

Encountering Children in Conflict Zones:
The British Experience

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Declaration & Statement Page

Word Count of Thesis: 106,945.

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This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

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Abstract

With contemporary conflicts being fought amongst and alongside civilian populations, the likelihood of professional soldiers encountering children during military operations has increased. Legal frameworks concerning the topic of children in armed conflict are born from sociological understandings surrounding the Western concept of childhood based on the idea that children are innocent and in need of protection. Within theatres of armed conflict children can be encountered by military forces in two distinct ways; either as innocent bystanders or as security threats. However, a moral dilemma can occur when a child, who is armed and capable of a lethal attack, is encountered by an adult soldier, whose values resonate with the Western concept of childhood. This leads to the adult soldier needing to make a difficult decision: to shoot and harm a child or to hesitate and risk harming themselves and others around them. This situation can have consequences for both the military operation and the psychological well-being of the professional soldier.

This thesis collated evidence from former British soldiers to examine their experiences of encountering children in armed conflict, and whether the presence of children impacts military operations, and the attitudes and practices of British soldiers. Examples from the conflicts in Bosnia (1992-95), Sierra Leone (2000-02), and Afghanistan (2001-2012), determine the various roles children play in contemporary armed conflict and the different challenges the child actor poses to military personnel. Locating itself in the existing child soldier literature base, this thesis argues that children involved in armed conflict can be both victims and perpetrators. However, this thesis also approaches the topic from a security perspective. By using a bottom-up approach, it shows how soldiers have individual reactions, experiences and understandings of this particular issue which should be acknowledged when designing and implementing military training guidelines and support frameworks on this topic.

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List of Abbreviations

| | |
|---------|--|
| AK47 | Avtomat Kalashnikov 1947 Assault Rifle |
| Brig | Brigadier |
| BritBat | British Battalion |
| Civpop | Civilian Population |
| Col | Colonel |
| Coy | Company |
| Lt | Lieutenant |
| Maj | Major |
| MPs | Members of Parliament |
| Op | Operation |
| Paras | Parachute Regiment |
| Pte | Private |
| Regt | Regiment |
| Sit Rep | Situation Report |
| Sgt | Sergeant |
| Solbel | Soldier- Rebel |

List of Acronyms

| | |
|-------|---|
| ACF | Army Cadet Force |
| ADP | Army Doctrine Publication |
| AFRC | Armed Forces Revolutionary Council |
| ANA | Afghan National Army |
| ANP | Afghan National Police |
| ANSF | Afghan National Security Force |
| APC | Army Proficiency Certificate |
| ATC | Air Training Corps |
| AWOL | Absent Without Leave |
| BEF | British Expeditionary Force |
| BIBUA | Brushing up in Built up Areas |
| BNCA | British National Cadet Association |
| BTEC | Business and Technology Education Council |
| CAR | Central African Republic |
| CCF | Combined Cadet Force |
| CDF | Civil Defence Forces |
| CETO | Centre for Emerging Threats and Opportunities |
| CIMIC | Civil-Military Co-operation |
| CO | Commanding Officer |
| COIN | Counter-Insurgency |
| CPERS | Captured Persons |
| CRC | Convention on the Rights of the Child |
| DDR | Disarmament, Demobilisation & Reintegration |
| DIBUA | Defence in Built Up Areas |
| DRC | Democratic Republic of the Congo |

| | |
|--------|---|
| DoD | Department of Defense |
| DoE | Duke of Edinburgh |
| ECOWAS | Economic Community of West African States |
| ELN | Ejercito de Liberacion Nacional |
| EU | European Union |
| FARC | Revolutionary Armed Forces of Columbia |
| FIBUA | Fighting in Built Up Areas |
| FOI | Freedom of Information |
| HRW | Human Rights Watch |
| HVO | Hrvatsko Vijeće Obrane |
| ICRC | International Committee of the Red Cross |
| IED | Improvised Explosive Device |
| IHL | International Humanitarian Law |
| ILM | Institute of Leadership and Management |
| ILO | International Labour Organisation |
| IR | International Relations |
| IRA | Irish Republican Army |
| ISIS | Islamic State of Iraq and Syria |
| ISAF | International Security Assistance Force |
| IWM | Imperial War Museum |
| JSP | Joint Services Publication |
| JSM | Joint Services Manual |
| JDP | Joint Doctrine Publication |
| JSCSC | Joint Services Command Staff College |
| JRRF | Joint Rapid Reaction Force |
| KCL | Kings College London |
| KCMHR | Kings Centre for Military Health Research |

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| LOAC | Law of Armed Conflict |
| LRA | Lord's Resistance Army |
| LTTE | Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam |
| MoD | Ministry of Defence |
| MODREC | Ministry of Defence Research Ethics Committee |
| MOUS | Military Operations in Urban Surroundings |
| MST | Mission Specific Training |
| NAM | National Army Museum |
| NATO | North Atlantic Treaty Organisation |
| NCO | Non-commissioned Officer |
| NGO | Non-governmental Organisation |
| OEF | Operation Enduring Freedom |
| OMLTs | Operation Mentoring and Liaison Teams |
| ORs | Other Ranks |
| PDHRA | Post-Deployment Health Reassessment Survey |
| PMSC | Private Military Security Company |
| PoW | Prisoner of War |
| PR | Public Relations |
| PRT | Provincial Reconstruction Team |
| PSC | Private Security Contractor |
| PTSD | Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder |
| RAF | Royal Air Force |
| RCIED | Radio Controlled Improvised Explosive Device |
| RLC | Royal Logistics Corp |
| RMAS | Royal Military Academy Sandhurst |
| RMP | Royal Military Police |
| RN | Royal Navy |

| | |
|----------|--|
| RoE | Rules of Engagement |
| RSLAF | Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces |
| RUF | Revolutionary United Front |
| SAS | Special Air Service |
| SBU | Small Boys Unit |
| SoPs | Standard Operating Procedures |
| SRSO | Special Representative of the Secretary-General |
| SSIs | School Staff Instructors |
| TA | Territorial Army |
| UK | United Kingdom |
| UN | United Nations |
| UNA | United Nations Archives |
| UNAMA | United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan |
| UNAMSIL | United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone |
| UNHCR | United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees |
| UNICEF | United Nations Children’s Emergency Fund |
| UNMO | United Nations Military Observer |
| UNPROFOR | United Nations Protection Forces |
| UNSC | United Nations Security Council |
| US | United States |
| WHO | World Health Organisation |
| WPK | Wider Peacekeeping |
| WSB | West Side Boys |

List of Illustrations

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Chapter One

Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Children being subjected to and experiencing the horrors associated with armed conflict is a notion that invokes great sympathy amongst adult populations, with international agencies and charities working tirelessly to provide aid and help those affected by such situations. However, the notion of a child partaking in armed conflict situations is met with greater antipathy due to certain cultural and moral beliefs that a child should be protected and not be an active participant in the dangerous act of war. The issues surrounding children's involvement and presence in theatres of armed conflict is gaining greater attention due to the efforts of political organisations, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), celebrities and academics who seek to create international legal frameworks and laws, as well as support structures to help rehabilitate and protect those children affected. This increased interest in the subjects of children affected by and associated with armed conflict is known as the 'child soldier phenomenon'¹, which emerged in the post-Cold War environment due to rising debates about the changing nature of conflicts and the increased likelihood of children becoming involved in armed conflict.

Mary Kaldor suggests that conflicts taking place in the aftermath of the Cold War are likely to be more intra-state rather than inter-state, which increases the involvement of civilians.² This factor also increases the likelihood of children being present within the conflict landscape, as well as making it easier for them to become directly involved in

¹ The term 'child soldier phenomenon' was first used by Peter W Singer, a policy analyst for Brookings Institute, in his work 'Caution: Children at War', *Parameters*, Winter 2001-02. Since then academics such as Alcinda Honwana, David Rosen, Susan Shepler, Julie McBride have continued to use the phrase to discuss the supposed increase of child soldiers since the early 1990s.

² Kaldor, M. *New and Old Wars: Organised Violence in a Global Era*, (Polity Press, Cambridge, 2012).

hostilities, notably as child soldiers. The rise of non-state armed groups or irregular forces, seeking to conduct warfare by non-conventional means, has resulted in the increased employment of children into their ranks. The child as an active participant in the conflict environment is now deemed a major consequence of these types of 'new wars'. Regardless of whether one is a proponent of the 'new wars' concept, it is difficult to disagree that conflicts are now becoming more complex due to the nature and goals of the actors taking up arms and the landscapes in which they choose to fight. With conflicts becoming more population-centric and military operations increasingly taking place in urban theatres, the question arises as to how professional military forces interact and react to the child actor involved in armed conflict situations, especially military forces that hold a particular set of beliefs regarding the role and protection of children. The 'Western concept of childhood' is the term given to those that adhere to the notion that children are vulnerable, innocent beings who are worthy of protection, and will be discussed fully in the second chapter entitled *Methodology and Principal Concepts*.

Children in conflict zones can be encountered either as members of the civilian population or as actors that pose (or are perceived as posing) a military threat. Historically, children have primarily carried out tasks of a merely supportive nature to help military forces. More recently, however, the increased availability of light weapons, and changes in the types of environments in which conflicts occur, has enhanced the ability of a child to participate more directly in hostilities. The disintegration of the Soviet Union resulted in the infamous Kalashnikov (AK-47) rifle becoming readily available to many individuals, including members of terrorist organisations. The AK-47 is light³ in weight and, due to its ease to carry, clean and fire, has become the weapon of choice notoriously linked with child

³ The average AK-47 weighs just 4.3kg (unloaded). Source: http://www.military-today.com/firearms/ak_47.htm, accessed on 3rd December 2013. For further information regarding the AK-47 as a weapon please see Chivers, C.J. *The Gun: The Story of the AK-47*, (Penguin Books, London, 2010).

soldiers.⁴ The use of children as suicide bombers⁵ also marks a clear departure from children's roles in previous conflict situations. Scott Gates, a writer for *Foreign Policy*, has observed the changing role of child combatants and their increased involvement in suicide bombing operations: 'suicide bombing which child soldiers have carried out in the Palestinian territories, Iraq, Sri Lanka, and Chechnya... there is little that trained soldiers can do other than guess that a nearby child is in fact a suicide bomber.'⁶ In this situation, the morally correct response is unclear. Under the principle of distinction, one of the four core principles that define the Laws of Armed Conflict⁷ (LOAC), the child can be treated as a combatant if they are taking part in hostilities and are presenting a direct threat to the soldier, and, or the soldier's comrades, and, or the nearby civilian population. Article 48 of the First Additional Protocols to the Geneva Convention stipulate the need for distinction between military and civilian targets and objectives:

Parties to the conflict shall at all times distinguish between the civilian population and combatants and between civilian objects and military objectives and accordingly shall direct their operations only against military objectives.⁸

Article 51 (3) determines the circumstances in which a civilian loses their special protection status:

⁴ The AK-47 is often referred to as the 'people's weapon' because of its ease of use, this also makes it the weapon of choice for those recruiting child soldiers as they able to carry, clean and use the weapon easily. For further information regarding the use of the AK-47 by child soldiers please see <http://www.projectak47.com/> and 'AK-47: The Sierra Leone Child Soldier', *BBC News*, 6th December 2005, taken from <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/4500358.stm>, accessed on 18th June 2015.

⁵ Hider, J. 'Iraqi children trained by Al Qaeda to be suicide bombers', *The Sunday Times*, 21st April 2009, taken from www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/iraq/article6135887.ece, accessed on 17th January 2011, np.

⁶ Gates, S. 'Think Again: Child Soldiers', *Foreign Policy*, 22nd May 2009, p.3.

⁷ The four principles of the Laws of Armed Conflict are distinction, proportionality, military necessity and unnecessary suffering.

⁸ Article 48 of the Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts (Protocol 1), 8th June 1977, taken from <https://www.icrc.org/ihl/4e473c7bc8854f2ec12563f60039c738/8a9e7e14c63c7f30c12563cd0051dc5c?OpenDocument>, accessed on 16th March 2016.

civilians shall enjoy the protection afforded by this Section, unless and for such time as they take a direct part in hostilities.⁹

The International Committee of the Red Cross handbook on LOAC makes reference to these articles to demonstrate that civilians, including children, are protected until they take up arms or participate in armed conflict, ‘civilians are protected from attack but lose that protection whenever they take a direct part in hostilities for the time of their participation.’¹⁰ Once the child no longer takes a part in hostilities, they will return to civilian status and their protection restored. Whilst the law provides the soldier with the right to self-protection, the soldier’s conscience may be rooted in the belief that harming a child is wrong and should be avoided. Robert Tynes acknowledged the challenge facing some Western personnel:

In the Western tradition, children are considered civilians. So, when soldiers are faced with the problem of having to choose between firing on 12 or 13-year-old boys or girls or holding back and potentially being shot, their effectiveness as a soldier is severely diminished. Again, the question is, what do you do? The problem or dilemma arises when you cannot do both of these actions. You have to pick!¹¹

It is this problem that is the focus of this doctoral thesis. Whilst work towards the eradication of the use of children in theatres of armed conflict is extremely important, a myriad of works focus on this topic and the issue is being constantly analysed and debated at both the political and academic levels. This is not a suggestion that further work does not need to be carried out on the subject, but the topic itself is receiving a great deal of attention and support from a number of organisations and platforms. Whilst many of the debates associated with children in armed conflict are concerned with the socio-economic well-being

⁹ Article 51 (3) of the Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts (Protocol 1), 8th June 1977, taken from <https://www.icrc.org/applic/ihl/ihl.nsf/Article.xsp?action=openDocument&documentId=4BEBD9920AE0AEAEC12563CD0051DC9E>, accessed on 16th March 2016.

¹⁰ ‘*The Laws of Armed Conflict: Basic Knowledge*’, International Committee of the Red Cross, June 2002, taken from https://www.icrc.org/eng/assets/files/other/law1_final.pdf, accessed on 17th May 2016, p. 12-1.

¹¹ Tynes, R., ‘Child Soldier as Tactical Innovation’, *Air and Space Power Journal*, Volume 22, No: 1, 2008, taken from www.airpower.maxwell.af.mil/apjinternational/apj-s/2008/1tri08/tyneseng.htm, accessed on 13th June 2014, p.2-3.

of the child, this thesis attempts to discuss the topic from a security perspective; by acknowledging the various roles children play in armed conflict and whether their presence impacts the soldiers who encounter them. In particular, this project will focus specifically on the British Army, a professional armed force who subscribe to the Western concept of childhood which suggests that children should be protected and are innocent.

For the British soldier fighting against an enemy that does not abide by international laws or rules of war it is difficult; however, the implications with facing an actor (a child) that does not fit the traditional combatant model can have far-reaching consequences. This has the ability to create a moral dilemma which is a situation that involves a complex judgement between two moral reasoning's. In this situation, the soldier may be tasked with the choice to save himself and others around him, or to react to the child that is posing as a hostile threat. The potential moral dilemma this poses to the professional soldier and the implications for military operations form the basis for discussion within this thesis, as Colonel Charles Borchini stated 'a 14-year-old with an AK-47 is just as deadly as a 40-year-old with an AK-47.'¹²

Therefore, this thesis focuses on the following question (to be explained fully in section 1.4):

How does the presence of children in theatres of armed conflict affect British military operations, and the attitudes and practices of individual British soldiers (1992-2012)?

1.2: Research Purpose

¹² Borchini, C. P. and O'Connell, F. 'What Marines need to know about child soldiers', *Marine Corps Gazette*, April 2003, taken from www.mca-marines.org/gazette/article/what-marines-need-know-about-child-soldiers#sthash.b7qsiWmi.dpuf, accessed on 12th September 2012, p.1.

The ideas behind this research project arose from a newspaper article I read in *The Independent* concerning the suicide of a young British soldier named Private Jason Chelsea. The headline read “‘I can’t go to Iraq. I can’t kill those Children’ – Suicide Soldier’s dying words to his mother’ and told the story of a nineteen-year-old private in the King’s Lancaster Regiment who had taken his life prior to his first deployment into Iraq¹³. *The Independent* cited that

he had even told his parents that he had been warned by his commanders that he could be ordered to fire on child suicide bombers. It was a fear that he never confronted. Within 48 hours of confessing his concerns to his family, Pte (Private) Chelsea was dead after taking an overdose of painkillers and slashing his wrists. On his death bed, he told his mother, Kerry: ‘I can’t go out there and shoot at young children. I just can’t go to Iraq. I don’t care what side they are on. I can’t do it.’¹⁴

Whilst this news article involves a devastating event, it is important to acknowledge that the reality and reasons for this young man’s death may have been far more complex than the simple narrative posed by this national newspaper’s headline. Regardless of the narrative being created within the article, it highlighted the fact that professional military personnel may have to work in an environment where they are forced to operate, and even engage, with hostile child actors. As I pursued my interest and research in the field of strategic studies, I became interested in the dynamics of counter-insurgency operations and found the child actor to be missing from many of the narratives associated with civil-military relations and irregular fighters despite a growing literature on the subject of child soldiers.

The experience of professional military forces in the recent Afghanistan (post- 2001) and Iraq (post- 2003) conflicts highlighted that children were present and part of the complex operational landscape. For example, in January 2002, the first US fatality of the Afghan

¹³ The deployment into Iraq was a result of military operations in the country stemming from the 2003 Iraqi conflict led by American and British military forces.

¹⁴ Milmo, C. “‘I can’t go to Iraq. I can’t kill those children’ – Suicide Soldier’s dying words to his mother’, *The Independent*, 25th August 2006, taken from <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/this-britain/i-cant-go-to-iraq-i-cant-kill-those-children-suicide-soldiers-dying-words-to-his-mother-413277.html>, accessed 14th January 2011.

conflict was named as Sergeant (Sgt) Nathan Ross Chapman, a member of the Special Forces who was killed by a fourteen-year-old boy. Incidents such as these created a greater interest in the relationship between the professional soldier and child in conflict zones, with an emphasis on the potential dilemmas hostile child actors may pose to the soldiers who operate alongside them. The lack of literature on the subject and the perceived importance of the topic resulted in an application to the Economic Social Research Council to interrogate and examine this issue further at PhD level, and it is with their funding and support that this research project has been allowed to take form.

1.3: Literature Review

As with any research project, a review of the current literature was conducted in order to collate as much information as possible on the topic. This process revealed that little data had been produced regarding the interactions between professional soldiers and children. However, since the 1990s a wealth of literature had been produced regarding the child soldier; their roles, their motivations, their psychological well-being, and the role of agencies in attempting to eradicate the use of children in such environments.¹⁵ The surge in literature produced by the NGO and academic community created a ‘child soldier phenomenon’, an increased prominence and interest in the role of the child soldier as an actor in popular culture, government initiatives and charity campaigns.

Whilst knowledge of this particular type of actor expanded, there remained a lack of discussion and literature regarding the child’s impact on military operations and the well-being of the professional soldier. Although literature on military engagement with child soldiers was sparse, it was not non-existent and the literature that had been produced helped

¹⁵ Further information concerning the literature on childhood can be found in chapter 2, section 2.5. The literature about children involved in armed conflict can be found in chapter three, *Children in Contemporary Armed Conflict*.

to inform my thinking and ideas, as well as showing the gaps in the field. Whilst some literature sources were produced prior to the commencement of this project, others were produced during the research journey and have proved to be invaluable in confirming some of the original thoughts, as well as shaping the nature of the project and establishing the direction of my research. Due to the limited nature of research on this topic, the literature review encompasses academic contributions, as well as working papers, policy guides and opinion papers. All of these works produced a core message: that more research needs to be conducted on the topic.

Helen Brocklehurst helped to establish the issue of children and child soldiers within the field of security studies. In her work, *Who's Afraid of Children? Children, Conflict and International Relations*¹⁶, Brocklehurst discusses the presentation of children as apolitical actors within normative international relations (IR) theory and creates a new framework using case study analyses from Nazi Germany, Mozambique and Northern Ireland, to show how children *can* have and *can* be used for their political value. Discussions about the identity and agency of the child actor will be discussed further within the third chapter of this thesis, *Children in Contemporary Armed Conflict*. As well as discussions about the role of children and their agency, Brocklehurst also acknowledges the implications these child actors may have for adult soldiers. Her contributions to the subject can be found in the first, second and third editions of Alan Collins' edited collection *Contemporary Security Studies*. Whilst much of the work in these chapters dispels the apolitical and victim only status of the child, Brocklehurst suggests that the 'child status may cause an almost operational paralysis by troops unwilling to open fire upon them.'¹⁷

¹⁶ Brocklehurst, H. *Who's Afraid of Children? Children, Conflict and International Relations*, (Ashgate Publishing Limited, England, 2006).

¹⁷ Brocklehurst, H. 'Children and War', taken from Collins, A. ed. *Contemporary Security Studies*, (First Edition, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2007), p. 374.

In the first edition, Brocklehurst states that ‘there is yet no doctrine for engagement with child soldiers used by mission planners or deployed units.’¹⁸ The lack of engagement with the issue of child soldiers by military planners is then reiterated in the third edition in 2013, ‘it is curious that despite immense Western (European and American) attention on child soldiers and the roles they are assigned, there has been relatively little preparation by Western militaries in engaging them.’¹⁹ Despite a six year gap between the editions, Brocklehurst shows how little progress has been made on the subject. The chapters produced in the first and second editions carry similar arguments, but in the third edition Brocklehurst expands on the issue of children as security threats. She uses examples such as Germany’s refusal to send their troops into the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) in 2003 due to the fears of facing child soldiers²⁰, as well as children becoming suicide bombers²¹ to provide context to her arguments. Whilst Brocklehurst acknowledges that children can be a security threat which can have a potential effect on adult military forces, the majority of her work focuses on re-examining the role of the child and their position in the field of international politics. An examination of the literature concerning the sociology of childhood and the need to place the child within the academic disciplines of security studies and international relations can be found in section 2.5.1, *Childhood*, and chapter three, *Children in Contemporary Armed Conflict*.

Eyal Ben-Ari provides an anthropological perspective on the subject, choosing to examine the social construction of the term ‘child soldiers’ and the implications this constructed image has on troops. Within his work, Ben-Ari asks, ‘what happens when

¹⁸ Brocklehurst, H. ‘Children and War’, (First Edition, Oxford, 2007), p. 375.

¹⁹ Brocklehurst, H. ‘Child Soldiers’, taken from Collins, A. ed. ‘*Contemporary Security Studies*’, (Third Edition, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2013), p.385.

²⁰ Brocklehurst, H. ‘Child Soldiers’, (Third Edition, Oxford, 2013), p.385.

²¹ Brocklehurst, H. ‘Child Soldiers’, (Third Edition, Oxford, 2013), p.385.

soldiers belonging to a professional armed force face these young combatants?’²²

Recognising that children can belong to an ‘anomalous category in which they are both threatening and non-threatening’²³, Ben-Ari focuses his study on the psychological impact encountering these actors have on the professional soldier. His work examines how child soldiers contravene Western notions of childhood and how the portrayal of a child soldier by the media and humanitarian groups help to produce an image of innocence which resonates with the soldier on the ground. He is clear in his aims and stipulates that he does not want to normalise the idea that child soldiers are part of conflict situations, rather he embeds the ‘children and war relationship in a wider human rights discourse...to show how one of the unintended consequences of this discourse may actually be the heightening of psychological and ethical difficulties for professional troops.’²⁴ It is important to acknowledge that children in such situations can be a threat to the professional soldier, but also to recognise that children are not a normal part of the operational landscape therefore should not be treated that way. A child should not be in that environment, and until their presence and active participation in conflict zones can be eradicated, the consequences of their presence must be acknowledged and dealt with. It is important to take measures to limit harm to the child *and* to the soldier who may encounter them in this complex environment.

Jenny Kuper²⁵ produced a book which discussed military training in relation to children in armed conflict. Her work is aimed at officers in the hope that the information will be filtered down through the ranks. The book approaches the topic in a methodical way by discussing the various laws designed to protect children in armed conflict. However, Kuper is

²² Ben-Ari, E. ‘Facing Child Soldiers, Moral Issues and ‘Real Soldiering’: Anthropological Perspectives on Professional Armed Forces’, *South African Journal of Military Studies*, Volume: 37, No: 1, 2009, p.2.

²³ Ben-Ari, E. ‘Facing Child Soldiers, Moral Issues and ‘Real Soldiering’, *South African Journal of Military Studies*, 2009, p.11.

²⁴ Ben-Ari, E. ‘Facing Child Soldiers, Moral Issues and ‘Real Soldiering’, *South African Journal of Military Studies*, 2009, p.18.

²⁵ Kuper, J. *Military Training and Children in Armed Conflict: Law, Policy and Practice*, (Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, Boston, 2005).

critical of the applicability of certain aspects of International Humanitarian Law (IHL) to contemporary challenges due to its establishment in the post-World War Two era. Again, the topic of military personnel encountering children is deemed to be an issue but little discussion exists as to the reasons why such a situation is cause for concern.

Tor Arne Berntsen and Bård Mæland also propose that current laws and principles of war are outdated. In their chapter, *The Agency of Child Soldiers: Rethinking the Principle of Discrimination*²⁶, they acknowledge that child soldiers pose a unique challenge to Just War frameworks due to their protected status as a child and their ability to conduct a lethal attack. As mentioned earlier, the principle of discrimination (or distinction) suggests that a person loses their protected civilian status when they take a direct part in hostilities. However, Berntsen and Mæland suggest that the principle of discrimination should include both the identity and actions of the participant; ‘children should enjoy non-combatant protection by virtue of their identity as vulnerable children, even when they engage in behaviour that may be dangerous to themselves or others.’²⁷ This chapter is part of an edited collection discussing Just War theory in the twenty-first century, and Berntsen and Mæland use the complex identity of the child soldier to discuss the need for an ‘ethical framework that takes into account both the necessity of protecting and engaging children in war.’²⁸ Jeff McMahan also uses the complex dilemmas posed by the child soldier to argue that Just War frameworks are not appropriate for contemporary challenges. Along with Berntsen and Mæland, McMahan’s work suggests that children should be shown mercy for their actions despite being permissible targets under the principle of discrimination.²⁹

²⁶ Berntsen, T.A. and Mæland, B. ‘The Agency of Child Soldiers: Rethinking the Principles of Discrimination’, taken from Allhoff, F., Evans, N., and Henschke, A. ed, *The Routledge Handbook of Ethics and War: Just War Theory in the Twenty-First Century*, (Routledge, Oxon, 2013).

²⁷ Berntsen, T.A. and Mæland, B. ‘The Agency of Child Soldiers’, (Oxon, 2013), p. 275.

²⁸ Berntsen, T.A. and Mæland, B. ‘The Agency of Child Soldiers’, (Oxon, 2013), p. 281.

²⁹ McMahan, J. ‘An Ethical Perspective on Child Soldiers’, taken from Gates, S. and Reich, S. ed. *Child Soldiers in the Age of Fractured States*, (Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh University Press, 2009).

In autobiographical accounts, two former soldiers have drawn upon their own conflict experiences to highlight the issues of fighting amongst child soldiers. Retired Major Phil Ashby³⁰, a former British Royal Marine and United Nations Military Observer (UNMO), draws upon his experiences from the conflict in Sierra Leone (2000-02). Whilst retired Lieutenant General Romeo Dallaire's work³¹, centred on his own Canadian perspective, focuses on his time in Rwanda in the early 1990s as the Commander of the UN peace-keeping mission in which he witnessed the use of child soldiers and genocide in the region. Both books were intended for a wider popular audience than academic texts, but produce a thought-provoking narrative concerning the experiences of a professional soldier. It is Dallaire's desire to eliminate the use of child soldiers which has resulted in the formation of the *Child Soldiers Initiative*, an organisation with both advocacy and policy orientated goals, who have produced a training handbook for military and security sector personnel.³²

This training handbook is now in its second edition and whilst it does not offer an academic insight into the issue, it does provide examples of the various roles children play in armed conflict and the regions they operate. The handbook was created to provide military and security sector personnel with training on how to react to the child soldier in the hope it would reduce the strategic advantage the child offers to armed groups. By reducing or removing the strategic advantage children offer to the groups that recruit them, it would eliminate the use of children in armed conflict scenarios as the child would be seen as a wasted resource. The aim of the handbook is not to contribute to academic debates but to provide clearly worded examples and exercises to help prepare personnel for such

³⁰ Ashby, P. Major. *'Unscathed: Escape from Sierra Leone'*, (Macmillan, London, 2002), and Ashby, P. 'Child Combatants: A Soldier's Perspective', *The Lancet Supplement*, Volume: 360, December 2002, taken from [http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(02\)11800-9/abstract](http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(02)11800-9/abstract), accessed on 10th July 2013.

³¹ Dallaire, R. *'They Fight like Soldiers, They Die like Children'*, (Walker & Company, New York, 2010).

³² Whitman, S., Zayed, T., and Conradi, C. *'Child Soldiers: A Handbook for Security Sector Actors'*, Second Edition, (Romeo Dallaire Child Soldiers Initiative, Halifax, 2014).

encounters. It does little to acknowledge the experiences of the professional soldier but does provide military forces with relevant training materials that they can adopt into their own exercises and practices.

The literature review highlighted a scholarly emphasis on the American experience and the culture of the US armed forces. Examples tended to be drawn from conflicts in which the US had been involved, namely Afghanistan (post- 2001) and Iraq (post- 2003), and reference made to American soldiers. Robert Tynes³³ acknowledged the potential mental deliberations and moral dilemmas for American soldiers when they operate in areas where child soldiers are present. His work employs an ethical approach in order to examine the impact on military forces, whilst also providing various recommendations that could be used to overcome such an issue. Lt. Col. Judith Hughes focused on post-deployment well-being and the lack of information provided to US personnel on the subject of child soldiers prior to deployment. Her assessment concentrated on the post-deployment health reassessment survey (PDHRA) which ‘ask military members to identify exposures they believe may have affected their health. Lists of exposures range from the application of DEET insect repellent to lasers and depleted uranium but do not list exposure to killing (sic) child soldiers.’³⁴ Hughes’ work involved an in-depth review of the literature and guidelines produced by the US armed forces to show that little information or help existed for those faced with such a situation. Critical of the lack of literature and advice available to soldiers on the subject, Hughes concluded that ‘there is an obvious need for the DOD (Department of Defense) to develop doctrine that addresses the many unique aspects of this growing threat.’³⁵

³³ Tynes, R. ‘Child Soldiers as Tactical Innovation’, *Air and Space Power Journal*, 2008, p.1.

³⁴ Hughes, J.A. ‘Child Soldiers: Are US Military Members Prepared to Deal with the Threat?’, *Air & Space Power Journal*, Volume: 1, 2008, p.3.

³⁵ Hughes, J.A. ‘Child Soldiers’, *Air & Space Power Journal*, 2008, p.10.

Whilst academic literature concerning the implications of child soldiers for military professionals may be sparse, Peter W Singer, a policy analyst at the Brookings Institution, has produced a number of articles on the subject³⁶ and a book entitled *Children at War*³⁷. It was during his research for another publication, *Corporate Warriors: The Rise of the Privatised Military Industry*³⁸, in which he conducted a number of interviews with private security contractors (PSCs), that Singer noticed a reoccurrence in their encounters with children in conflict zones. Singer's next publication would be focused on the role of the child in war, acknowledging the roles they play and to account for the rise of child soldiers in modern conflicts. His work contains a section which focuses on the implications for US forces, making reference to Western militaries sporadically, and acknowledges that US military personnel are unprepared to deal with the threat as they are lacking any formal training or doctrine in the area. Drawing upon much of the existing literature concerning child soldiers, his work is varied and attempts to amalgamate the growing discourse concerning children in armed conflict with an analysis on the implications for US forces based on information from the 2003 Iraq War.

Alongside Singer's claims that the US are unprepared to deal with child soldiers, other articles have been produced which form similar conclusions. As these articles were written during the Afghanistan (post- 2001) and Iraq (post- 2003) conflicts, the topical nature of the subject is used to appeal to a wider audience rather than seeking to embed itself within the academic literature. Ann Tyson, a writer for *The Christian Science Monitor*, published an

³⁶ For further information, please see Singer, P. W. 'Caution: Child at War', *Parameters*, Winter 2001-02, p.156-172., Singer, P.W. 'Talk is getting cheap: Getting serious about preventing child soldiers', *Cornell International Law Journal*, Volume: 32, Issue: 3, 2004, p.561-586., Singer, P.W. 'Facing Saddam's Child Soldiers', Paper presented for the Saban Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution, 14th January 2003, taken from <http://www.brookings.edu/research/papers/2003/01/14iraq-singer>, accessed on 12th December 2012.

³⁷ Singer, P.W. 'Children at War', (Pantheon Press, New York, 2005).

³⁸ Singer, P. W. 'Corporate Warriors: The Rise of the Privatized Military Industry', (Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 2003).

article in 2002 shortly after the death of US Sgt Nathan Ross Chapman in which she noted that 'child soldiers are an extreme example of how US forces must adjust to an increasingly eclectic, unpredictable group of non-traditional combatants who have no uniforms, codes of conduct or clear organisation.'³⁹Tyson's focus is on the psychological burden of facing such an enemy, and uses the experience of British soldiers in Sierra Leone to highlight the issue,

In one of the first Western military engagements with child warriors, in late 2000 a patrol of British soldiers was surrounded and taken hostage in Sierra Leone by a rogue militia made up mainly of children. The squad commander had reportedly refused to open fire on 'children armed with AK-47s' ... 'the impact of being fired on by a child is initial shock, but the soldiers will do their job,' says Maj. Jim Gray of the British Royal Marines, who served on a UN observer mission in Sierra Leone in 1999. 'But if you don't care for them when they come home, it might destroy them.'⁴⁰

Col. Charles Borchini and Erin O'Connell published an article in the *Marine Corps Gazette* in which they suggested the US Marine Corps lacked awareness and were unprepared to deal with the child soldier threat. The article claims that 'battles that involve killing children often have a very demoralizing effect on professional combat forces from countries where children are protected and their rights are valued.'⁴¹However, the article does provide a number of recommendations that can be implemented in future military training packages. Borchini and O'Connell also contributed towards a report for the Marine Corps research think tank, the Centre for Emerging Threats and Opportunities (CETO), entitled *Child Soldiers: Implications for US Forces*. Again, US centric in its approach, the report suggested that 'the child soldier issue must be solved at the strategic level by the international community. However, until that happens, the military must be prepared to deal with it on a tactical level.'⁴² Similar to Ben-Ari's work, the ultimate goal is focused on the removal of

³⁹ Tyson, A.S. 'Tough Calls in Child Soldier Encounters', *The Christian Science Monitor*, 27th June 2002, taken from <http://www.csmonitor.com/2002/0627/p03s01-usmi.html>, accessed on 12th October 2012, np.

⁴⁰ Tyson, A.S. 'Tough Calls in Child Soldier Encounters', *The Christian Science Monitor*, 2002, np.

⁴¹ Borchini, C. P. and O'Connell, E. 'What Marines need to know about child soldiers', *Marine Corps Gazette*, 2003, p.3.

⁴² Borchini, C., Lanz, S. and O'Connell, E. '*Child Soldiers: Implications for US Forces*', Center for Emerging Threats and Opportunities, CETO 005-02, Marine Warfighting Laboratory, Quantico, VA, November 2002, p. 20.

children from the conflict theatre, but until this occurs the report suggests that militaries must prepare their personnel for encountering the hostile child actor. Both pieces of literature produced by Borchini and O'Connell highlight the lack of preparation by US forces in their plea for further research to be carried out in the area.

However, it is the Research and Technology Organisation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) that has produced the most comprehensive report, *Child Soldiers as the Opposing Force*.⁴³ Featuring contributions from academics, clinical physicians and policy analysts, the report examines the issue of child soldiers from anthropological, ethical, psychological and sociological perspectives. To understand the moral implications associated with facing a child soldier, the report uses transactional analysis which is based on the ability to recall certain events and emotions together such as, the 'conflicting role of caring parent and competing adult.'⁴⁴ It suggests that this conflict of interest or duties could lead to psychological harm or moral injury for the soldier who has a duty to protect and to defend. The report then provided a comprehensive analysis of the role of children in armed conflict, providing detailed information concerning the child's motivations and the laws prohibiting the recruitment of children. Ben-Ari also contributed a chapter focusing on the psychological impact for Western forces and used the folk model of soldiering to suggest that the professional role of an adult soldier made it difficult to rationalise facing a child as part of the opposing force. As well as highlighting the implications that could arise for professional militaries, the report also focused on the lack of research and literature available, especially from a British perspective,

the literature search by the British Ministry of Defence in 2006 on the consequences of facing child soldiers has uncovered very little data relating specifically to the psychological impact of child soldiers on armed forces personnel. This in itself is an important finding, showing a

⁴³ 'Child Soldiers as the Opposing Force', North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) TM-HFM-159, January 2011, taken from https://www.cso.nato.int/ACTIVITY_META.asp?ACT=1416, accessed on 28th September 2012.

⁴⁴ 'Child Soldiers as the Opposing Force', NATO, 2011, p. 2-2.

lack of knowledge in this field and thus highlighting the level of research that MoD will have to carry out to support its own forces.⁴⁵

As well as calling on the Ministry of Defence (MoD) to conduct further research, the report also suggested that

Current British Military Doctrine makes no mention of child combatants and thus seems to suggest that British forces have no official policies on dealing with child soldiers, nor do they dedicate any specific training to the subject. This would seem a doctrinal gap when we remember British peacekeeping forces have on many occasions been deployed in regions where child soldiers are utilised (Kosovo, Bosnia, Sierra Leone, and Congo, among many).⁴⁶

For a thorough discussion of British military doctrine in relation to the central research question please see chapter four, *The British Army and Children in Armed Conflict*.

The literature search drew upon a range of sources in order to gain an understanding of the current situation as well as identifying gaps in the field. A common theme was evident amongst the varied sources: encountering child soldiers could cause implications for military personnel and that further research needed to be conducted on the topic. It was evident that a narrative had emerged within the security discourse which recognised that children could play a role, albeit a dangerous one, in conflict situations. Brocklehurst⁴⁷ and Ben-Ari⁴⁸ both focus on the construction of identities, either the child as an innocent or the soldier as a professional, to explain the potential ethical dilemma for armed forces engaging with the hostile child actor. Both acknowledge the child as having the potential to commit harm and the need for the child to be viewed as a potential security threat. However, Ben-Ari is keen to note that the child's role in conflict should not become normalised and the end goal remains to eradicate the use of children in conflict zones.

⁴⁵ 'Child Soldiers as the Opposing Force', NATO, 2011, p. ES-1.

⁴⁶ 'Child Soldiers as the Opposing Force', NATO, 2011, p. 5-4.

⁴⁷ Brocklehurst, H. 'Who's Afraid of Children?', (England, 2006) and Brocklehurst, H. 'Child Soldiers', (Third Edition, Oxford, 2013).

⁴⁸ Ben-Ari, E. 'Facing Child Soldiers, Moral Issues and 'Real Soldiering'', *South African Journal of Military Studies*, 2009.

Whilst all the sources acknowledged a problem existed, discussions about the potential implications for military personnel were heavily focused on the psychological level, with little analysis on the implications at the tactical and operational levels. Ben-Ari⁴⁹ and Hughes⁵⁰ works discussed the moral implications or psychological impact such an encounter has on military personnel, but there was little information regarding how such interactions impact the working lives of the deployed soldier. There was little evidence in any of the methodologies reviewed that the authors had discussed the topic or experiences with the soldiers themselves. The autobiographies of Dallaire⁵¹ and Ashby⁵² are insightful, but only provide information relevant to the African context and, due to their rank position at the time of their deployment, are not indicative of the experience held by the majority of front-line soldiers.

Although the literature acknowledged that the child could be a hostile actor in a security environment, only some of the works attempted to provide recommendations as to how to deal with such an actor. Tyson⁵³, Singer⁵⁴, and Borchini and O'Connell⁵⁵, referred to various exercises and training recommendations that would benefit Western militaries seeking to prepare for such a threat. However, there remained a lack of discussion and analysis as to the ways military personnel encountered the child and the experiences they were likely to face, which deemed the recommendations to be generic in their approach, rather than explaining their compatibility with the cultural practices of each national military

⁴⁹ Ben-Ari, E. 'Facing Child Soldiers, Moral Issues and 'Real Soldiering'', *South African Journal of Military Studies*, 2009.

⁵⁰ Hughes, J.A. 'Child Soldiers', *Air & Space Power Journal*, 2008.

⁵¹ Dallaire, R. *They Fight like Soldiers, They Die like Children*, (New York, 2010).

⁵² Ashby, P. 'Child Combatants: A Soldier's Perspective', *The Lancet Supplement*, 2002.

⁵³ Tyson, A.S. 'Tough Calls in Child Soldier Encounters', *The Christian Science Monitor*, 2002.

⁵⁴ Singer, P.W. *Children at War*, (New York, 2005).

⁵⁵ Borchini, C. P. and O'Connell, E. 'What Marines need to know about child soldiers', *Marine Corps Gazette*, 2003, and Borchini, C., Lanz, S. and O'Connell, E. *Child Soldiers: Implications for US Forces*, Center for Emerging Threats and Opportunities, CETO, Quantico, VA, 2002.

force. *Child Soldiers: A Handbook for Security Sector Actors*⁵⁶ provided the most comprehensive and practical set of recommendations for military personnel, whilst also providing vignettes as to the range of circumstances a child could be encountered.

The majority of the literature published concerning the implications for military forces (and their lack of preparation) were produced during the Afghanistan (post- 2001) and Iraq (post- 2003) conflicts. The literature was also biased towards the American perspective, with little reference to the experiences or debates held by other professional armed forces. The 2011 NATO report⁵⁷ highlighted the lack of research and information concerning the British military experience. A British focused review of the literature was undertaken and, even in 2016, there was little public evidence to suggest that research is being carried out or that the British military have adopted measures to deal with the issue. The suggested gap in the literature resulted in the British military becoming the focus of this thesis, with a particular emphasis on the experiences of British Army personnel due to their front line operational duties and greater likelihood of encountering children in theatres of armed conflict.

The NATO report also suggested that in order to make progress on the topic, research needs to be conducted with the soldiers themselves, ‘such a comprehensive approach needs to be prioritised and this needs to be validated through discussions with personnel with first-hand experience of engaging with child soldiers, thereby ensuring that any work undertaken has face validity and is of operational value.’⁵⁸ Such first-hand experience was also missing from the literature reviewed. Gaining an insight into the experiences of the soldier is vital for a number of reasons; it determines whether they do encounter children, the ways in which

⁵⁶ Whitman, S., Zayed, T., and Conradi, C. ‘*Child Soldiers: A Handbook for Security Sector Actors*’, (Halifax, 2014).

⁵⁷ ‘*Child Soldiers as the Opposing Force*’, NATO, 2011.

⁵⁸ ‘*Child Soldiers as the Opposing Force*’, NATO, 2011, p. 5-1.

children are encountered, and their own perspective and attitudes towards the child actor. By acknowledging the actual experiences of the soldier on the battlefield, it provides an invaluable insight into the issue which can aid future research and provide validity to any potential policy recommendations. This research project draws upon the gaps in the literature highlighted via the NATO report and the existing literature base to look at the topic from a different angle, the perspective of the British soldier. The following section will discuss the formation of the central research question and hypothesis of the project.

1.4: Central Research Question

In order to examine the challenges facing a professional armed force when encountering a child in theatres of armed conflict, the following central research question was formulated,

How does the presence of children in theatres of armed conflict affect British military operations, and the attitudes and practices of individual British soldiers (1992-2012)?

The research project investigates the British soldiers' experience, with a core focus on personnel who operate in a front-line capacity as they are more likely to encounter and interact with children. The central research question focuses on the attitudes and practices of 'individual British soldiers' as the aim of this research project seeks to recognise the voice of the individual soldier as an important narrative when discussing the topic. As a researcher, I recognise that conflict experiences differ depending upon the person's individual thought-processes and perception of events. Therefore, the aim of this project is to collect the individual experiences and narratives of the British soldier in order to build an awareness and knowledge on the topic of encountering children in theatres of armed conflict.

Due to my position as a PhD researcher at a British institution, it is more convenient to conduct fieldwork and collect data on the British Army and the soldiers who serve(d) within that organisation. The British Army also has a varied operational history therefore should contain a wealth of experience and evidence from different conflict environments. The time period 1992 to 2012 was chosen as, during this twenty-year period, the British Army operated in a number of different conflict environments that would help to provide a comparative analysis of their experiences. The British were involved in the following military campaigns during that period: Bosnia (1992-95), Northern Ireland (1968- 98), Kosovo (1998-99), Sierra Leone (2000-02), Afghanistan (2001-14), Iraq (2003-2011), and Libya (2011-present). In order to capture the range of experiences during this time period it is necessary to include the experiences from both serving and former British soldiers. As an organisation, the British Army abides by the cultural norms, values and principles that are at the heart of this research project; they are a professionally trained army which operates under the LOAC and IHL, whilst belonging to a nation state that adheres to the principles and beliefs known as the ‘Western concept of childhood’.

The central research question also focuses on ‘*the presence of children in theatres of armed conflict*’ as it seeks to understand the soldier’s reactions to the child as an innocent bystander and the child who has the potential to be a hostile threat. Broadening the question to include all children present in theatres of armed conflict will allow for greater analysis regarding the interpretations and attitudes of the British soldier towards this particular actor. ‘*Theatres of armed conflict*’ was chosen to encompass the range of situations the child and professional soldier may find themselves to be part of. This does not limit the study; therefore, experiences can be gathered from traditional conflict scenarios to peace-keeping operations.

The existing literature focuses upon highlighting the moral dilemma and potential psychological implications for the soldier. There was little evidence to suggest that personnel were consulted during the data collection process, therefore the core aim of this project is to gather information from the soldiers regarding their experiences. This allows a bottom-up approach to the topic, and recognises the voice of the soldier as an important narrative when discussing the issue. Due to the grey area associated with encountering a child, a bottom-up approach is important as it allows the researcher to engage with the participant who has experienced such a situation first hand. This provides a contextual understanding to the varying roles children can play, as well as offering a very personal insight into the unique experience felt by the professional soldier. By presenting the soldier's narrative on the subject, their attitudes towards the topic will emerge and provide an understanding of how the soldier views the issue. As well as looking at the attitudes towards the child, the thesis examines how, or whether, the presence of the child alters the soldier's practices in the conflict theatre. The soldier's practices refer to the individual ways the soldier conducts himself and his duties,⁵⁹ compared to the conduct of a particular unit tasked with achieving a strategic outcome during a military operation. The implications for military operations are also acknowledged within this thesis.

With this in mind the project seeks to answer the following sub questions within the thesis;

1. How, or, in what ways do British soldiers encounter children in theatres of armed conflict?

⁵⁹ To date, the British Armed Forces do not allow women to operate in the majority of front-line roles. As this thesis draws upon the experiences of British soldiers who have operated on the front-line, no females were interviewed as part of this research project therefore gender neutral language has not been used.

2. How is this problem addressed officially by the Ministry of Defence (MoD) and the British Army?
3. Does military training prepare the soldier for such situations?

The aim of this thesis is to gain a deeper understanding of the British soldier's experience when operating amongst children, with a core focus on the child who is acting as a hostile threat. It aims to acknowledge the various ways the child can be encountered in theatres of armed conflict, with the hope that if we can understand the situation the professional soldier faces, then we can begin to work on solutions to address the practical and moral dilemmas posed by the child actor. The hypothesis of this project suggests that due to the nature of operations British soldiers have been involved with, they will have had experience with and encountered children who have the potential to be a hostile and lethal threat. Using the data from interviews, it will show that the hostile child actor has the potential to create a moral dilemma and have implications for both the soldier and the operation, despite the training provided by professional military organisations.

1.5: Contributions

A review of the existing literature surrounding the topic of professional military forces encountering children in theatres of armed conflict highlighted three significant knowledge gaps. The aim of this project is to conduct a piece of research that acknowledges these gaps in order to make an original contribution to knowledge. As this project seeks to engage with the practical and moral dilemmas posed by the child actor, it is hoped that this thesis will bear relevance to both academic and policy related audiences. The following section will provide an overview of the academic areas this thesis will bear relevance to and aims to contribute to knowledge.

Firstly, there is a distinct lack of understanding about the topic from a British perspective. This issue was raised in the NATO document *Child Soldiers as the Opposing Force*⁶⁰ where the lack of literature, doctrine, or knowledge about British experiences was expressed as a concern. Much of the literature surrounding the topic focuses on the issue from an American perspective and, in particular, the implications for US Marines.⁶¹ Therefore, this thesis aims to contribute not only to the small but growing literature on the subject of professional armed forces encountering children in theatres of armed conflict, but to also acknowledge the experiences of the British Armed Forces in relation to this particular issue. As this thesis focuses upon the British perspective and draws upon the experiences of British soldiers, it also provides a unique insight into this particular dilemma from the viewpoint of a particular military organisation which will be relevant to the discipline of military studies and military culture.

Secondly, the literature review highlighted that the soldiers' perspective was often missing from the discussions about professional military forces' interactions with children in theatres of armed conflict. The NATO document *Child Soldiers as the Opposing Force*⁶² recommended that discussions with personnel were needed to ensure that research on this topic has 'face validity and is of operational value.'⁶³ Therefore, this thesis will make an important contribution to the topic as it will draw upon the perspectives of the individual soldier and their experiences of operating in this environment. As the core aim of this project is focused upon discussions with the soldiers themselves, this thesis provides an opportunity for the soldier's voice to be heard. Most military studies projects focus on an issue from a top-down or macro-level approach. Whilst this is relevant for many projects focusing on

⁶⁰ 'Child Soldiers as the Opposing Force', NATO, 2011.

⁶¹ Borchini, C. P. and O'Connell, E. 'What Marines need to know about child soldiers', *Marine Corps Gazette*, 2003, and Hughes, J.A. 'Child Soldiers', *Air & Space Power Journal*, 2008.

⁶² 'Child Soldiers as the Opposing Force', NATO, 2011.

⁶³ 'Child Soldiers as the Opposing Force', NATO, 2011, p. 5-1.

military institutions the decision was taken that, due to the sensitive⁶⁴ nature of this topic and the need to discuss experiences, then a bottom-up or micro-level approach would be more appropriate. This also allows the thesis to make a methodological contribution to the fields of military culture and military studies, as it adopts an approach that is often under-used within these disciplines.

Thirdly, this thesis will also contribute to the topic of encountering children in theatres of armed conflict as it acknowledges the potential implications for military personnel *and* military operations. The existing literature and research is focused upon the potential moral dilemmas and psychological implications for military personnel. Although this project seeks to understand the experiences of British military personnel, the thesis also aims to highlight how the presence of children in theatres of armed conflict could have implications for the conduct of military operations. The practical implications associated with encountering children in theatres of armed conflict are likely to be of interest and relevance to military practitioners. By acknowledging the potential implications for both military personnel *and* military operations, this thesis will contribute to knowledge on the subject area which will be relevant to both academic and policy related audiences. This includes professional armed forces whose personnel are likely to be deployed into areas where children are likely to be present.

Although this thesis aims to contribute to the policy world by collating evidence about the experiences of British soldiers and their interactions with children in the operational landscape, this project also contributes to knowledge and informs discussions within various academic disciplines. This project is of particular relevance to the discipline of military

⁶⁴ For the purpose of this thesis 'sensitive' refers to data collected on matters of potential emotional distress. Ethical considerations in the context of this research project are addressed in chapter 2.

studies⁶⁵, especially the fields of military culture and military sociology. This thesis aims to provide an insight into the culture of a specific military organisation, the British Army, and their relationship with children within the conflict landscape. Therefore, this piece of research will contribute to knowledge about the organisational and military culture of the British Army, which will be of relevance and interest to the fields of military culture and military sociology.

As the existing literature on this topic is focused on the US perspective, this thesis could be used as a comparative study which examines the differences between British and American perspectives, experiences, and responses. Therefore, this thesis could also contribute to the field of comparative military studies. A contribution can also be made to the field of military sociology as this thesis discusses the British Army's relationship with children, both at home and abroad. This thesis also provides an insight into the ways military personnel understand their conflict experiences which will be relevant to the fields of military culture and military sociology. As this thesis recognises the agency of the child and their presence in theatres of armed conflict, this research project will also contribute to the growing literature in the fields of security and strategic studies about the child as a potential security threat and the potential implications for professional armed forces when conducting operations in modern conflict zones.

Although this thesis is focused on the military perspective, it should also appeal to the children in armed conflict literature base as it examines the role of agency and the child actor, as well as the evolution of the roles of children in conflict zones. Due to the multi-disciplinary approach this thesis takes, it is hoped that it will be of interest to multiple audiences: appealing to those interested in history, sociology, military, and security studies.

⁶⁵ Military studies can sometimes be referred to as military science which looks at the social, strategic, political, economic, operational and tactical elements associated with deploying military force.

The topic is under-researched and contemporary, therefore could be relevant to a variety of different audiences with vested interests in the welfare of children or soldiers, as well as providing an insight into the challenges and dilemmas that exist in modern conflict zones. As the thesis focuses on the implications affecting both military operations *and* the well-being of the soldier, it is hoped that the project will add relevance to the policy world, and highlight the need for continued support, training and guidelines, and doctrine on the subject.

1.6 Thesis Structure

As discussed, this thesis seeks to examine how the presence of children in theatres of armed conflict affects British military operations, and the attitudes and practices of individual British soldiers. This chapter has outlined the existing literature on the subject, highlighting the current knowledge gaps and the process undertaken to formulate the research question which guides this thesis. Due to the limited existing literature surrounding this topic, the thesis calls upon the disciplines of history, childhood studies, sociology, strategic and security studies to discuss the challenges for professional military forces when they encounter children in conflict environments.

The second chapter of this thesis, *Methodology and Principal Concepts*, discusses the methodological approach taken to guide this research project. The conceptual framework that provides the theoretical underpinnings of this thesis are examined, as well as a discussion of the methods used to collect data on the subject. This chapter also contains an overview of the literature concerning the sociology of childhood and how the concept of childhood is constructed. The chapter will also discuss the importance of personal narratives in the field of military studies, and the current lack of biographical works from junior soldiers. As the core aim of this thesis is to allow the soldiers' voice to be heard, the discussion about the importance of personal narratives within the field of military studies will be evidenced here.

This chapter will then provide the reader with an understanding of the research design used for this thesis and address the ethical considerations for conducting such research.

The third chapter, *Children in Contemporary Armed Conflict*, provides a factual overview of the topic of children in armed conflict. It provides an analysis of the definition of the child soldier, as well as discussing the various legal frameworks associated with their use. This chapter introduces the main narratives embedded within the children in armed conflict literature base, as well as drawing upon current debates regarding the role of agency and motivation for the child actor. It draws upon interviews with NGOs and an examination of the presentation of the child soldier in popular culture in order to provide a clear understanding of the type of actor the professional soldier may face. This chapter provides a contribution to the security and strategic studies literature base as it acknowledges the role of the child, their agency, and their position within theatres of armed conflict. It recognises the child as a non-traditional security issue which produces a complex set of challenges that require a distinct response and approach.

The fourth chapter, *The British Army and Children*, uses a top-down, macro-level approach to determine the type of organisation the British soldier works for; the level of training and guidelines they receive on the subject, and the organisation's perceived relationship with children. This chapter begins with an historical insight into the British Army as an organisation, with a strong emphasis on its cultural values and ethos, before examining the role of the British Army in the twenty-first century. The chapter then focuses on the British Army's relationship with British children; drawing upon historical examples from the two World Wars it shows how children were celebrated for their heroism in partaking in armed conflict, before looking at the British cadet movement, and current debates concerning the British recruitment of minors. Finally, this chapter examines the various legal instructions, training and guidelines given by the British Army and MoD to their soldiers

prior to operations. It is this chapter that addresses the second sub-question of the thesis; *'How is the problem addressed officially by the MoD and British Army?'* This chapter will contribute to the cultural understandings and knowledge of the British Army in relation to a particular sub-group; children. Therefore, this chapter will be of interest to military sociologists who have a keen interest in the British Army's relationship with children, both at home and abroad, as well as contributing to the military culture literature base.

Having gained an understanding of the topic concerning children and armed conflict, as well as acknowledging the level of training, guidelines and information afforded to the British soldier, the fifth chapter addresses the ways British soldiers encounter children in theatres of armed conflict. It is this chapter that provides the most significant contribution to knowledge as it draws upon the written and oral testimonies of former and serving British soldiers to provide an insight into their experiences and interactions with children in armed conflict scenarios. The personal narratives of the soldier (serving or former) emerge and help to build knowledge on the topic of encountering children in theatres of armed conflict. The soldiers' voices also highlight the dichotomy between the organisational or official narrative of the British Army on the subject of children in armed conflict with the personal narratives or experiences of the soldiers who operate on the battlefield.

The fifth chapter uses the cases of Bosnia (1992-95), Sierra Leone (2000-02), and Afghanistan (2001-12)⁶⁶ to determine the various ways children were encountered in these environments by British personnel. The chapter then uses the data collected from serving and former personnel to determine how the presence of children affected British military operations, and the attitudes and practices of the British soldier. The chapter is divided into three distinct sections; military operations, attitudes, and practices, with an analysis in each to

⁶⁶ This research project began as the Afghanistan conflict was still ongoing, therefore the decision was made to conduct research until 2012. However, the conflict in Afghanistan ended in 2014.

capture the aims and objectives of the central research question and overall research project. The conclusion of this chapter examines whether current training and guidelines adequately prepare British soldiers for the challenges of encountering children in theatres of armed conflict, as well as highlighting any potential implications associated with such interactions.

The concluding chapter draws together the main discussions and findings throughout the thesis, acknowledging the role of children in contemporary conflict, and how their presence can impact professional soldiers operating in the same environment. Having examined the potential implications for both military operations and the soldiers, the final chapter will include a section with recommendations for future training and support, as well as acknowledging the main areas this thesis contributes towards. Any avenues for further research will also be acknowledged within this chapter, followed by a concise conclusion which weaves together the main narratives concerning the presence of children in contemporary theatres of armed conflict and the effect this has on the British soldier.

Chapter Two

Methodology and Principal Concepts

2.1 Methodology

The aim of this research project is to gain a deeper understanding of a particular phenomenon; the experiences of military personnel when they encounter children in theatres of armed conflict. The project was narrowed down to incorporate the experiences of a particular military organisation; the British Army, and the research question constructed to ask how the child can affect military operations, and the attitudes and practices of the British soldier. This is a qualitative research project with the aim to generate empirical data and knowledge on the topic informed through discussions with the soldiers (former or serving) about their own experiences. Within this chapter, the research design of the project, including the ethical considerations needed when conducting sensitive research, will be discussed. The latter part of the chapter will discuss the various theoretical assumptions relevant to the project, followed by an analysis of the conceptual framework that guides this study.

The literature review highlighted three knowledge gaps which this project sought to overcome. Firstly, that the soldier and their experience was missing from many of the discussions and data collected about the presence of children in theatres of armed conflict. In order to build knowledge on the subject and to understand the effect on the soldier it is important to draw upon the soldiers' experiences. Secondly, the topic of encountering children focuses heavily on the implications for the soldiers' psychological well-being. Whilst this is important, there remains a knowledge gap as to the various ways professional soldiers encounter the child and also how the child actor can impact military operations, as well as the soldiers' well-being. The third, highlighted a lack of literature or discussion on the subject from the British perspective. Therefore, the focal point of this thesis relies on the

experiences collected from British soldiers to determine how the presence of children in theatres of armed conflict can affect their attitudes and practices, as well as the potential implications for military operations. This is an exploratory piece of work which aims to gather knowledge about a previously under-researched issue, in the hope it will provide a greater understanding and awareness of the topic from those that have experienced such a situation first-hand.

This study falls within the interpretivist paradigm as it relies on the subjective understanding and experience of the professional soldier to determine how the child actor impacts their own conduct, practices and attitudes in theatres of armed conflict. The subjective nature of this project is important as it is the experience of a particular actor that is sought and analysed. By using an interpretivist paradigm, the ‘researcher attempts to interpret what is going on according to the subjective frame of reference’¹, the frames of reference used within this thesis are drawn from existing theoretical assumptions that predict particular patterns of behaviour; and the creation of a conceptual framework which highlights the core variables used within this study and their relationship with one and another. It is through the social construction of particular ideals, meanings and language that produce a particular reality or experience for the participant², and it is their reality and experience which is the focus of this thesis. Within section 2.2, the ethnographic dimensions of this research project will also be discussed to provide an understanding as to how the data was collected. This is a qualitative research project that sought to generate understandings and knowledge from the participant’s point of view, therefore it is important to acknowledge how the researcher interacted with participants and how knowledge was created. As I wished to see what type of information and narratives emerged from the participant’s discussions and data, the decision

¹ Williams, M. ‘Interpretivism and Generalisation’, *Sociology*, Volume: 34, No: 2, 2000, p.212.

² Myers, M. ‘*Qualitative Research in Business and Management*’, (Sage Publishers, London, 2009).

was made to not place a particular label or theoretical model on to the project. Due to the ethical and moral dilemmas associated with this topic, it became evident that the different theoretical assumptions created a complex narrative that made it difficult to discuss the topic in the form of a unitary, monolithic theoretical tale. The sections succeeding the discussions about data collection and ethical considerations will explain the theoretical assumptions and conceptual framework that guided this research project, helping to frame the research questions and allow the key narratives relevant to the soldier's experience to emerge.

2.2: Data Collection

The aim of this thesis was to gather the experiences of British soldiers (serving and former) in order to examine how the presence of children in theatres of armed conflict affected military operations, and their own attitudes and practices. Therefore, the subjective nature of this project is deliberate as it is the perspectives and experiences of the soldier that is required to both inform and create knowledge of this particular phenomenon. A lack of existing literature on the British experience and the British Army's recent conflict experience resulted in the decision to focus on the experiences of the frontline British soldier. Those operating on the frontline are more likely to engage with the local populations and have experiences of encountering children during their deployments. As previously mentioned, this project is not just concerned with children who partake in hostilities but also the child who is part of the operational landscape; more commonly referred to as an 'innocent bystander'. For Jon Pedersen and Tone Sommerfelt, there is an important distinction 'between children who are *exposed* to conflict and children who are *participating* in conflict,'³ and this thesis will also seek to differentiate between the two.

³ Pederson, J. and Sommerfelt, T. 'Studying Children in Armed Conflict: Data Production, Social Indicators and Analysis', *Social Indicators Research*, Volume: 84, No: 3, 2007, p.252.

2.2.1 Case Studies

In order to ensure the research conducted was contemporary and could be applicable to any future operations the British may find themselves involved with, the project aimed to analyse experiences from a range of conflicts to build knowledge and to chart any developments that may have taken place. Therefore, this project drew upon experiences from three distinct operational areas in which the British had been deployed. These included Bosnia (1992-95), Sierra Leone (2000-02), and Afghanistan (2001-12). All three conflicts took place in the post-Cold War era, therefore against the backdrop of the ‘child soldier phenomenon’, and had different mandates and operational aims. These cases were used to highlight that the British do have experience of being deployed in areas in which children were present and that children could be encountered in a multitude of ways. They also highlighted that children could be present in different conflict environments and regions.

An aim of this research project was to also acknowledge the various roles children play and can be encountered in theatres of armed conflict. To build this knowledge, the thesis drew upon the interviews with British soldiers (serving and former) to collect information about the roles of children. The purpose of this thesis is to contribute to knowledge on the various ways the child can be encountered in theatres of armed conflict, with the hope that if we can understand the situation the professional soldier faces, then we can begin to work on solutions to address the practical and moral dilemmas posed by the child actor. Therefore, the case studies were useful in building a contextual awareness as to the roles children play and the ways they can be encountered in different regions and conflict environments. Prior to conducting the interviews, a call for participants was published and distributed which requested contributions from anyone who had been deployed in any of these conflicts. It was not a pre-requisite needed for the interview, but the experiences presented during discussions helped to build a more comprehensive understanding of the cases.

2.2.2 *The Soldiers' Narratives*

The aim of this project was to provide a bottom-up approach when seeking to understand how the presence of children in theatres of armed conflict affect military operations, and the attitudes and practices of British soldiers. This was achieved by collating the experiences of the British soldiers (former and serving) who were deployed into theatres of armed conflict during their military careers. As there was little evidence within the literature review to suggest that personnel were consulted about their experiences, the core aim of this project was to gather the information and the perspectives from soldiers who had served in such environments. The project recognises the voice of the soldier as an important narrative, which can be used to gain a deeper understanding of the British soldier's experience when operating amongst children and therefore create knowledge on an under-researched topic.

Whilst the use of the soldier's personal narrative is an important part of this thesis and will be used in chapter five, *Children Associated with Armed Conflict: The Soldier's Perspective*, to discuss how the presence of children can affect the attitudes and practices of individual soldiers, this thesis also looks at the organisational perspective or narrative associated with encountering children in the theatres of armed conflict. The use of organisational and personal narratives is important within this thesis as they help to create knowledge on the subject. The organisational narrative provides an insight into the organisational culture of the British Army and their perspective on the topic of encountering children in theatres of armed conflict. The personal narratives belong to the soldiers who have operated in such conflict zones, and provide an insight into their experiences of encountering children in such situations. By acknowledging a top-down and bottom-up approach, this thesis seeks to examine how the presence of children in theatres of armed

conflict can affect military operations, and the individual attitudes and practices of British soldiers.

The organisational narrative refers to the knowledge or story an organisation wishes to communicate to a wider audience. This is also referred to as an official narrative. The organisational narrative is important to determine how knowledge is created, communicated, and transferred, and is a reflection on the organisation's culture and ethos. Organisational narratives can be defined as the 'way in which knowledge might be transferred, shared or exchanged in an organisational setting.'⁴ Gathering the organisational perspective of the British Army is difficult due to the nature of the organisation. Joseph Soeters, Patricia Shields, and Sebastiaan Rietjens acknowledge the difficulty of accessing organisational narratives, stating that 'the organisation wants some control over the diffuse of information about itself.'⁵ Any information that is released to the public is important for its content, but also provides an insight into the organisational narrative or story that a particular organisation wishes to communicate. It is important to consider questions such as how stories are constructed, who produced the material, and who is the consumer, and how they are published.

This thesis collated information from the various guidelines and training manuals produced by the British Army in order to gain an insight into their perspective of the presence of children in theatres of armed conflict. Discussions were also held with personnel working as MoD trainers and three Freedom of Information (FOI) requests were also submitted, for more information please see section 2.2.6 *Freedom of Information Requests and Key Informant Discussions*. The knowledge these sources provided represented the official

⁴ Connell, N.A.D., Klein, J.H., Meyer, E. 'Narrative Approaches to the Transfer of Organisational Knowledge', *Knowledge Management Research and Practice*, December 2004, Volume: 12, Issue: 3, 2004, p.184.

⁵ Soeters, J., Shields, P., and Rietjens, S. '*Routledge Handbook of Research Methods in Military Studies*', (Routledge, Oxon, 2014), p.3.

information the British Army, as an organisation, wished to transfer to civilian audiences. Therefore, in chapter four, *The British Army and Children in Armed Conflict*, the perspective and knowledge produced by the British Army can be referred to as the organisational narrative. This information can then be used and contrasted to the personal narratives, which are based on the perspectives and experiences of the individual British soldiers. A personal narrative is a spoken or written account of a story, which ‘carry traces of human lives that we want to understand.’⁶ Claire Duncanson suggested that ‘in autobiographies, memoirs and personal narratives, soldiers reflect on who they are, what they do and how they feel about operations and being a soldier.’⁷ This thesis used biographies, individual in-depth interviews, and pre-recorded oral history interviews to collect information about the soldiers’ experiences. It is the personal narrative of the individual British soldier that will help to build knowledge on the subject, and to understand how the presence of children could have implications for the soldier who may have to operate in the same environment.

This thesis focuses on providing a contribution to knowledge by acknowledging the experience and perspective of the British soldier. There is a lack of engagement with the personal narratives of the soldiers within the field of military studies. Isla Forsyth acknowledges the missing narratives of the soldier from the field of military studies, ‘while soldiers’ actions are accounted for, the embodied experience in these sources is left to linger uncommented. Thus, the challenge is how to get under the clipped language, to consider the experiences as well as the strategic impacts.’⁸ This thesis seeks to acknowledge how the presence of children in theatres of armed conflict could have implications for military

⁶ Squire, C., Andrews, M., and Tamboukou, M. ‘What is Narrative Research?’, taken from Squire, M. et al. *Doing Narrative Research*, (2nd Edition, Sage Publishers, London, 2013), p.2.

⁷ Duncanson, C. *Forces for Good? Military Masculinities & Peace-building in Afghanistan and Iraq*, (Palgrave and Macmillan, UK, 2013), p.53.

⁸ Forsyth, I. ‘Biography and the Military Archive’, taken from Williams, A.J., Jenkins, N.K., Rech, M, F., and Woodward, R. ed. *The Routledge Companion to Military Research Methods*, (Taylor and Francis, London, 2016), p.73.

operations, and the attitudes and practices of individual soldiers. Therefore, by incorporating personal narratives into this thesis, it is hoped that it will create knowledge on the subject from the soldiers who have operated in conflict zones and have witnessed the presence of children in this environment. Rachel Woodward and Neil Jenkins discuss the benefits that using military memoirs could have in military research by stating that

they (military memoirs) provide the immediacy of the eyewitness account, the detail not necessarily present in the writings of journalists, the personal reflection and nuance of emotional, affective responses absent from the strictly official reports and records, and the possibility for the inclusion into the public record of issues not necessarily welcomed into the public domain by official institutional records.⁹

Whilst the eyewitness account or personal narrative plays a significant role in the development of this thesis, I also wanted to acknowledge the paucity of testimonials from lower-ranking military personnel. *If* the soldier's voice is present within discussions about conflict, it is often biased towards the perspective of senior ranking personnel. Media interviews, military memoirs and biographies focus on the perspectives and conflict experiences of senior officers within the armed forces. Since the Renaissance period, senior officers began to chart their conflict experiences by writing memoirs that were 'designed to bridge the gap between an autobiography and history.'¹⁰ As literacy levels improved within the UK, more works were published by senior officers based on their military careers. However, many of the autobiographies published by these officers tended to focus on their military careers rather than providing details about specific conflict experiences. Woodward and Jenkins acknowledged the difference between the perspectives of the senior officer and that of the enlisted soldier, 'the career autobiography of a senior soldier is written with a different readership and objective in mind by its author, and published for a different market

⁹ Woodward, R. and Jenkins, N. 'The Uses of Military Memoirs in Military Research', taken from Williams, A.J., Jenkins, N.K., Rech, M, F., and Woodward, R. ed. *The Routledge Companion to Military Research Methods*, (Taylor and Francis, London, 2016), p.111.

¹⁰ Harari, Y. 'Military Memoirs: A Historical Overview of the Genre from the Middle Ages to late Modern Era', *War in History*, Volume: 14, No: 3. 2007, p.295.

niche by a publishing house, than a worm’s eye view of life from an enlisted soldier.’¹¹ It is this worm’s eye view of the battlefield that this thesis seeks to examine.

Esmerelda Kleinreesink conducted a mixed methods study which examined military memoirs published between 2001 and 2010 by soldier-authors who served in Afghanistan from the UK, US, Canada, Germany, and the Netherlands.¹² Her aim was to look at the various ranks of the soldier-authors, their motives for publication, and the plots of their memoirs. Within her work, she discovered that during the twentieth century more autobiographies were written by those from the lower-ranks. However, whilst there was an increase in publications from this cohort, two-thirds of the total military autobiographies published were based on the experiences of officers.¹³ Kleinreesink noted that many of the military autobiographies published were self-published, therefore soldier-authors from senior ranks held an advantage, as they had the capital to seek publication. Having looked at all the military autobiographies published during the Afghan conflict from the regions listed above, Kleinreesink produced the following table.¹⁴

| | OFFICER | NCO | ENLISTED | TOTAL |
|----------------|---------|-----|----------|-------|
| NETHERLANDS | 7 | 0 | 0 | 7 |
| GERMANY | 4 | 2 | 1 | 7 |
| UNITED KINGDOM | 8 | 5 | 2 | 15 |
| UNITED STATES | 14 | 7 | 1 | 22 |
| CANADA | 3 | 0 | 0 | 3 |
| TOTAL | 36 | 14 | 4 | 54 |

¹¹ Woodward, R. and Jenkins, N. ‘The Uses of Military Memoirs in Military Research’, taken from Williams, A.J. et al. *The Routledge Companion to Military Research Methods*, (London, 2016), p.113-14.

¹² Kleinreesink, E. *On Military Memoirs: Soldier-authors, Publishers, Plots and Motives: A Mixed Methods Study into Military Afghanistan Autobiographies from the US, the UK, Canada, Germany, and the Netherlands Published between 2001-2010*, (Bureau Repro, Breda, 2014).

¹³ Kleinreesink, E. *On Military Memoirs*, (Breda, 2014), p.187.

¹⁴ Kleinreesink, E. *On Military Memoirs*, (Breda, 2014), p.187.

This table highlights that soldier-authors who held officer rank were more likely to publish than NCOs or enlisted soldiers, and that this was evident across all the regions studied. Out of five countries studied, only four autobiographies were published from the enlisted ranks, which highlights a paucity of testimonials from lower-ranking military personnel. Kleinreesink's study also looked at whether there was a correlation between the plot and bestseller status of a military autobiography. She discovered that 'being a sergeant or higher gave a better chance of getting a best-seller than being an ordinary soldier or corporal in the UK'¹⁵, and that those who were awarded a combat medal achieved higher selling status.¹⁶ This study highlighted the paucity of testimonials from lower-ranking soldiers, and is one of the few pieces of research to address the topic which includes British soldier-authors and contemporary conflict experiences.

This thesis recognises the importance of the soldier's voice and the need to gather information about their conflict experiences to determine how the presence of children in theatres of armed conflict can affect British military operations, and the attitudes and practices of individual British soldiers. Therefore, the methods used to collect the testimonies of former and serving British soldiers were varied to ensure that perspectives and experiences were gathered across the rank system and different conflict environments.

2.2.2.1 Biographies

Firstly, a close examination of the biographical works written by former or serving British soldiers was conducted. These biographical works were selected based on two factors; the author must have served within the British Army or Special Air Service (SAS)¹⁷, and they had to have experience serving in one (or more) of the conflicts listed as a case. This ensured

¹⁵ Kleinreesink, E. *'On Military Memoirs'*, (Breda, 2014), p.189.

¹⁶ Kleinreesink, E. *'On Military Memoirs'*, (Breda, 2014), p.189.

¹⁷ The SAS is the Special Forces unit of the British Army who are likely to work alongside civilian populations when conducting military operations.

that the narratives presented in the biographies reflected the experiences of those who had served in conflicts which had taken place after 1990, as this coincided with discussions about the perceived new types of wars amongst the population and the emergence of children in conflict zones. An awareness about gathering information from such sources resulted in concerns about the bias of such experiences, and the need to question the author's purpose in writing their memoirs was needed. However, the purpose of the exercise was to not gather information about the political or strategic dimensions of the conflict, rather it was to see whether children were mentioned in their reflections of the conflict, and if so, in what capacity. Any experiences or anecdotes would be noted and analysed according to the various categorical labels created for the interview analysis which will be discussed further in this section. These biographical works provided some interesting experiences and helped contribute knowledge of the various ways children could be seen in conflict zones, however it only recognised the perspective of those from the commissioned ranks with very little publications produced by other-ranks (ORs).¹⁸

2.2.2.2 Individual Interviews

Therefore, in order to ensure that the experiences collated were representative, semi-structured interviews were conducted with former British soldiers. The aim was to make an application to the Ministry of Defence Research Ethics Committee (MODREC) as an external researcher (one who conducts research on military matters but is not funded by the MoD) to request permission to conduct interviews with personnel who had served in one of the three geographical locations used for the cases. After completing numerous reports and awaiting a

¹⁸ Other-ranks is the term given to military personnel who hold a rank below 'Officer'. The majority of personnel within military institutions fall into this category.

lengthy ethical review decision, it was decided that permission to interview military personnel would be denied on the basis that

Unfortunately, having reviewed the topic of your research study whilst the requirement to study this issue is understood it is not something that the Army wishes to undertake at the present time and therefore will not be able to support your access to UK Service personnel.¹⁹

Whilst this decision made it impossible to conduct interviews with serving military personnel, it led to the reformulation of the research design which in turn benefitted the triangulation process. As the interviews could not be conducted with serving personnel, the participant pool was altered to include retired personnel or veterans. For the purpose of this research, the term 'veteran' is based on the 'the official UK government definition for a veteran is the most inclusive of any country' which includes 'everyone who has performed military service for at least one day and drawn a day's pay is termed a veteran.'²⁰ Whilst the notion of 'retired' has connotations with those who have reached the national retirement age of 65, within the military context the term 'retired' is used synonymously with veteran and refers to anyone who has completed a period of military service, therefore the demographics of my participant pool were still varied.

After undergoing another strict ethical review process with Aberystwyth University's Research and Ethics department, permission was granted to contact veterans and conduct semi-structured, in-depth interviews. It was during the interview recruitment process that I began to acknowledge the importance of ethnography within my research project. By acknowledging ethnography as a methodological process, I began to examine how my own actions and self-presentation helped to develop a rapport with participants and created social interactions which affected the research project and my methods of obtaining data. Whilst

¹⁹ Email Correspondence with the MoD Ethics Review Panel, received 25th November 2014.

²⁰ Burdett, H., Woodhead, C., Iverson, A.C., Wessely, S., Dandeker, C., Fear, N. 'Are you a Veteran? Understanding the term 'Veteran' among UK ex-service personnel a research note', *Armed Forces and Society*, Volume: 39, No: 4, 2013, p.752.

discussing the option to place a call for participants with members of a national organisation run by former military personnel, I noticed that the member's attitudes towards me changed when they realised that I understood a lot of the terminology and military references they were using in their dialect. Having been questioned by one of the members, I divulged the information that my family had served within the British military and I had been raised within this environment. I also took the opportunity to explain that I worked as a volunteer support worker within the local veterans' community. This information was received positively and, whilst I had not served in the military myself, I was quickly seen to be 'one of the team' as I understood the 'in-jokes' and could join in the conversation without members feeling they had to stop and explain terms of reference to me.

The call for participants was circulated through a national organisation whose membership includes former members of the British Army. This network is only available to those who have served or are serving, therefore limited my chance of recruiting any fantasists whilst ensuring I reached a specific target group. It was during this process that I received a number of requests from serving members of the British Army congratulating myself on researching such a sensitive topic and asking if they could partake in the project, as they had numerous experiences they would like to discuss which bore relevance to the project. Whilst I was unable to recruit these people into my sample, it highlighted the importance of the project and the need for greater discussion on the topic. Alongside the call for participants, a document was circulated which provided details of my research project and asked anyone who held experience serving in one (or more) of the conflicts related to my case studies to contact myself.

As a young female researcher wishing to discuss conflict experiences with former military personnel, I was aware that I might have difficulty recruiting participants or that participants may be selective about the information they wished to discuss with me.

However, it was during the early stages of my interview process that I realised how divulging information about my personal background and associations with the military could be beneficial in building a rapport with my participants. Prior to the interview process, I provided the participant with a copy of the consent form to read over, the participant information sheet, the project information sheet, and a copy of the themes and questions I wished to discuss during the actual interview. This allowed the participant time to read over the information and to raise any questions or concerns prior to the scheduled interview date. On the interview date, I also reiterated the purpose of the interview, their rights as a participant, ensured they were happy to sign the consent form, and provided the participant with a post-information sheet which provided details of a number of 24 hour helplines in case they required emotional support after the interview. During this discussion, I also provided a more detailed overview of my own background as a researcher and aim of the research project.

It was during this stage of the interview process that I took the active decision to divulge my own background as a child who grew up within the military environment and my role as a volunteer veteran support worker. This decision aided my research project in a number of ways. Firstly, once the participant became aware that I understood military slang and terminology I felt the conversation flowed more freely as they did not have to keep pausing to provide explanations. Secondly, I believe it helped to build rapport between myself, as the researcher, and the participant. The military is an organisation that promotes a sense of community amongst its members which continues after service life. Those that have served in the military tend to distance themselves from those that have not served, colloquially known as ‘civvies’²¹, therefore by aligning my sense of identity within the

²¹ ‘Civvies’ is the colloquial phrase used within the British Military as a term of reference to describe civilians who have not served in the British Armed Forces.

military context it helped to diminish the cultural gap. Brooke Harrington focused on the importance of group identities when seeking access in research contexts, she claimed that ‘individuals and groups prefer to interact with others who have been categorised as similar to themselves’²² and ‘having a social identity as a member of any given group means accepting at least some group values and norms.’²³ This was evidenced during the snowballing process, when participants introduced me to other potential participants as a military researcher *and* the daughter of a military veteran.

Whilst the call for participants was a useful way to create a sample, this was further developed by the snowball method. This approach ‘entails an initial, often non-random, sample of the target respondents. Then the respondents provide information on contacts that also are members of the target population.’²⁴ After the interview process, my participants were asked if they knew of anyone else who might be interested in sharing their experiences. Due to the sensitive nature of the research topic, this was a useful method for recruiting participants. Mistrust between the media and the military has caused many personnel to become wary about sharing their experiences, however, I felt the use of snow-balling as a method helped to counter-act that issue, as those who had already been interviewed could verify my credibility and research interests. It was during this process that I witnessed how my personal and professional identity was used to encourage other potential participants to contact myself and become involved with the project. According to Harrington, this is a vital aspect of conducting ethnographic research. Harrington notes that the use of social identity

²² Harrington, B. ‘The Social Psychology of Access in Ethnographic Research’, *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, Volume: 32, No: 5, October 2003, p.608.

²³ Harrington, B. ‘The Social Psychology of Access in Ethnographic Research’, *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, Volume: 32, No: 5, October 2003, p.607.

²⁴ Pederson, J. and Sommerfelt, T. ‘Studying Children in Armed Conflict’, *Social Indicators Research*, 2007, p.258.

and self-preservation theories are important as ‘participants often have the upper hand, acting as gatekeepers and defining the terms on which researchers can gather data.’²⁵

The decision to divulge my personal background helped me to earn recognition and gain access to the ex-service personnel community. Cedric Parizot argued that losing the posture of ‘The Researcher’ in certain research spaces can be beneficial. Speaking about his own fieldwork experiences in Israel, Parizot noted that ‘it provided me with a depth of understanding that I could not have reached if I had maintained controlled detachment.’²⁶ Due to the potential emotive nature of this research project, I believe that by removing the controlled attachment associated with being a researcher and allowing my personal and professional identity to merge it would help the participant to feel at ease and willing to discuss their experiences in conflict environments. By acknowledging my own identity as the daughter of a veteran, I was able to develop a strong interpersonal relationship with my participant due to shared language, norms, and values, which I believe benefitted the interview experience and the data collected.

Through the call for participants and snowball method, 13 in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with former personnel ranging from privates to brigadiers. All of whom have served overseas, on the front-line and had encountered children in some capacity. These interviews were conducted within the UK, and I travelled to the region in which the participant was based in order to conduct the interview. Interviews were conducted in public spaces to ensure my own safety and the safety of the participant. Due to the potentially emotive subject of the interviews, I explained to the participant that they could stop or request

²⁵ Harrington, B. ‘The Social Psychology of Access in Ethnographic Research’, *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 2003, p.598.

²⁶ Parizot, C. ‘Moving Fieldwork: Ethnographic Experiences in the Israeli- Palestinian Space’, taken from Hazan, H. and Hertzog, E. ed. ‘*Serendipity in Anthropological Research: The Nomadic Turn*’, (Ashgate Publishing, Surrey, 2012), p.131.

a break during the interview process. As part of the process in securing ethical approval from Aberystwyth University's Ethical Review Committee, I had to attend and complete two courses on the subjects working with veterans and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). This was beneficial as it helped to further my knowledge on the subject area and how to acknowledge the well-being of my participant. I also took measures to ensure my own safety, such as meeting participants during the day and liaising with a trusted colleague before and after the scheduled interviews.

The decision was made to use semi-structured interviews as I was keen to focus on the soldier's perspective, experience, and story. Therefore, the use of pre-determined questions would be used to guide the interview, but the participant also had the opportunity to discuss topics which they felt were relevant to the discussion. This method helped to produce rich and insightful data which was valuable for the research project. The interview questions were grouped together thematically and can be found in Appendix A of this thesis. The first two themes contained questions which sought to acknowledge the participant's general attitudes towards children in armed conflict, the tactical advantages children offer to armed groups, and the how children in conflict zones are presented in the media. The third theme contains questions which seek to examine the soldiers' experiences; including the regions children were encountered, the roles children played, and whether the presence of children in theatres of armed conflict altered their attitudes, practices, and the conduct of military operations. The final theme focused on the training and guidelines the participant received prior to being deployed into different conflict zones.

Alongside discussions based on the above themes, the interview was an opportunity for the participant to discuss their conflict experiences and any factors they felt might have been relevant to the research project. The decision was made to not limit participants to discussions based on their operational experience in relation to the cases of Bosnia (1992-95),

Sierra Leone (2000-02), and Afghanistan (2001-12), but to allow them to mention areas in which they had served and felt the presence of children was relevant. All my participants had seen active service in one or more of the following places: Northern Ireland, Bosnia, Kosovo, Sierra Leone, Iraq, and Afghanistan. As the aim of this project was to analyse how the presence of children could affect the attitudes and practices of individual British soldiers, the opportunity to conduct interviews with former military personnel was beneficial to the project as I could directly reference and frame questions around these two concepts.

2.2.2.3 Pre-recorded Interviews

Whilst I gained an insight into the soldier's perspectives from former personnel and autobiographical works, I wanted to ensure triangulation had taken place and that I was able to capture a wide-range of experiences. Therefore, I utilised the resources held at the National Army Museum (NAM) and the Imperial War Museum (IWM). Both of these organisations had recorded interviews with serving personnel on their return from various deployments in Afghanistan and Iraq as part of an oral history project. Interviewers from both organisations conducted semi-structured interviews with soldiers from various ranks and regiments who had returned from a tour of duty in order to capture their conflict experiences. As the purpose of oral history projects is to 'enable people normally ignored in written histories to speak their minds and share their experiences,'²⁷ these oral history projects proved to be an invaluable source, as many of the interviews were conducted with military personnel from the ORs, and it was their story that was missing from my biographical literature search.

The interviews also allowed me to engage with the soldier's experience in a theatre of armed conflict, without forcing the direction of the discussion to involve children. If

²⁷Mohaqqeq, M. 'The Possibilities of Oral History in Situations of Conflict', taken from Aras, R. Boyd, D. Marshall Clark, M. Kurt, M. Mohaqqeq, M. and Taminian, L. ed. *'Documenting and Interpreting Conflict through Oral History: A Working Guide'*, (Centre for Oral History, Columbia University, New York, 2013), p.4.

instances involving children were mentioned it was entirely independent from my own research agenda which helped to provide authenticity to the soldier's discussion. Petra Notz highlighted the benefit of secondary analysis by suggesting that it 'allows us to use an existing pool of data to pursue a research interest which is different from that of the original work.'²⁸ There are some issues associated with using secondary analysis, such as the inability to ask follow-up questions and not being able to gauge the body language of the participant due to only having the tape recording to listen to. However, these sources provided some invaluable material and helped to triangulate my research findings by allowing me to compare and contrast the anecdotes from my other sources. Due to the difficulty in proving reliability and validity in qualitative research projects, triangulation helps to identify any bias or obvious discrepancies in the research.

2.2.2.4 Analysis

Using three different methods; semi-structured interviews, analysis of biographical works, and analysis of pre-recorded interviews, helped to broaden the information collated on the soldier's experiences. These methods involved front line British Army personnel (either serving or retired) who had served in theatre(s) of armed conflict. Due to varying the methods of data collection, experiences were sought from personnel from a range of ranks. This proved useful in gaining a broader understanding of the soldiers' experiences, practices, and attitudes towards children. Through the oral and written testimonies of the individual soldiers, themes concerning the attitudes and behaviours towards the presence of children in theatres of armed conflict emerge which are relevant and are a core objective of this project. These testimonies also provide an insight into how the child's presence can alter military operations and the practices of individual soldiers. As this study focused on gaining in-depth information

²⁸ Notz, P. 'Secondary Qualitative Analysis of Interviews: A Method used for Gaining Insight into the work/ life balance of middle managers in Germany', *Qualitative Social Research*, Volume: 6, No: 1, Article 34, 2005, p.1.

about soldiers' experiences rather than attempting to replicate findings, a homogenous sampling strategy was used. This sampling strategy involved the use of in-depth data collection relevant to a particular sub-group who shared a similar cultural background and set of experiences. The aim of this piece of data collection was to discuss the soldiers' experience, and to see which themes emerged which would highlight how the presence of children in theatres of armed conflict affected military operations, and the attitudes and practices of individual British soldiers.

Using Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke's thematic analysis model²⁹, the data was transcribed and divided into the three distinct categories: military operations, attitudes and practices. Continuous reading and analysis of the data resulted in a number of different themes emerging within each category and across the data sets. These themes were then coded and it became evident that repeated patterns of meaning existed across the data sets, the details of which are discussed in the fifth chapter, *Children Associated with Armed Conflict: The Soldier's Perspective*. Whilst thematic analysis can be criticised as it relies on the researcher's judgement to look for themes, it is a good analytical method due to its flexibility in being applied to a range of datasets, as well as being able to 'provide a rich and detailed, yet complex, account of the data.'³⁰ The aim of this research project is to gain a deeper understanding of British soldiers' experiences when encountering children in theatres of armed conflict. To achieve this, the decision was taken to draw upon the oral and written testimonies of former and serving British soldiers, as this method would allow the soldiers' voice to emerge and provide a personal insight into the issue from their perspective.

²⁹ Braun, V. and Clarke, J. 'Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology', *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, Volume: 3, 2006, p.77-101.

³⁰ Braun, V. and Clarke, J. 'Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology', *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 2006.

2.2.3 Secondary Data Analysis

Secondary data analysis was used to gather information that would be relevant for all the chapters. This material was also useful in providing a contextual understanding about the topic of children in armed conflict, which would be useful in achieving the thesis' aim to acknowledge the various ways the child can be encountered in the conflict environment. Analysis of the existing literature helped to frame the research question, but was also used to gain a broad understanding of some of the key issues within the thesis. Reference books, scholarly articles, government reports, NGO literature, military manuals, and training guidelines were all used throughout the project. Films and fictional literature were used to acknowledge the various ways children involved or associated with armed conflict are portrayed in popular culture. Such films can provide audiences with an insight into the various potential narratives evident within a certain situation, or conflict environment. British soldiers are part of the general audience in which films are produced for, therefore films can inform their expectations and understandings of a particular subject matter. Fictional works about child soldiers became popular in the 1990s and, during the recent Afghanistan (post-2001) and Iraq (post-2003) conflicts, there was an increase in the number of films produced focusing on conflict situations. The analysis of such works will draw upon David Bordwell's *film comprehension* framework³¹ to show how children are represented and portrayed in popular culture. This framework focuses on the explicit meanings made within films and other works, as opposed to a *film interpretation* framework which seeks to analyse hidden meanings and symbols within the story-telling narrative. The *film comprehension* framework is a useful analytical tool to explain what is being shown to the audience, making reference to the specific actions and events that take place.

³¹ Bordwell, D. *Making Meaning: Inference and Rhetoric in the Interpretation of Cinema*, (First Harvard University Press, USA, 1991).

2.2.4 Elite Interviews

Elite interviews were also conducted with individuals working within the field of children and armed conflict. The purpose of conducting elite interviews was to engage with professionals working within this field, in order to gather knowledge and to inform my understanding of the subject area. Joel Aberbach and Bert Rockman acknowledged that the benefit of elite interviews was the importance in finding out ‘what a set of people think’ as ‘respondents are selected on the basis of what they might know to help the investigator fill in pieces of a puzzle or to confirm the proper alignment of pieces already in place.’³² Therefore, interviews were conducted with officials from UN agencies, international child protection agencies, non-governmental organisations, aid workers and journalists in order to gain a deeper perspective of the topic of children associated with armed conflict. This allowed me to engage with those working within the field of children in armed conflict, and to gain a deeper awareness of the narratives within such institutions. It was decided that I would conduct a six-week fieldwork trip to New York City in order to carry out these elite interviews and to also conduct archival work as the majority of the organisations working within the field of children and armed conflict are located here, as is the United Nations Headquarters.

The benefit of conducting elite interviews is the insight and information the professional, working within a specified field, can provide which adds an important contribution to the knowledge of the researcher and the overall research project. However, there are a number of issues associated with conducting elite interviews which I needed to overcome in order to ensure this method was utilised effectively, and benefitted my research project. Firstly, access to interview participants is difficult as the people I wished to interview were busy professionals whose work diaries were often scheduled months in advance.

³² Aberbach, J. and Rockman, B. ‘Coding and Conducting Elite Interviews’, *Political Science and Politics*, Volume: 35, Issue: 4, December 2002, p.673.

Aberbach and Rockman highlighted the difficulty associated with accessing such professionals, stating that ‘it can be quite difficult to secure interviews with busy officials who are widely sought after.’³³ Kenneth Goldstein reiterated this point, suggesting that the most important aspect of conducting elite interviews is securing the interview in the first place.³⁴ As I sought to interview professionals within key organisations who worked in the field of children and armed conflict, I used purposive sampling and did not issue a call for participants when designing my elite interviews schedule. Instead, I conducted research on the relevant organisations to see which individuals would be useful to speak with depending upon their role and subject area. Many of the organisations had sections on their websites which provided portfolios on their staff members’ interests and specialist areas. This helped me to identify the individuals I would like to interview within each organisation. Snowballing was also used to identify participants who may provide useful contacts or information relevant for my project. At the end of each interview conducted, I asked the participant whether they knew of anyone else who may be interested in speaking with me. This proved to be extremely useful in gaining access to organisations such as the United Nations, as their contact lists are more secure than other organisations. Therefore, the snowballing method helped me to gain access to other organisations and potential interviewees due to the contacts made through my interview participants.

Having identified the various professionals that I wished to conduct elite interviews with, I drafted individual letters which would be sent to my potential participants. These letters contained an outline of my research project, the purpose of the interview, how their participation would benefit my thesis, an outline of the potential questions I wished to

³³ Aberbach, J. and Rockman, B. ‘Coding and Conducting Elite Interviews’, *Political Science and Politics*, 2002, p.673.

³⁴ Goldstein, K. ‘Getting in the Door: Sampling and Completing Elite Interviews’, *Political Science and Politics*, Volume: 35, Issue: 4, December 2002, p.669.

discuss, and a statement of support from my project supervisor. As I was sending these letters via international post, I also sent an email to my potential participants which introduced myself, my project, and notified them that a letter would be forthcoming. I felt it was important to make contact via email as I was aware that many of these professionals would be unlikely to open their own correspondence, however, a formal letter was also needed to maintain a degree of professionalism. This form of contact was made three months prior to my fieldwork trip, as I wanted to ensure that everything was schedule prior to my departure. However, the response rate was poor and, those that did respond suggested that I contact them when I was in New York so that we could arrange a suitable time to conduct the interviews. In my eagerness to schedule the interviews prior to arrival in New York City, I had ignored a vital piece of advice that Goldstein had discussed in his paper about sampling and completing elite interviews. Goldstein noted that to ensure access ‘a sustained time period ‘in country’ is key to making connections and being able to set up interviews.’³⁵ This was an important learning curve for myself as a researcher, as I found that once I was ‘in country’ my participants were more engaged, response rates improved, and interviews were scheduled quickly. As I was ‘in country’, I found that I received telephone calls from my participants who had been notified of a cancelled meeting or available slot in their diary, and asked whether I could meet them at short notice.

The different interview locations also posed their own advantages and disadvantages. The majority of these interviews were conducted in the offices of the participants, therefore I needed to ensure that I had appropriate identification with me at all times so that I could enter these spaces. The strict security measures associated with entry into such spaces meant that sometimes I was unable to use a Dictaphone, therefore I had to balance the need to make notes on the interview as well as to actively engage with the participant. Some of my

³⁵ Goldstein, K. ‘Getting in the Door’, *Political Science and Politics*, 2002, p.669.

participants requested that I meet them away from their place of work. Although these interviewees allowed me to record their interviews, they did request anonymity and I could not cite them or their organisation. Whilst the information provided was beneficial to my research and informed my ideas, citing a participant as *anonymous* does pose issues concerning the validity and credibility of such quotes.

Another issue associated with conducting elite interviews was highlighted by William Harvey, who acknowledged the power gap that can occur between the professional and the researcher.³⁶ Harvey suggests that as the professional is an expert in their field they tend to speak down to the researcher who is asking them questions. He describes this as a teacher-student relationship, in which the participant may use the interview to educate the researcher about the subject matter in a basic manner, which limits the benefits of conducting the interview in the first place.³⁷ In his paper, *Strategies for Conducting Elite Interviews*, Harvey states that ‘gestures such as handshaking, eye contact, body language and exchanging business cards, for example, help to reduce this gap.’³⁸ Although he provides a number of tips to help reduce the power gap between professionals and researchers, Harvey also suggests that ‘researchers must show that they have done their homework’ so that the professional does not feel their time is being wasted.³⁹ One of the approaches I used to overcome this gap was to send the participant a weblink to my academic profile page which provided details about my research interests, publications, and conference attendances. At the start of the interview, I also handed the participant a business card with my contact details. These two

³⁶ Harvey, W. ‘Strategies for Conducting Elite Interviews’, *Qualitative Research*, Volume: 11, No: 4, 2011, p.431-441.

³⁷ Harvey, W. ‘Strategies for Conducting Elite Interviews’, *Qualitative Research*, 2011, p.439.

³⁸ Harvey, W. ‘Strategies for Conducting Elite Interviews’, *Qualitative Research*, 2011, p.439.

³⁹ Harvey, W. ‘Strategies for Conducting Elite Interviews’, *Qualitative Research*, 2011, p.439.

acts helped to reduce the power gap, as I felt I was presenting myself in a professional manner.

In their paper, *Conducting and Coding Elite Interviews*, Aberbach and Rockman suggested that researchers should ask open-ended questions in order to engage and promote discussion. They suggest that ‘elites especially – but other highly educated people as well – do not like being put in the straightjacket of close-ended questions’ and that professionals ‘prefer to articulate their views, explaining why they think what they think.’⁴⁰ Therefore, when designing the interview questions, I decided to group them together by theme. This would allow open-ended discussions to take place, yet still allowed the opportunity for the key questions to be asked.

The first theme focused on discussions concerning the age of recruitment into military groups. This was used to interrogate beliefs about using age as a factor to determine participation in conflict zones. The following theme discussed the differences between voluntary and forced recruitment in armed conflict situations. This would help to expand my own knowledge about how participation in armed conflict is categorised by such organisations. Discussions about the campaign literature were also important during the interview process. I wished to interrogate the use of certain visual images used in campaign literature by NGOs and the opportunity to ask participants directly about the choice of material was beneficial to the project. The next theme focused on seeking information about the various regions and armed conflicts children participate in. This helped to inform my understanding about the roles children played in the regions relevant to my cases. It also provided an insight into which regions NGOs were concerned about regarding the contemporary use of children in theatres of armed conflict. Another theme questioned the

⁴⁰ Aberbach, J. and Rockman, B. ‘Coding and Conducting Elite Interviews’, *Political Science and Politics*, 2002, p.674.

term ‘child soldier phenomenon’, and whether the roles children play are changing. The final theme aimed to discuss the specific use of children against Western military forces. A copy of the themes and questions used in my elite interviews can be found in Appendix B of this thesis.

The information gathered from these elite interviews were useful in informing my own knowledge and understanding on the topic of children involved in armed conflict. However, the elite interviews also provided information that was beneficial and informed discussions produced in the third chapter of this thesis, *Children in Contemporary Armed Conflict*. This chapter will contain the discussions and analysis of the information derived from the elite interviews. However, it did become apparent from the tone used in certain interviews that there was a great divide in narratives and dislike from humanitarian organisations towards military forces. During four of the elite interviews I conducted, I was questioned as to my motivations for looking at the topic of children and armed conflict from a military perspective. In each of these conversations, it was emphasised that it would be more beneficial for me, as a researcher, to conduct a project on the issues surrounding children’s participation in armed conflict.

Whilst I thanked each participant for their comments, I reiterated the fact that there was a lot of research conducted in this area and that I sought to look at the topic from a military perspective due to the knowledge gaps that existed. The tone was slightly negative in these interviews and, whilst the interviews continued, it may have impacted the amount of information these particular participants provided me, when the participant realised they could not alter my research focus. However, the dissension between NGOs and militaries is not uncommon and has been discussed within academia. Joelle Jenny acknowledged the lack of co-operation between NGOs and military groups, stating that it could cause ‘a loss of independence and neutrality if humanitarian organisations start to be perceived as working

too closely with international forces.’⁴¹ Her work suggests there is a significant culture gap between the two organisations. She states that

an army and a humanitarian organisation work with fundamentally different rationales. While soldiers respond to clear lines of command, sets of rules and operational orders, aid workers are generally independent minded and retain considerable decision-making power at field level. Distrust and / or misunderstanding can result from this culture gap.⁴²

This culture gap was evident in the tone and discussions held in some of the interviews I had with professionals working within the NGO community. During one interview, a participant demonstrated dissatisfaction towards the US military and the legal age of recruitment stating that ‘an eighteen-year-old is still a boy and quite frankly you are going to make him shoot other boys? Great, then what? Then you are going to bring them back into our society...great.’⁴³ Although the culture gap was evident in some of the elite interviews I conducted, these interviews were beneficial in acknowledging that this dissension exists. They also provided invaluable information about the role of children in armed conflict from such organisations who seek the removal of children from the conflict environment.

2.2.5 Archival Work

Archival work was also conducted at the United Nations Archive Centre, New York City which was helpful in gaining access to numerous documents linked to the topic of children in armed conflict. Under the 1958 Public Records Act, material marked ‘confidential’ in the UK cannot be released for public viewing until a 30-year period had passed. Whereas in the US, such material can be viewed publicly after a 20-year period. This

⁴¹ Jenny, J. ‘Civil-Military Co-operation in Complex Emergencies: Finding Ways to Make It Work’, *European Security*, Volume: 10, No: 2, 2007, p. 23.

⁴² Jenny, J. ‘Civil-Military Co-operation in Complex Emergencies’, *European Security*, 2007, p. 27.

⁴³ Interview with representative attributable to a policy organisation working within the field of children and armed conflict, New York City, April 2014, Interviewed by Michelle Jones, Aberystwyth University.

allowed me to access material concerning the British military's involvement in the Bosnian conflict which would not have been available in the archives in the UK. Materials such as situation reports, fax correspondence, and personal letters were useful in providing contextual information relevant to children's involvement in conflict situations and my cases. They also provided an insight into the presence of children in various regions of Bosnia. Archival work was also carried out at the London Metropolitan Archives, National Army Museum and the Imperial War Museum. Here, I gathered information from various sources such as reports, letters, private documentation and memos regarding children and soldiers in the conflict zones. This method of data collection was used to enhance my collection of oral and written testimonies of British soldiers which was needed to gain a deeper understanding of their experiences in particular conflict environments.

2.2.6 Freedom of Information Requests and Key Informant Discussions

Due to the limited publicly available data directly linked to my research project, I submitted three Freedom of Information⁴⁴ (FOI) requests to the MoD requesting information regarding their training and guidelines given to Army personnel prior to and during deployments, in specific relation to the presence of children. Whilst the aim of my research project was to seek a bottom-up approach by discussing the experiences of British soldiers, it was important to acknowledge the organisational perspective by examining the training and guidelines produced by the British Army and MoD. The responses confirmed that there was

⁴⁴ Please see the following citations regarding the responses from the MoD concerning requests made under the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

a. *Freedom of Information Response FOI2015/02562*, received on 13th April 2015, no URL available. (Please note that whilst no URL has been produced by the MoD for this item, the researcher is in possession of the original document which can be produced on request).

b. *Freedom of Information Response FOI2015/07194*, received on 8th September 2015, taken from https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/460424/PDFSCANS_Document_1.pdf.

c. *Freedom of Information Response FOI2015/08438*, received on 1st October 2015, taken from https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/467733/20151002-FOI2015_08438_REDACTED-U.pdf.

limited data available and that the MoD had not produced any specific unclassified documentation concerning the issue of British personnel encountering children in theatres of armed conflict. The FOI requests confirmed that the sources I had found, in which the MoD referred to children, were the only publicly available materials on the topic. I had a Skype meeting with two MoD trainers⁴⁵ who provided information as to the training methods and guidance they provide to their personnel. Again, this meeting had to be subjected to stringent checks and confirmation by the Army Scientific Assessment Committee. Direct quotations and references will not be made to matters discussed during this meeting, as the purpose of this conversation was to inform my understanding of the current MoD training and guidelines rather than to interrogate the subject matter.

2.2.7 Concluding Remarks

The research design arose out of the need to question military personnel about their experiences and to see what the reality was in theatres of armed conflict. It was important to gain an understanding of experiences from those who had served as part of the land force and in a front-line capacity, but also to capture experiences from various ranks and regiments. The soldiers' narratives and voice is an important aspect of this thesis, as it is their perspective which will help to create knowledge on the subject of encountering children in theatres of armed conflict. Whilst access to military personnel would have benefited my research project, the inability to secure MoD ethics approval resulted in shifting the focus from serving to retired personnel which proved to be a useful exercise. Participants no longer part of the military institution may have less restrictions imposed upon them, therefore are likely to be more open in their responses. The pre-recorded interviews from the archives were

⁴⁵ Conversation with MoD trainers (via Skype), 18th March 2015. In order for this meeting to occur the MoD trainers had to apply to the Army Scientific Assessment Committee to receive permission to discuss the current training guidelines with myself. This was granted on the 25th February 2015 (email correspondence confirming this is in the author's possession and can be read on request).

conducted with serving personnel on their return from an overseas deployment, therefore this ensured that the views of both former and serving personnel were included.

Whilst the inability to secure MoD ethics approval may have led to redesigning the research plan, it also highlighted some of the key issues facing researchers wishing to engage with such institutions. David Gee highlighted the implications for military research, ‘even for academic institutions willing to forego military funding, they still require government approval for access to personnel. These constraints pose a barrier to research into politically sensitive research projects.’⁴⁶ Most research into military culture and military organisations is conducted with funding from the military themselves. However, there seems to be a lack of research on the military sector from financially independent researchers. John Lindsay highlighted the implications for conducting research about the military, he noted that ‘without MoD co-operation it was impossible to obtain a truly representative sample of former soldiers, with MoD co-operation their testimony would be tarnished.’⁴⁷ Although MoD ethics approval had been denied, this project was still required to undergo ethical approval by the Aberystwyth University Ethics Committee and the following section highlights the considerations needed to conduct this type of research project.

2.3: Ethical Considerations

As I chose to interview participants about their experiences in armed conflict, especially when encountering children, this resulted in the Aberystwyth University Research Ethics Committee classifying this research project as ‘sensitive’. Therefore, this research project needed to receive ethical approval from the Aberystwyth University Ethics Board prior to conducting the interviews. Whilst ethical clearance was needed in order to engage

⁴⁶ Gee, D. *The Last Ambush: Aspects of Mental Health in the British Armed Forces*, (Forces Watch, London, 2013), p.16.

⁴⁷ Lindsay, J. *Brits Speak Out: British Soldiers’ Impressions of the Northern Ireland Conflict*, (Guildhall Press, Derry, 1998), np.

with any human subjects for this research project, it was the desire to interview former military personnel that required a more stringent ethical process. In order to show that I was qualified as a researcher to conduct interviews with this particular participant group, I underwent a number of training courses. Courses regarding interviewing and interviews with sensitive subjects helped to increase my awareness regarding conducting this particular method of data collection. I also underwent an intensive training course on the subject of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) so that I was aware of the symptoms and could refer any of my participants to seek extra help if they showed any signs of distress. A veterans' awareness and training course was also undertaken to deepen my knowledge of this particular group within, and to ensure I understood their needs and how to interact with them. These courses were a required component which needed to be demonstrated prior to my ethical review panel. However, participation on these courses also enhanced my knowledge on the subject area and improved my awareness regarding the need to ensure the well-being of my participants. Alongside the formalised training I had to undertake, I also had to ensure that any risks associated with partaking in my research project were communicated thoroughly to the participant. This included detailed communication prior to the event, a consent form which ensured that all participants would be anonymised, and a post interview information sheet which gave contact details should the participant have any emotional stress after the interview.

During the ethical review process, it was decided that I would be unable to interview anyone who had received or was in the process of receiving a diagnosis for post-traumatic stress disorder. All interviews would also be conducted in a public environment to ensure both my own and the participant's safety. Consent forms were used for each interview I undertook and each participant was made aware of the fact that they could remove themselves from the research process at any given time. Interview recordings were

transcribed by myself to ensure anonymity and any data collected was stored in a doubly locked facility. During the referencing process, each interviewee was assigned a letter of the alphabet in order to maintain their anonymity. The decision was also made to not allude to their rank or position within the reference to ensure they cannot be identified. As the project is interested in the former soldier's experiences on the subject, the acknowledgement of their rank or position was not deemed a crucial element in the telling of their story therefore will not be referenced. However, the range of rank positions was important during the sampling stages to ensure narratives from enlisted soldiers were also included. Due to the sensitive issues discussed, I ensured that my participants felt safe and tried to reduce the risk of harm. However, I also had to ensure the risk of harm was reduced for myself as the principal researcher. Prior to conducting my interviews, I ensured that I had support within my university institution should I feel the interview process becoming problematic. My supervisors were also on hand should I need to debrief. As I chose to transcribe my own interviews, I ensured there was plenty of time for breaks and other activities to lessen the chance of secondary trauma. The courses I had undertaken and information from other studies provided some useful advice regarding the need for both myself and the participant to be able to take some time out during the actual interview to regain composure and to collect our thoughts.⁴⁸The guide produced by Cyanne Loyle and Alicia Simoni was invaluable as it was laden with useful hints and tips to ensure the well-being of both the participant and the researcher.⁴⁹

Ethical clearance was also sought to conduct elite interviews with the participants working within the field of children and armed conflict. This stage in my research project did

⁴⁸ Corbin, J. and Morse, J.M. 'The Unstructured Interactive Interview: Issues of Reciprocity and Risks When Dealing with Sensitive Topics', *Qualitative Inquiry*, Volume 9, No: 3, 2003, p.343.

⁴⁹ Loyle, C. and Simoni, A. 'Research Under Fire: Researcher Trauma and Conflict Studies', *Political Violence At A Glance*, 30th October 2014, taken from <http://politicalviolenceataglance.org/2014/10/30/research-under-fire-researcher-trauma-and-conflict-studies/>, accessed on 3rd December 2014.

not require such a formalised ethical review procedure, however I did have to ensure that considerations such as consent forms, anonymity, and interview conduct were acknowledged and reviewed prior to conducting fieldwork. A separate consent form was used for these interviews, and did not require the same amount of rigour concerning post-interview information sheets and safeguards to the participant's well-being. However, the same procedures regarding the participant's right to remove themselves from the interview process and research project were still applicable to these participants.

Having discussed the data collection methods and ethical considerations relevant to this research project, the following section will discuss the main theoretical assumptions and the conceptual framework used within this thesis.

2.4 Theoretical Assumptions

The following sections will discuss the main theoretical assumptions that guided the project. It will focus on the application of Just War theory, and the way in which elements of this theory are used in military ethics training which provide an ethical framework for soldiers regarding their conduct in war, and the use of combat motivation theory to determine why soldiers choose to fight and kill. These theoretical assumptions are part of a normative framework which explains the soldier's expected decision-making process and motivations within theatres of armed conflict.

The first theoretical assumption focuses on the use of the Just War principles which guides the decision-making process of governments and the conduct of soldiers in war. Just War Theory is a theoretical framework which guides ethical behaviour in war, by shaping a military's strategies and conduct in conflict situations. This theory focuses on two key elements; the right to go to war, *jus ad bellum*, and the appropriate conduct in war, *jus in*

bello.⁵⁰ Through these shared values as to when and how war should be fought, rules of combat that guide soldiers' conduct in war have been created under IHL. These guidelines that determine appropriate conduct in war can be described as 'synonymous with *jus in bello*; as it seeks to minimize suffering in armed conflicts, notably by protecting and assisting all victims of armed conflicts to the greatest extent possible.'⁵¹ IHL uses the four basic principles known as the Laws of Armed Conflict (LOAC) to ensure that conduct in war is just. These are; *discrimination or distinction*, the need to distinguish between combatants and civilians; *proportionality*, that force should not be excessive and collateral damage kept to a minimum; *unnecessary suffering*, that any force used does not cause suffering that is unnecessary to achieve the military objectives; and *military necessity*, that the actions taken are necessary and justifiable to the objectives and aims of the operation.⁵²

The theoretical assumption that guides this thesis is that members of the British Armed Forces are aware of the Just War principles and LOAC which are taught in military ethics courses. These courses are usually taught during the soldiers' initial training period, and again prior to deployment into a conflict situation. These courses introduce the soldier to the principle concepts and guidelines that are produced to guide the soldier's conduct in conflict scenarios, to ensure that actions undertaken by the soldier are legal and ethical as outlined in IHL.

Discussions about the ethics of war and rules of combat are worked into the professional soldiers' Ethics of War training package, which is a training and development

⁵⁰ For more information concerning Just War theory please see Walzer, M. '*Just and Unjust Wars: A Moral Argument with Historical Illustrations*', (Basic Books, New York, 2006).

⁵¹ ICRC, '*International Humanitarian Law: Answers to your Questions*', taken from <https://www.icrc.org/en/document/what-are-jus-ad-bellum-and-jus-bello-0>, 22nd January 2015, accessed on 2nd April 2017, np.

⁵² For a more detailed explanation of the principles of the Laws of Armed Conflict please see '*The Laws of Armed Conflict: Basic Knowledge*', International Committee of the Red Cross, June 2002, taken from https://www.icrc.org/eng/assets/files/other/law1_final.pdf, accessed on 17th May 2016.

package that all soldiers are required to undertake prior to deployment into a conflict zone. This training package is designed to introduce the soldiers to the key concepts regarding the LOAC and military ethics. Paul Robinson discussed the role of Ethics of War Training with a focus on the British Army and noted that ‘the most commonly expressed sentiment among those tasked with the conduct of this training is that the objective should be individuals who are able to think about ethical problems independently and act autonomously.’⁵³ He suggested that the British Army’s production of the *Values and Standards of the British Army*⁵⁴ builds upon formal ethics training to provide the British soldier with guidelines as to their appropriate ethical behaviour. This assumption was later confirmed during discussions with former servicer personnel and the MoD trainers, who discussed the pre-deployment training packages undertaken by all British military personnel on the LOAC, Rules of Engagement, and military ethics. Further details can be found in chapters four and five of this thesis.

The soldier must acknowledge the four principles associated with the LOAC for their conduct in war to be legal and just. As mentioned in the *Introduction* chapter, the professional adult soldier faces a potential ethical dilemma when faced with a child soldier who has reneged their protected civilian status in return for partaking in the hostilities. The theoretical assumption exists that, the soldier belonging to a professional military organisation is well-versed in the principles associated with the ethics of war and the LOAC, therefore understands that a child becomes a morally permissible target when taking part in hostilities. However, as seen in the literature search, many of the authors suggest that this is not the case, and that the child causes an ethical dilemma for the soldier who abides by such principles, due to the soldier’s cultural beliefs that a child is vulnerable and in need of

⁵³ Robinson, P. ‘Ethics Training and Development in the Military’, *Parameters*, Spring 2007, p.30.

⁵⁴ ‘*Values and Standards of the British Army*’, British Army, January 2008, taken from www.army.mod.uk/documents/general/v_s_of_the_british_army.pdf, accessed on 30th June 2015.

protection. Within this study, it is important to be aware of the principles associated with Just War theory and the LOAC, as well as their application in the courses taught to professional soldiers. Although this thesis does not seek to add to the debates concerning Just War theory and the child soldier⁵⁵, it does assume that the ethical behaviour outlined in Just War theory play a role in the conduct and moral reasoning of the professional soldier. These assumptions informed my thinking prior to conducting fieldwork with former British soldiers, and were confirmed during the interview process and analysis of the data.

Whilst Just War theory and the LOAC provide a framework and guidelines concerning the moral reasoning and legal restrictions facing a professional soldier, combat motivation theory provides an understanding as to why a soldier chooses to fight and kill in conflict situations. Combat motivation theory disregards ideology as an enabling factor, instead the dynamics of group cohesion and ‘buddy loyalties’⁵⁶ are seen as the most important factors in which ‘soldiers are persuaded to overcome fears of dying and the social stigma against the taking of a life.’⁵⁷ This particular theoretical assumption became popular after the Second World War era due to the studies by Samuel Marshall⁵⁸, Samuel Stouffer⁵⁹, and Edward Shils and Morris Janowitz⁶⁰, all of whom found that soldiers opted to fight due to their relationship with their comrades rather than for political or ideological motivations. Simon Wessely suggests that both self-preservation and protection of comrades are the key motivating factors in convincing soldiers to fight and kill, ‘they have been trained to fight and

⁵⁵ For further information, please see Berntsen, T.A. and Mæland, B. ‘The Agency of Child Soldiers: Rethinking the Principles of Discrimination’, taken from Allhoff, F., Evans, N., and Henschke, A. ed. *The Routledge Handbook of Ethics and War: Just War Theory in the Twenty-First Century*, (Routledge, Oxon, 2013).

⁵⁶ ‘Buddy Loyalties’ refers to the idea that soldiers become loyal to those in their platoon or unit, their immediate friendship group. For further discussion, please see Kellett, A. *Combat Motivation: The Behaviour of Soldiers in Battle*, (Springer Science and Business Media, Canada, 1982).

⁵⁷ Smith, D. ‘The Freudian Trap in Combat Motivation Theory’, *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Volume: 25, No: 3, 2002, p.208.

⁵⁸ Marshall, S.L.A. *Men against Fire: The Problem of Battle in Future War*, (University of Oklahoma Press, USA, 1947).

⁵⁹ Stouffer, S. *The American Soldier: Combat and its Aftermath*, (Princeton Publishers, New Jersey, 1949).

⁶⁰ Shils, E. and Janowitz, M. ‘Cohesion and Disintegration in the Wehrmacht in World War 2’, *Public Opinion Quarterly*, Volume: 12, 1948, p.280-315.

because failure to do so endangers not just their own lives, but also those people around them with whom they have formed powerful social bonds.’⁶¹ The assumption that soldiers choose to fight and kill due to their relationship with their fellow comrades is important to acknowledge when discussing the soldier’s experiences. The assumption based on existing studies and theory is that soldiers will fight and kill if an enemy fighter threatens his own existence or the existence of his comrades.

Both Just War theory and combat motivation theory provide a particular set of assumptions about the conduct and motivations that guide professional military personnel. They help to explain and determine the conduct and actions of the professional soldier. Whilst these theories provide a normative framework which determines what the soldier is *expected* to do, the hostile child actor has the potential to contradict this. Their presence and interaction with the professional adult soldier can contravene beliefs based upon the need to protect children, therefore can cause a potential ethical and moral dilemma. This thesis relies on these theoretical assumptions to provide an understanding and knowledge as to the norms the professional soldier is expected to follow in theatres of armed conflict. The knowledge of such assumptions help to provide an understanding as to how an ethical dilemma occurs; it shows how the soldier is trained to act versus the cultural narrative that a child should be protected. The clash of these two normative understandings can create an ethical dilemma, or grey area, for personnel operating in such situations. By utilising this normative framework, it became apparent in the analysis of the in-depth interviews with former service personnel that children could cause a moral or ethical dilemma, as some soldiers acknowledged the child as a combatant, whereas others recognised the combatant as a child.

⁶¹ Wessely, S. ‘Twentieth Century Theories on Combat Motivation and Breakdown’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, Volume: 41, No: 2, April 2006, p.276.

2.5 Principal Concepts

Whilst theoretical assumptions provided guidance about the expected actions and conduct of the professional soldier, this thesis also requires a conceptual framework to provide an understanding of how core ideas connect with one another, and helped to formulate the central research question. In order to examine the relationship between children and the experiences of soldiers, it is important to define the main concepts used within this study; the manner in which they are being used, and their relationship with one another, as this will provide clarity to the discussion and debates within the thesis. The three concepts that require a solid explanation and grounding within the thesis are; childhood, innocence and violence.

Within this thesis, the Western concept of childhood plays an important role in creating a particular identity of the child based on societal expectations and cultural norms. However, prior to examining the Western notion of childhood, it is vital to understand what a child is and what is meant by childhood, and how varying cultural understandings of childhood can depend upon different experiences and expectations. Working alongside the concept of childhood is the idea of innocence. This concept can be associated with the notion of childhood and all its purity (moral innocence), or it can be examined in terms of accountability for certain acts and crimes (physical innocence). This in turn links to the notion of violence; whether it is intended or unintended, physical or psychological. Each of these concepts will be defined and discussed in a logical sequence in order to show their relationship with one another.

2.5.1 Childhood

‘The state of being a child; the stage of life or period during which one is a child; the time from birth to puberty.’⁶²

The above definition attempts to classify childhood within a certain timeframe, in this case ‘*from birth to puberty*’, whilst it is commonly understood that the birth of a human being indicates their position as a child and thus the period known as childhood, the term ‘*puberty*’ is not a fixed end point. Depending on biological and cultural factors, the age in which a child enters puberty is flexible, and therefore difficult to gauge. For many the ‘*state of being a child*’ and ‘*childhood*’ are synonymous with one another, therefore in order to understand what ‘*childhood*’ is, and the period in which it relates to, we must have a clear definition of a ‘*child*’. The most universal definition of a child has been created by the United Nations (UN) in their Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)⁶³, in which Article 1 states that,

For the purpose of this present Convention, a child means every human being below the age of 18 years unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier.’⁶⁴

This definition of a child has been adopted and become universally accepted by the majority of UN member states.⁶⁵ As the timeframe associated with being a child ends at 18, the process of childhood must also end at the same point. Whilst childhood may be categorised as the period up until 18 years of age, the understanding of what childhood is and what it means to different groups, has yet to be acknowledged or standardised on a universal scale. In fact, the term ‘childhood’ has been described as a ‘complex phenomenon which therefore requires complex understandings that cannot be arrived at by looking through a

⁶² ‘*Childhood*’, Oxford English Dictionary Online (2014 Edition), taken from <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/31631?redirectedFrom=childhood#eid>, accessed on 24th November 2014.

⁶³ The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child was adopted and opened for signature, justification and accession by General Assembly Resolution 44/25 on the 20th November 1989 and was entered into force on the 2nd September 1990.

⁶⁴ Article 1, ‘*The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*’, taken from www.unicef.org.uk/documents/publication-pdfs/UNCRC_Press200910web.pdf, accessed on 1st December 2014, p.4.

⁶⁵ To date (2016), only the United States and South Sudan have failed to ratify this treaty.

single disciplinary lens.’⁶⁶ The concept of childhood is fairly new and different disciplinary fields continue to contribute to debates on the subject with the hope of finding a definition with universal applicability.

Debates surrounding childhood first emerged when Philippe Aries published *Centuries of Childhood* in 1962 in which he claimed,

In Medieval society, the idea of childhood did not exist; this is not to suggest that children were neglected, forsaken or despised. The idea of childhood is not to be confused with affection for children; it corresponds to an awareness of the particular nature of childhood, that particular nature which distinguishes the child from the adult, even the young adult. In Medieval society, this awareness was lacking.⁶⁷

Aries’ suggested the concept of childhood was socially constructed, and used paintings from the Medieval period to show that children were painted as miniature adults and not given a special or different role to their adult counterparts. It was only in the mid-18th century that the romantic notion of childhood, in which children were seen as angelic with the need to be nurtured and protected, began to emerge therefore highlighting that childhood was a social construct.⁶⁸ Although Aries’ work was criticised for his limited choice in historical sources, it did lay the foundations for further research on the subject of ‘*childhood*’, especially within the fields of history and sociology.

Historians noted that assumptions and values associated with childhood varied depending on the historical period being analysed. During the Enlightenment period childhood was seen as preparation for the adult world. The child was expected to use their childhood years to gain an education, to be disciplined and to develop oneself ready for adulthood. The philosopher, John Locke, contributed to the idea that childhood was the best time for the child to learn which increased the role and powers of schools in society.⁶⁹ Children were presented as innocent beings who were born free from sin, yet could become

⁶⁶ James, A. and James, A. ‘*Key Concepts in Childhood Studies*’, (Sage Publishers, London, 2008), p.2.

⁶⁷ Aries, P. ‘*Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life*’, (Vintage Press, New York, 1962), p.128.

⁶⁸ Aries, P. ‘*Centuries of Childhood*’, (New York, 1962).

⁶⁹ Locke, J. ‘*Some Thoughts Concerning Education*’, (A & J Churchill, London, 1693).

sinful as they progressed into the adult world. This was exemplified in Jean-Jacques Rousseau's work *Emile*⁷⁰, in which the Swiss philosopher developed some of his main theories concerning childhood and education. Rousseau suggested that children are born innocent and dependent on their superiors, yet through natural education adults must prepare and shield the child from the corrupt world, therefore developing the notion that the child needs to be protected.

During the Romantic period, children were given a special status; 'the Romantics idealized the child as a creature blessed by God.'⁷¹ Infant sentimentality continued and during the Industrial era reformers sought to provide better working conditions for children. Reformers also campaigned for laws to protect the child's educational and welfare needs. Although Aries' work has been criticised for its lack of sources, historians also struggled to find sources that cut across all sectors of society. Children were unlikely to have produced material worthy of documentation, and those that did tended to be from the upper or middle literate classes. Whilst the discipline of history provided a useful lens to examine the varied concepts of childhood, much of the analyses focused on the depiction of the wealthier child's experience therefore it is difficult to assume there was a universal understanding of childhood at any given point of time in history. However, historical analysis has shown that European and North American experiences were quite similar and that the 'the association of childhood with innocence became deeply embedded within Western culture, particularly after the Romantics left their mark in the nineteenth century.'⁷²

Sociologists also took an interest in the development of the child and the concept of childhood. A particular school of thought, known as Grand Stage Theorists, emerged which promoted the idea that human life could be divided into a series of stages in which 'there are

⁷⁰ Rousseau, J. J. '*Emile*', (IAP Publishing, USA, 2009).

⁷¹ Heywood, C. '*A History of Childhood*', (Polity Press, Cambridge, 2001), p.3.

⁷² Heywood, C. '*A History of Childhood*', (Cambridge, 2001), p.34.

specific, universal, and in some cases, predestined stages in the evolution of the family, children, and childhood.’⁷³ The notion of childhood as a special period, or stage in life, provoked a rapid interest and growth in the study of the child in sociology. Previously, children and childhood had been looked at under the umbrella term of ‘family’ within the sociological field, but interest in the topic resulted in greater research being conducted solely on the child and their interaction with different institutions and cultures. This resulted in the emergence of disciplines such as child development and childhood studies. Rather than attempting to provide a universal definition of childhood which would be applicable across the disciplines, sociologists began to acknowledge that childhood could be dependent upon a number of external factors.

Sociologists, Allison James and Alan Prout, argued that there was ‘no universal child in which to engage’⁷⁴ and that the notion of a childhood, in which everyone had the same experience, was socially constructed. Instead they suggested four distinct approaches to examining the topic of childhood. The first is known as *the social structural child*; this approach claims that ‘children are a constant feature of all social worlds’⁷⁵ and that the child looks the same regardless of global positioning, yet the way in which they act and behave is different depending on the society in which they live, their social structure, and position within that society. The second, the *minority group child*, believes children are politicised because they come from a discriminatory section in society in which they are deemed to not have agency or rights. The *tribal child* approach suggests the power relations between children and adults does not exist in terms of hierarchy, rather the child has self-determination and can choose whether to follow adults as leaders or not. The final approach believes the child is *socially constructed* and that a unitary form of childhood exists despite

⁷³ Corsaro, W.A. *The Sociology of Childhood*, (Sage Publishing, London, 2015), p.69.

⁷⁴ James, A. Jenks, C. and Prout, A. *Theorizing Childhood*, (Polity Press, Cambridge, 1998), p.27.

⁷⁵ James, A. Jenks, C. and Prout, A. *Theorizing Childhood*, (Cambridge, 1998), p.32.

changing laws, attitudes and experiences. This approach does not acknowledge the change in social attitudes, therefore the historic use of minors in conflict scenarios or in marriage practices is perceived negatively based on the modern understanding of childhood.

Prout and James noted that the ‘attempts to develop a comparative understanding of children and childhood across diverse societies will undoubtedly face a large number of problems’⁷⁶, therefore childhood needs to be understood alongside other important and influencing factors such as; ethnicity, class, and gender. This idea was furthered by a number of key sociologists in the field who sought to provide evidence that academics should be discussing ‘childhoods and not childhood.’⁷⁷ Gill Valentine and Sarah Holloway suggested that, by including and recognising the role of children within the field of sociology it is important to ‘explore the different constructions of childhood in different times and places.’⁷⁸ Martin Woodhead argued that studies on the topic of children and childhood need to take into account the ‘much wider range of childhoods than has traditionally been represented...by encompassing diverse global and diverse local experiences of childhood, in the past as well as the present.’⁷⁹

Using the United Kingdom as an example, Ray Lowe drew upon historical references to show how childhood differed depending on gender and location in Victorian Britain. He noted that ‘during the period of industrialisation childhood meant different things in differing locations depending upon particular local patterns of industrialisation.’⁸⁰ In industrialised areas, male and female children from the lower social classes would take up roles in factories. Whereas in the more rural areas, female children were likely to be working as housemaids for

⁷⁶ James, A. Jenks, C. and Prout, A. ‘*Theorizing Childhood*’, (Cambridge, 1998), p.124.

⁷⁷ James, A. and Prout, A. ‘*Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood: Contemporary Issues in the Sociological Study of Childhood*’, (Routledge, London, 2015), p.xii.

⁷⁸ Valentine, G. and Holloway, S.L. ‘Children’s Geographies and the New Social Studies of Childhood’, taken from Jenks, C. ed. ‘*Childhood: Critical Concepts in Sociology*’, (Routledge, Oxon, 2005), p.168.

⁷⁹ Woodhead, M. ‘Childhood Studies: Past, Present and Future’, taken from Kehily, M.J. ed. ‘*An Introduction to Childhood Studies*’, (Open University Press, England, 2009), p.17.

⁸⁰ Lowe, R. ‘Childhood through the Ages’, taken from Maynard, T. and Thomas, N. ed. ‘*An Introduction to Early Childhood Studies*’, (Sage Publications, London, 2004), p.25.

farms or on large estates, and the boys working in the fields. Virginia Morrow also used historical examples to highlight how there has always been a multiplicity of childhoods. She noted that 'bourgeois boys were singled out for special treatment in the form of education, and this was eventually, over the course of two or three centuries, extended to middle-class girls, and then to working class children.'⁸¹ Morrow also drew upon contemporary evidence to demonstrate the differences in childhood experiences depending upon gender, class, and culture. She suggests that the 'age at which societies consider it 'acceptable' for females to enter motherhood provides another example of how constructions of childhood change over time and between different cultural contexts.'⁸² She uses the example of teenage parents being viewed as a societal problem in the Western world, compared to the expectation in some developing countries for girls to become wives and mothers in their teenage years.⁸³ Therefore, sociologists play an important role in contributing to the discussions on the concept of childhood as they seek to demonstrate how ethnicity, religion, culture, social class, and gender influence the childhoods experienced by children around the world.⁸⁴

However, whilst the James' acknowledged that certain influencing factors created a multiplicity of childhoods, their work also recognised that there were certain psychological and physiological characteristics that were universal for all children. This was reinforced by Karen Wells who suggested that childhood does have a distinct set of universal characteristics which are applicable to all children throughout the world. These are based on their physical development, periods of dependency, and emotional needs, and are evident amongst all children despite ethnicity, class, and gender factors.⁸⁵ Whilst each child may

⁸¹ Morrow, V. '*Understanding Children and Childhood*', Centre for Children and Young People, Background Briefing Series No: 1, 2011, p.4.

⁸² Morrow, V. '*Understanding Children and Childhood*', 2011, p.5.

⁸³ Morrow, V. '*Understanding Children and Childhood*', 2011, p.5.

⁸⁴ Further discussions about the construction of childhood in different locations can be found in Chapter Three, *Children in Contemporary Armed Conflict*.

⁸⁵ Wells, K. '*Childhood in a Global Perspective*', (Polity Press, Cambridge, 2009).

endure similar physical and physiological developmental stages, their experience of childhood is likely to be very different depending on a range of external factors. Thus, it can be argued that ‘childhood is a social construction and that there is no such thing as a single childhood, rather a multiplicity of childhoods.’⁸⁶

Discussions about the concept of childhood was further developed due to the work of a number of academics who sought to ‘properly anchor the study of childhood in sociology’⁸⁷, this became known as the *new sociology of childhood*. Not only has this new development within the field contributed knowledge to the concept of childhood, it has also ‘altered the way children have become politically positioned within society.’⁸⁸ The *new sociology of childhood* promoted an ethnographic approach to studying childhood which focused on the importance of children having agency and their role as social actors. This approach was promoted by Prout and James in their work *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood*⁸⁹, which argued that ethnography should be the most important methodological approach used to develop a *new sociology of childhood* ‘since it allows children a more direct voice.’⁹⁰ The concept of a *new sociology of childhood* was first introduced in 2011 by Alan Prout who outlined the aims of this new sociological turn as; ‘first, to create a space for childhood in sociological discourse, and second, to confront the complexity and ambiguity of childhood as a contemporary and destabilised phenomenon.’⁹¹ In order to do this, Prout suggested that academics would have to recognise the ‘agency of children and the idea of childhood as a structural form.’⁹² The idea of childhood as a structural form was further

⁸⁶ James, A. and James, A. ‘*Key Concepts in Childhood Studies*’, (London, 2008), p.37.

⁸⁷ Alanen, L. (Editorial), ‘Theorizing Childhood’, *Childhood*, Volume: 21, Issue: 1, 2014, p.3.

⁸⁸ Moran-Ellis, J. ‘Reflections on the Sociology of Childhood in the UK’, *Current Sociology*, Volume: 158, No: 2, March 2010, p.186.

⁸⁹ James, A. and Prout, A. ‘*Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood*’, (Routledge, London, 2015).

⁹⁰ James, A. and Prout, A. ‘*Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood*’, (Routledge, London, 2015), p.4.

⁹¹ Prout, A. ‘Taking a Step Away from Modernity: Recognising the New Sociology of Childhood’, *Global Studies of Childhood*, Volume: 1, No: 1, 2011, p.6.

⁹² Prout, A. ‘Taking a Step Away from Modernity: Recognising the New Sociology of Childhood’, *Global Studies of Childhood*, Volume: 1, No: 1, 2011, p.6.

developed by William Corsaro. His work suggested that, for children the period of childhood was temporary as they moved through this phase into adulthood. However, for society, ‘childhood is a static category whose membership changes constantly.’⁹³

Alongside the need to recognise the agency of children and their place within sociological discussions, the *new sociology of childhood* seeks to acknowledge how conceptualising childhood could contribute to other academic disciplines. Beier noted that discussions about children were missing from the fields of international relations and security studies. He suggested theorising childhood which would allow children to be viewed as a non-traditional security issue rather than ‘as innocents to be protected or a social resource for the future.’⁹⁴ However, it is Cecilia Jacob that provides the greatest contribution towards theorizing childhood. In her paper, ‘*Children and Armed Conflict*’ and the *Field of Security Studies*, Jacob suggests using a Bourdieu inspired framework to conceptualise the notion of children and child security in global politics. By locating children within the field of global politics, it would highlight that the child is a worthy subject to be studied and that ‘childhood is an integral aspect of identity alongside other markers such as gender, ethnicity, class, and religion.’⁹⁵ She suggests that a Bourdieu inspired approach is suitable, as it ‘recognises the importance of the sociological turn and the current inadequacy of ethical and political theorising of security in critical security studies.’⁹⁶ By acknowledging the methodological approaches associated with the *new sociology of childhood* and using a Bourdieu inspired framework, the concept of childhood has been developed to recognise the importance of agency and the child’s position as a social actor.

⁹³ Corsaro, W.A. ‘*The Sociology of Childhood*’. (Third Edition, Sage Publishers, London, 2011), p.4.

⁹⁴ Beier, J.M. ‘Children, Childhoods, and Security Studies: An Introduction’, *Critical Studies on Security*, Volume: 3, No: 1, 2015, p.8.

⁹⁵ Jacob, C. ‘Children and Armed Conflict, and the Field of Security Studies’, *Critical Studies on Security*, Volume: 3, Issue: 1, 2015, p. 14.

⁹⁶ Jacob, C. ‘Children and Armed Conflict’, *Critical Studies on Security*, 2015, p. 15.

This thesis recognises the difficulty in producing a set of principles and standards that define 'childhood' which can be universally applicable to all children. Children may share certain characteristics which epitomise being a child such as their physical and physiological development, but the concept of childhood can differ both *within* and *between* cultures depending on a range of factors such as class, gender, ethnicity. Alongside the works of Wells⁹⁷, James and Prout⁹⁸, this thesis recognises that a multiplicity of childhoods exist in which the values placed upon this period in a child's life depend entirely on social, historical and cultural factors. This thesis also recognises the importance of acknowledging the agency of children in order to understand how they create their own social spaces and interact with others. For a more detailed discussion about agency and children please see chapter three, *Children in Contemporary Armed Conflict*.

Whilst this thesis recognises the importance of discussing the concept of agency in childhood studies, it is recognised that organisations such as the UN have attempted to provide a global definition in order to protect the rights of children. The ideas and discussions centred on the topic of children's rights and childhood were developed within North American and European narratives and follow 'a well-established Western discourse on childhood as a time of play, innocence and learning.'⁹⁹ These elements of childhood can be seen as an ideal and are based on 'what we have come to imagine as modern, Western childhood.'¹⁰⁰ However, they are unlikely to have universal applicability due to the different needs, societal expectations and cultural understandings of the world's children. The challenges of protecting children in a modern, developed regions are markedly different from the challenges of protecting a child's innocence and involvement in the adult world from less well developed countries. Ignoring social, historical and cultural factors of childhood can

⁹⁷ Wells, K. 'Childhood in a Global Perspective', (Cambridge, 2009).

⁹⁸ James, A. Jenks, C. and Prout, A. 'Theorizing Childhood', (Cambridge, 1998).

⁹⁹ Wells, K. 'Childhood in a Global Perspective', (Cambridge, 2009), p.19.

¹⁰⁰ James, A. Jenks, C. and Prout, A. 'Theorizing Childhood', (Cambridge, 1998), p.13.

polarise groups and distract from the real political issues concerning children. David Rosen argues that ‘the representations of childhood by all these groups (NGOs) are political constructs used to support legal and political agendas, and they discount the more varied and complex local understandings of children and childhood found in anthropological research.’¹⁰¹

Therefore, for the purpose of this thesis it is important to recognise that there is not a universal definition of childhood, due to the varying cultural, historical and sociological factors that define this particular period of a child’s life, but a multiplicity of childhoods. However, all children undergo the same physical and physiological developmental stages regardless of cultural and geographical factors. Recognising the different cultural expectations associated with childhood and what it means to be a child is important when discussing the various roles of children involved in, and associated with, armed conflict. The ability to understand the concept of childhood and its contributions is also important for another reason. Wells highlighted that the concept of childhood not only refers to societal expectations of a particular period in a child’s life, but it ‘informs expectations and attitudes *towards* children.’¹⁰² Therefore theoretical assumptions can be made, based on the development and theories of childhood, that those socialised in a society where the Western concept of childhood dominates legal frameworks and cultural expectations will hold a particular set of beliefs about the child being an innocent and worthy of protection. This is important when acknowledging how understandings of childhood can inform the British soldiers expectations and attitudes towards the children they encounter in theatres of armed conflict.

¹⁰¹ Rosen, D. M. ‘Child Soldiers, International Humanitarian Law and the Globalisation of Childhood’, *American Anthropologist*, Volume: 109, Issue 2, 2008, p.296.

¹⁰² Wells, K. ‘*Childhood in a Global Perspective*’, (Cambridge, 2009), p.14.

2.5.2 Innocence

‘Freedom from sin, guilt, or moral wrong in general; the state of being untainted with, or unacquainted with evil; moral purity.’¹⁰³

The notion of innocence has been mentioned in the discussion about childhood, and the two concepts are often used alongside each other. Yet our understanding of innocence depends entirely upon the context in which it is being used. Innocence can describe the moral condition of a person (moral innocence) or it can relate to a person’s accountability over a certain act (physical innocence). Within this thesis the term ‘innocence’ will be examined in both contexts; the notion that children are innocent and worthy of protection, followed by the debates concerning the accountability and agency of child soldiers participating in armed conflict.

To describe a person as ‘innocent’ usually refers to either a personality trait or ignorance of a given fact or situation, yet the term is often attributed to children who are deemed to be born without moral blemish and have yet to experience the vulgarity of the adult world. As children are deemed vulnerable, adults take the responsibility to protect them by creating rules and laws designed to preserve the child’s innocence and their knowledge of evil associated with the adulthood. Innocence is seen as a virtue that once lost can never be returned; ‘the state of innocence is one of unalloyed trust, of virtue unconscious of the existence of the wrong. For such reasons, it is irretrievable loss.’¹⁰⁴ Tim Lott, a journalist for *The Guardian*, noted that ‘children are beautiful because they possess something that we have all lost – the quality of innocence.’¹⁰⁵ Once the truth is known about certain elements of life

¹⁰³ ‘Innocence’, Oxford English Dictionary Online (2014 Edition), taken from <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/96292?redirectedFrom=innocence#eid> , accessed on 24th November 2014.

¹⁰⁴ Wolgast, E. ‘Innocence’, *Philosophy*, Volume: 68, No: 265, July 1993, p.297.

¹⁰⁵ Lott, T. ‘What exactly is the innocence of childhood?’, *The Guardian*, 10th May 2013, taken from www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2013/may/10/what-is-childhood-innocence, accessed on 3rd December 2014, np.

or evil is seen, or experienced, then it becomes difficult to eradicate that knowledge. Lott acknowledged that childlike innocence is,

at one level, a rarefied quality of ignorance. To not grasp imaginatively that death will come. To be ignorant of sex, likewise, to believe in the irrational- Santa Claus, fairies, monsters under the bed. And, of course, the myth of the infinite power and goodness of parents.¹⁰⁶

This understanding of innocence can be termed as ‘moral innocence’ and refers to those that are deemed to be ‘morally pure, incapable of wrong-doing, ignorant of morality and resistant to sin.’¹⁰⁷ The desire to protect and preserve children’s innocence has been extended to the political level in which many NGOs and humanitarian groups seek to provide safeguards for children against the horrors of war and poverty. The way in which these groups use the concept of innocence to push a political and humanitarian narrative associated with children involved in armed conflict will be analysed in the third chapter, *Children in Contemporary Armed Conflict*.

The second understanding of innocence relates to a person’s accountability and acknowledgement of conducting a wrong; or in the case of this piece of research a participatory act in armed conflict. To be innocent suggests that the person in question is not guilty of committing an act of some sort. Elizabeth Wolgast suggests that

of all moral conditions, innocence seems easily the best and most desirable, for it means the complete absence of error and regret and all the anxieties that go with these – anxieties about avoiding guilt and making amends for instance.¹⁰⁸

This understanding of innocence in relation to wrong doing is quite basic, yet debates surrounding children and their innocence based on criminal activity, both at the national and international level, continues to divide opinions. The need to prove or disprove a child’s culpability of committing a criminal act has been highly contentious. The child’s understanding and awareness of the situation and the act committed are crucial factors in

¹⁰⁶ Lott, T. ‘What exactly is the innocence of childhood?’, *The Guardian*, 2013, np.

¹⁰⁷ Goldberg, Z.J. ‘Moral Illusion as Innocence and Inability’, *Philosophia*, Volume: 43, 2015, p.355.

¹⁰⁸ Wolgast, E. ‘Innocence’, *Philosophy*, 1993, p.297.

determining the age of criminal responsibility. The ‘age of criminal responsibility in England and Wales is 10 years old. This means that children under 10 can’t be arrested or charged with a crime.’¹⁰⁹ Whilst they are not placed in prisons with adults, children from the age of 10 can be detained in correctional institutions if found guilty of a crime. The age of criminal responsibility is set at 10 years but has been criticised for being ‘too low and should be increased to at least 12 in accordance with the recommendations of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child.’¹¹⁰ Having analysed research from a multitude of organisations, the UK Parliament refused to raise the age claiming that, at aged 10 the child has the capability to ‘know what he was doing was seriously wrong, not merely naughty or mischievous.’¹¹¹ During the Young Offenders debate in the House of Commons in 2011, the Justice Minister Crispin Blunt stated that,

The Government believe that children aged 10 are able to distinguish between bad behaviour and serious wrongdoing. It is entirely appropriate to hold them to account for their actions if they commit an offence, and it is important to ensure communities know that a young person who offends will be dealt with appropriately.¹¹²

Whilst British national laws state that the age of criminal responsibility is 10 years (under Scottish law the age of responsibility has been raised to 12), debates surrounding a child’s accountability and innocence with regard to international law, such as Human Rights crimes and violations, continues to be problematic. On the 14th August 2000, the UN passed Security Council Resolution 1315 which established a joint UN and Sierra Leone court in order to prosecute those responsible for crimes committed during the conflict, including

¹⁰⁹ ‘Age of Criminal Responsibility’, 12th November 2014, Guidelines taken from www.gov.uk/age-of-criminal-responsibility, accessed on 3rd December 2014, np.

¹¹⁰ Lipscombe, S. ‘*The Age of Criminal Responsibility in England and Wales*’, Home Affairs, 18th April 2012, SN/HA/3001, p.1.

¹¹¹ Lipscombe, S. ‘*The Age of Criminal Responsibility in England and Wales*’, Home Affairs, 2012, p.1.

¹¹² Justice Minister Crispin Blunt during Westminster Hall Debate on ‘*Young Offenders*’, House of Commons, Westminster Hall, Section C171WH, 8th March 2011, taken from <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201011/cmhansrd/cm110308/halltext/110308h0001.htm#11030849000001>, accessed on 8th December 2014.

former child soldiers. Article 7 of the Statute for the Special Court for Sierra Leone¹¹³ stipulated that anyone under the age of 15 could not be tried at court and that those between the ages of 15 and 18 years would be treated as juvenile offenders. Juvenile offenders would be treated with dignity and respect, acknowledging the age in which they were recruited and be offered places on demobilisation and reintegration programmes if found guilty of committing an offence. The decision to not try anyone under the age of fifteen was based on previous international laws concerning the recruitment of under fifteens rather than the age in which a child is deemed to know the difference between right and wrong, unlike the rules for national laws. Nienke Grossman stated that,

in addition to the psychological and physical dangers of war, the prohibition on both forced recruitment and use of children under age fifteen in direct hostilities suggest that the States party to these treaties believed children under fifteen do not possess the mental maturity to express valid consent to join an armed group. If children under fifteen are not sufficiently mature to consent to engage directly in armed conflict and must be protected from war under the CRC, they arguably are more like victims of armed conflict than its perpetrators. In agreement with this interpretation of the CRC, the Sierra Leone Report allows for the prosecution of only children aged fifteen and over while recognising the victimhood of all child soldiers.¹¹⁴

Not only does this remove the agency of the child, but suggests that whilst a child soldier may physically commit an act that makes them guilty, due to their age in which the act was committed the child can be deemed as morally innocent.

As it is difficult to determine whether child soldiers were recruited voluntarily or involuntarily, the commanders of forces who use or recruit children in armed conflict will now be liable for prosecution regardless of whether they committed the abuses themselves. This decision is also part of a strategy to deter leaders in recruiting and using children in future armed conflicts. It was during the court case of Charles Taylor, the former President of Liberia, that this strategy became apparent as ‘the court also chose not to prosecute child

¹¹³ For a general overview of the Articles please see ‘*Statute of the Special Court for Sierra Leone*’, University of Minnesota Human Rights Library, taken from <http://www1.umn.edu/humanrts/instree/SCSL/statute-sierraleone.html>, accessed on 1st April 2016.

¹¹⁴ Grossman, N. ‘Rehabilitation or Revenge: Prosecuting Child Soldiers for Human Rights Violations’, *Georgetown Journal of International Law*, Winter 2007, p.341-342.

soldiers, deciding instead to bring to justice political leaders and military commanders, those considered to bear the greatest responsibility in the conflict.’¹¹⁵ However, Grossman argues that in terms of international law under 18s should not be prosecuted for acts they commit due to the fact that ‘since the Optional Protocol precludes State parties from allowing children under eighteen to participate in direct hostilities, they should be protected from criminal liability if they are used in armed conflict.’¹¹⁶

The concept of innocence is complex as it holds different meanings depending on the context in which it is being used. The idea that a child is born innocent and thus it is the adult’s responsibility to protect the child from evils associated with the adult world is an ideal and utopian notion. However, it is one which many attempt to adhere to, although it is much easier to have innocence narratives in Western societies where the threat of danger and violence is generally at a minimum. Like the concept of childhood, the concept of innocence needs to be acknowledged in terms of cultural and societal awareness. It is an ideal value that has been derived from a Western discourse and this understanding needs to be acknowledged when analysing the role of humanitarian actors and their objectives in promoting children’s rights based on the concept of innocence.

The second context in which innocence is a problematic concept derives from issues between accountability and guilt for crimes committed in national and international contexts. Whilst the UN suggests the legal age of criminal accountability be set at 12 years for national crimes, the international laws concerned with atrocities and human rights abuses committed by child soldiers is set at 18 years¹¹⁷ due to difficulties in establishing their motivations for recruitment. Therefore, the concept of innocence being used within this thesis is actually

¹¹⁵ ‘Charles Taylor’s Conviction Upheld: A Message that Recruiters of Child Soldiers will be held Accountable’, 26th September 2013, taken from www.childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/press-release/charles-taylors-conviction-upheld/, accessed on 29th November 2014, np.

¹¹⁶ Grossman, N. ‘Rehabilitation or Revenge’, *Georgetown Journal of International Law*, 2007, p.342.

¹¹⁷ With those aged between 15 and 18 years being offered places on demobilisation and reintegration programmes rather than custodial sentences.

based upon both moral and physical innocence. Firstly, the idea that children are born innocent and it is the adult's role to protect them which, although a Western ideal, will be useful in determining soldier's responses to children in armed conflict scenarios based on their own cultural interpretations of childhood and innocence. The second use of the concept of innocence will be used to examine the role of agency and international debates concerning the accountability of child soldiers, as well as the difference between physical innocence and moral innocence.

2.5.3 Violence

'The deliberate exercise of physical force against a person, property, etc.; physically violent behaviour or treatment; (Law) the unlawful exercise of physical force, intimidation by the exhibition of such force. Formally also the abuse of power or authority to persecute or oppress (obs).'

¹¹⁸

In order to determine the accountability of child soldiers and their role in theatres of armed conflict, we must understand the concept of violence. The above definition by the Oxford English Dictionary focuses on the physical use of force against a person or an object, such as property. However, the concept of violence is difficult to define, despite it being an action that many people fear or are subjected to. Definitions tend to focus on the physicality of violence, either by the movement of something physical via force or the physical destruction of something. The amount of force used also proves controversial when attempting to provide a definition of violence. Johan Degenaar notes that 'violence is the movement of carrying extreme force against x.'¹¹⁹ Whilst violence can certainly be categorised by the use of '*extreme force*', it fails to acknowledge that any use of force against another person or object can be damaging, both physically and psychologically. Degenaar

¹¹⁸ 'Violence', Oxford English Dictionary Online (2014 Edition), taken from <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/223638?rskey=jhqC7b&result=1&isAdvanced=false#eid> , accessed on 24th November 2014.

¹¹⁹ Degenaar, J.J. 'The Concept of Violence', *Politikon: South African Journal of Political Studies*, Volume: 7, No: 1, February 2007, p.14.

then provides a second definition of violence in which ‘the movement is qualified by intentionality.’¹²⁰ This is problematic with regard to notions of justifiable violence, which is seen as the use of violence with a justifiable cause such as self-defence or saving a person from serious injury. The act of violence was not intentional nor was it pre-meditated, but it had to be used to counter the original act of violence.

Peter Imbusch highlighted another complexity when attempting to provide a definition of violence, he suggested that a major ambiguity exists ‘between the destruction and the creation of the order.’¹²¹ He questions whether the responsibility lies with the person who commits the act, or whether the person who authorised a violent act to be carried out should bear responsibility too.¹²² The World Health Organisation (WHO) also produced a definition of violence suggesting that ‘violence is the intentional use of physical force or power threatened or actual, or against a group or community, which either results in injury, death, psychological harm, mal-development, or deprivation.’¹²³ This definition suggests that violence can be either threatened or actual, which incorporates a wider analysis of actions that may constitute violence. For the purpose of this thesis, the definition of violence which includes both the actual act of violence and the threat of violence is important. As seen with the case of Private Jason Chelsea, the fear of possibly confronting the child actor was a contributing factor to his mental health.

Discussions about who has the legitimacy to use violence or force are also important within this thesis. Max Weber suggested that the state held the monopoly for use of legitimate force,¹²⁴ and that individuals working for the state, such as military personnel or law

¹²⁰ Degenaar, J.J. ‘The Concept of Violence’, *Politikon: South African Journal of Political Studies*, 2007, p.15.

¹²¹ Imbusch, P. ‘The Concept of Violence’, taken from, Heitmeyer, W. and Hagan, J. ed. *International Handbook of Violence Research*, (Kluwer Academic Publishers, Dordrecht, 2003), p.13.

¹²² Imbusch, P. ‘The Concept of Violence’, (Dordrecht, 2003).

¹²³ ‘Violence’, World Health Organisation Guidelines 2014, taken from www.who.int/topics/violence/en/, accessed on 3rd December 2014.

¹²⁴ Weber, M. *Politics as a Vocation*, (Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1965).

enforcement officials, have legal authority to use such force. However, as Markus Jachtenfuchs notes, in many modern states the ‘use of force became increasingly defined by legal rules and controlled by democratic processes.’¹²⁵ Despite the recent privatization of security, the definition of violence and who has the authority to legitimately use force has remained unaltered. According to Jachtenfuchs, it is the ‘basic idea that in the Western world, the state had exclusive control over the means of force and that the legitimising criteria for its use are developed domestically has remained stable for a long time.’¹²⁶ Unfortunately this is a rather utopian view, as the use of force and violence transcends ‘legitimate authority’ allowing non-state armed groups, terrorist organisations and rogue individuals to utilise violence regardless of the legitimacy debates. Violence is an action that can be conducted by a variety of individuals or groups, within this thesis it will be acknowledged how child soldiers and other children participating in armed conflict may not be seen as ‘legitimate actors’ or actors who have legitimate cause to use force, but do have the potential to perpetrate violent acts and be a lethal threat.

2.6 Conclusion

This chapter has sought to provide a framework in which the core concepts are defined and their theoretical ideas relevant to this particular research project are examined. This helps to frame some of the core ideas in which this thesis is centred upon, namely the importance of childhood, innocence and violence, and their varying constructs, in relation to the soldier’s experience of the child actor in armed conflict. To determine how the presence of children affects British soldiers and their conduct, it was vital to understand what a child is, and the cultural expectations attached to this particular actor. Acknowledging that current

¹²⁵ Jachtenfuchs, M. ‘The Monopoly of Legitimate Force: Denationalisation or Business as Usual’, *European Review*, Volume: 13, No: 1, March 2005, p.38.

¹²⁶ Jachtenfuchs, M. ‘The Monopoly of Legitimate Force’, *European Review*, 2005, p.38.

legal frameworks and understandings of childhood are rooted in the Western discourse, creates an awareness about the subjective lens in which the topic of children involved in armed conflict is being presented. The concept of childhood is also based on theoretical assumptions that suggest expected behaviour towards the child, such as the need to nurture and protect them. This assumption is important when acknowledging the soldier's experiences and attitudes towards the child present in theatres of armed conflict.

Alongside the expectations of childhood, is the notion that the child is innocent. For soldiers that encounter a child who is partaking in hostilities, the notion of innocence may be problematic. The child may not be deemed as physically innocent due to their actions, but could still be viewed as morally innocent due to their perceived vulnerability as a child. It is through this understanding of moral innocence and the assumptions associated with Just War theory, that the notion of a child soldier creating an ethical or moral dilemma for the professional soldier has emerged. Linking both the concepts of childhood and innocence is the notion of violence. Whether it be perceived or actual, violence can have a devastating impact on the physical and psychological well-being of another human. Alongside this notion of violence, the questions regarding who has the legitimate use of violence will become important when acknowledging the various types of child actors who, although not legitimate users of violence, do in fact have the ability to be a lethal threat in theatres of armed conflict. Having discussed the theoretical assumptions and the conceptual framework that guide this project, the following section will contain a discussion about the methods used to collect data on the topic.

This chapter has examined the main theoretical assumptions and the conceptual framework that has been used to guide this research project. It has introduced the theoretical assumptions associated with Just War theory, combat motivation theory, and the theory of childhood to acknowledge how the presence of children in a hostile situation can cause a

potential moral or ethical dilemma for professional soldiers. The conceptual framework introduces the main concepts that guide this study and their relationship with one and another. Although Wells¹²⁷ and James¹²⁸ acknowledge that a multitude of childhoods exist, the political and anthropological discussions concerning children and their position within the world continue to be embedded within the narratives associated with the Western concept of childhood. The concept of violence is used within this thesis in its broadest form; it acknowledges that violence does not have to be physical in order to effect a person, but that the prospect or threat of violent action can have implications for a person's well-being. Innocence, is also an important concept within this thesis as it acknowledges issues concerning accountability and moral conditions. The perceived nature of the child being morally innocent is embedded within Western narratives concerning childhood. However, child combatants can lose their physical innocence by partaking in armed conflict and, it is the contradiction between moral and physical innocence that has the potential to cause an ethical dilemma for the professional soldier who may encounter them.

This chapter has also highlighted the range of data collection methods used to gather information on this topic. It has provided an overview of the methods used; including secondary data collection, in-depth semi-structured interviews, secondary interviews, archival work, and biographical reviews. A review of the ethical considerations and limitations conducting fieldwork on this subject were also acknowledged within this chapter. The following chapter will introduce the topic of children and armed conflict into this thesis. Although this thesis is concerned with the British soldier's experience of children in theatres of armed conflict, it is important to understand the child actor and how they became part of

¹²⁷ Wells, K. *'Childhood in a Global Perspective'*, (Cambridge, 2009).

¹²⁸ James, A. and James, A. *'Key Concepts in Childhood Studies'*, (London, 2008).

the conflict landscape. Therefore, the third chapter of this thesis will provide an overview of the subject of children's participation in contemporary armed conflict.

Chapter Three

Children in Contemporary Armed Conflict

3.1 Definition of the Child Soldier

The primary aim of this thesis is to explore how the presence of children in theatres of armed conflict affect British military operations, and the attitudes and practices of individual British soldiers. However, to do this, it is important to have an awareness and understanding as to the type of child actor the British soldier may encounter. Following Pedersen and Sommerfelt's work¹, this thesis recognises that children can be involved in armed conflict in two distinct ways; either as innocent bystanders who are *exposed* to the conflict or as active participants *involved* in the conflict. Although this project is interested in the British soldier's experience in relation to both of these examples, it is the narrative associated with the child who actively participates in armed conflict that generates greater research interest. This is due to the competing theoretical assumptions, as outlined in chapter two, regarding the cultural beliefs associated with the child and the child's position as a combatant. Therefore, an examination of the child who participates in theatres of armed conflict is needed in order to understand the complex issues associated with this particular actor.

The aim of this chapter is to introduce the topic of children and armed conflict into the thesis, as well as providing an overview of the main narratives associated with this actor. Firstly, the chapter will discuss the debates surrounding the varying definitions used within the field. An overview of the various legal standards and frameworks that have been implemented in relation to children and armed conflict will also be discussed. The chapter will then examine the numerous narratives within the field of children and armed conflict, by

¹ Pederson, J. and Sommerfelt, T. 'Studying Children in Armed Conflict: Data Production, Social Indicators and Analysis', *Social Indicators Research*, Volume: 84, No: 3, 2007, p.252.

drawing upon a wealth of literature produced by the NGO and academic community. This will help to build a comprehensive illustration of the child actor who partakes in conflict; examining why they participate, the type of roles they conduct, where they operate, and the way the international community engages with them. This chapter will also draw upon the presentation of the child soldier in popular culture narratives to determine how children involved in armed conflict are portrayed to domestic audiences. Elite interviews conducted with specialists in the field of children and armed conflict will also be incorporated where appropriate to discuss the main challenges concerning the child involved in contemporary conflict scenarios. This chapter aims to explore the key discussions within the field of children and armed conflict, including the roles they conduct, the environments they operate in, and the main discourses present within the field, in order to gain an understanding as to the type of actor the British soldier could potentially face in conflict zones.

The words ‘child soldier’ form an unsettling picture in the mind of the reader; a young person, holding a weapon, surrounded by war and chaos. The phrase seems shrouded in contradiction, yet the use of children fighting in armed conflict situations is not a myth. The child soldier issue has been placed firmly on the global agenda by the United Nations and other organisations, who seek to eradicate their use and provide support to those children who have already been recruited.² Charities and NGOs use the image of the small child carrying a weapon to highlight the issue of children participating in armed conflict, and the devastating impact this has on the child’s life and society in which they are part of. These groups recount horror stories of children being plucked from their families, forced to fight in conflicts which they are too young to understand or care for, and paint a desperate picture of the state of

² *‘Louder Than Words: An Agenda for Action to End State Use of Child Soldiers’*, (Child Soldiers International, London, 2012).

humanity in the modern world. The following extracts demonstrate the type of narrative used by such charities and NGOs,

Children are kidnapped and forced to become fighters. It is estimated that over the last 15 years, 10,000 children have been abducted by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) around Gulu in northern Uganda, alone. Children are deliberately targeted as they are manipulated more easily than adults and can be indoctrinated to perform crimes and atrocities without asking questions.³

Such children are robbed of their childhood and exposed to terrible dangers and to psychological and physical suffering. They are placed in combat situations, used as spies, messengers, porters, servants or to lay or clear landmines. Girls in particular are at risk of rape and sexual abuse.⁴

The phrase 'child soldier phenomenon' has emerged due to the high number of child soldiers involved in conflicts in the post-Cold War era, made easier by the proliferation of light weapons such as the AK-47 assault rifle. Alongside an increase in recruitment levels, there has been a significant growth in international concern on the subject from NGOs, the media, policy-makers, and the academic community. All of these groups have their own motivations for becoming involved in the subject, and this chapter will investigate how these organisations inform popular narratives concerning the role of children in armed conflict.

Chapter two highlighted the difficulty associated with creating definitions that had universal applicability with regard to the term 'childhood', as it can be interpreted differently depending on social, cultural, and political factors. The difficulties associated with providing definitions with universal applicability also extends to the subject of children involved in armed conflict. Under the CRC, the age of 18 has been established as the benchmark for differentiation between child and adult status. However, children can be recruited voluntarily into armed groups once they reach the age of 15. Whilst there are legal restrictions in place concerning the use of the child in the armed group, it demonstrates inconsistencies within the

³ Anonymous. '*Children in Conflict: Child Soldiers*', (SOS Children, Cambridge, no year displayed), taken from <http://www.child-soldier.org/>, accessed on 27th May 2016.

⁴ Anonymous. '*From Cradle to War*', (Amnesty International, New York, 2016), taken from <http://www.amnestyusa.org/our-work/issues/children-s-rights/child-soldiers>, accessed on 27th May 2016.

field. Discussions as to what constituted a ‘child soldier’ were also diverse, and dependent upon a range of factors, such as the age and role of the child. Therefore, in 2007, the Paris Principles created a definition that could be applied universally due to its inclusivity of both sexes, and acknowledgement of both support and warfighting roles. This definition was comprehensive in nature, stating that a ‘child soldier’ referred to

a child associated with an armed force or armed gang, and refers to any person below 18 years of age who is or has been recruited or used by an armed force or armed group in any capacity, including but not limited to children, boys and girls used as fighters, cooks, porters, messengers, spies or for sexual purposes. It does not only refer to a child who is taking or has taken a direct part in hostilities.⁵

Whilst this definition acknowledged the role of both boys and girls, both in front line capacities or support roles, the term ‘child soldier’ still attracted criticism. In 2009, the Canadian Prime Minister, Stephen Harper, suggested that references should be made to ‘children in armed conflict’ rather than ‘child soldiers’ due to the multitude of roles played by children, which would then enhance awareness and popular understanding regarding these child actors.⁶ This definition would include children who are used by armed groups, but who have not formally joined such a group. UNICEF also use the term ‘children associated with armed conflict’ or ‘children associated with armed groups’ in order to include the experiences of a larger category of children.⁷ Shelley Whitman, from Child Soldiers Initiative, argues that this term is

distinct from the Canadian government perspective because it still recognises the variety of roles played by boys and girls with a variety of armed groups, but does not deny their experiences that may be wholly distinct from children who are not associated with armed groups but can still be classified as those affected by armed conflict.⁸

⁵ Definition created by United Nations Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF) and Save the Children, *The Paris Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups*, February 2007, www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/465198442.html, accessed on 2nd January 2013, p.7.

⁶ Collins, M. ‘Gender Equality, Child Soldiers and Humanitarian Law are Axed from Foreign Policy Language’, *Embassy Magazine*, 29th July 2009, <http://www.embassynews.ca/news/2009/07/29/gender-equality-child-soldiers-and-humanitarian-law-are-axed-from-foreign-policy-language/37889?absolute=1>, accessed on 26th September 2015, np.

⁷ ‘Children Associated with Armed Groups’, Child Protection Information Sheet, UNICEF, May 2006, available from http://www.unicef.org/chinese/protection/files/Armed_Groups.pdf, accessed on 12th May 2016, np.

⁸ Whitman, S. ‘The Responsibility to Protect and Child Soldiers’, taken from Knight, W.A. and Egerton, F. ed. *The Routledge Handbook of the Responsibility to Protect*, (Routledge, London, 2012), p.153.

The term ‘children associated with fighting forces’ has also been introduced by policy-makers and NGOs.⁹ However, this thesis seeks to include children who are not only part of an armed group, but are used deliberately due to the tactical advantage they offer by being present in the conflict environment, therefore I do not feel this term is appropriate for the project. For the purpose of this thesis, the term ‘children associated with armed conflict’ will be used where appropriate, in order to capture the range of roles children can play within the conflict environment. This term acknowledges the children who are not part of an armed group, but are still involved in the conflict situation.

The term ‘child soldier’ will also be used, as it remains the dominant term within the field that refers to a child who is an active participant and member of an armed group. As outlined in the Paris Principles, this term refers to children who operate on the front line, as well as in a support capacity. Whilst both of these terms are used throughout the thesis, the term ‘child soldier’ is quite modern and is attributed to the post 1990 ‘child soldier phenomenon’. Although children were involved in warfare prior to 1990, the terms ‘boy soldiers’ or ‘underage soldiers’ were often used instead. Both of these terms will be encountered in section 3.4 of this chapter, which provides an historical analysis of the role of children in theatres of armed conflict. Although the term ‘child soldier’ will be used, this thesis agrees with Brocklehurst who noted that

the arrival of the pejorative prefix ‘child’ to ‘soldier’ does not indicate the beginnings of the practice of soldiering by children. It marks the point at which a society’s conception of childhood became incommensurable when harnessed to its concepts of warfare.¹⁰

The Paris Principles includes a range of duties the child can conduct in order to be classified as a ‘child soldier’. The child can be used in a fighting capacity or in a support role,

⁹ Examples of organisations that use the term ‘children associated with fighting forces’ include Amnesty International, the International Committee of the Red Cross, and UNICEF.

¹⁰ Brocklehurst, H. ‘Childhood in Conflict: Can the Real Child Soldier Please Stand Up?’ taken from Gunning, J., Holm, S., Kenway, I. ed. *Ethics, Law and Society* (Volume 4, 2009, Ashgate Publishers, Surrey), p.261.

which includes working as a cook, porter, messenger, a spy, or for sexual purposes.¹¹ The Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary General (SRSG) for Children and Armed Conflict acknowledged that ‘girls were particularly vulnerable’ as they are often ‘forced to serve as sexual slaves.’¹² Female child soldiers can be used as ‘bush wives’ or ‘camp wives’, in which they partake in sexual activities with military commanders, this is a worrying concern for many humanitarian groups as the female body may not be mature enough for pregnancy or child-birth.¹³ In certain African regions, such as Sierra Leone, the children born from such circumstances are labelled ‘rebel babies’ and face stigmatisation and rejection from local communities.¹⁴ The use of children for sexual purposes is not just limited to females, males are often subjected to sexual abuse too.¹⁵

Children can also be used for suicide bombing missions¹⁶, or used for specific tasks such as being ‘sent into minefields ahead of older troops.’¹⁷ In Columbia, child soldiers are referred to as *little bees*, as they sneak behind enemy lines to attack their enemy, or *little carts*, as they smuggle items through checkpoints.¹⁸ Children may be sent to forage for food, or be given tasks such as cooking and cleaning at the military camp. This does not guarantee the child’s safety; as military camps are often over-run or targeted by enemy forces. The increased availability of the AK-47, and the ease in which it can be used, gave children the

¹¹ Definition created by United Nations Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF), *The Paris Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups*, February 2007, accessed from www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/465198442.html, accessed on 2nd January 2013, p.7.

¹² ‘*Child Recruitment and Use*’, Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary General for Children and Armed Conflict, taken from <https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/effects-of-conflict/six-grave-violations/child-soldiers/>, accessed on 7th June 2016, np.

¹³ Coulter, C. ‘*Bush Wives and Girl Soldiers: Women’s Lives through War and Peace in Sierra Leone*’, (Cornell University, USA, 2009).

¹⁴ ‘*Girl Child*’, Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary General for Children and Armed Conflict, taken from <https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/effects-of-conflict/six-grave-violations/child-soldiers/>, accessed on 7th June 2016, np.

¹⁵ Dupuy, K. and Peters, K. ‘*War and Children: A Reference Handbook*’, (Praeger Security International, California, 2010), p.72

¹⁶ ‘*The Red Hand Day Campaign: Against the Use of Child Soldiers*’, Resource Pack, Human Rights Watch, 2012, p.6. Hardcopies available from Human Rights Watch.

¹⁷ ‘*The Red Hand Day Campaign: Against the Use of Child Soldiers*’, Human Rights Watch, 2012, p.6.

¹⁸ Singer, P. ‘*Children at War*’, (Random House, USA, 2005), p.16.

opportunity to take on front-line duties. The role of the child soldier is varied and can include a range of tasks, the duties they hold can vary depending on the region in which they live, and the type of conflict in which they operate in.

Children can carry out a variety of roles, and are used by armed groups because of the benefits they provide to them. Child soldiers can be used to increase military strength, especially if there is a manpower shortage. For many groups ‘that otherwise would have no real military power, they can pose a significant threat by augmenting their ranks with child soldiers.’¹⁹ Children are seen as cheap raw material; they are cheap to feed, often sent into battle with no real equipment, they have the ability to complement adult fighters, and do not pose a great loss if they are killed. It has been suggested that child soldiers can lack rationality, due to their inability to correctly determine the consequences of their actions, and are more violent in their approach to warfare.²⁰

During the training process, child soldiers can be fed narcotics to reduce inhibitions, and can be forced by their leaders to undertake executions of their family or members of their local community.²¹ This helps to desensitise them to the violence associated with armed conflict, as well as ensuring the child has no family or community to return to. If the child fails to comply, they will be executed.²² In a report, Singer noted that there was a ‘wealth of evidence from battle zones demonstrating that children make effective combatants and often operate with terrifying audacity, particularly when infused with religious or political fervour,

¹⁹ Borchini, C., Lanz, S. and O’Connell, E. ‘*Child Soldiers: Implications for US Forces*’, Center for Emerging Threats and Opportunities, CETO 005-02, Marine Warfighting Laboratory, Quantico, VA, November 2002, p.14.

²⁰ Tiefenbrun, S. ‘Child Soldiers, Slavery and the Trafficking of Children’, *Fordham International Law Journal*, Volume: 31, Issue: 2, 2007, p.427, and Collmer, S. ‘Child Soldiers: An Integral Element in New, Irregular Wars?’, *Connections: The Quarterly Journal*, Volume: 3, Issue: 3, 2004, p.8-9.

²¹ ‘*Coercion and Intimidation of Child Soldiers to Participate in Violence*’, Human Rights Watch, 16th April 2008, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2008/04/16/coercion-and-intimidation-child-soldiers-participate-violence>, accessed on 1st June 2016, np.

²² ‘*Coercion and Intimidation of Child Soldiers to Participate in Violence*’, Human Rights Watch, 2008, np.

or when under the influence of narcotics.’²³ Whilst the use of narcotics was prevalent in the Sierra Leone conflict (1991-2002)²⁴, many children partake in hostilities without the use of narcotics. The range of reasons for participating in armed conflict can include passion for the cause, revenge, religious reasons, or the need for paid employment. Children can also be used by their leaders due to the tactical advantages they offer. The child can be used to courier items through checkpoints, if their leaders believe they will be less likely to be searched. Children may also have access to certain areas as they are not deemed to be a suspicious actor. The range of roles children can carry out are varied, and in certain cases there are advantages for their leaders to use them in such situations.

Whilst information about roles can be gathered from former child soldiers, it is difficult to gather valid statistics about the amount of child soldiers and the locations in which they operate. In 2002, UNICEF estimated that 300,000 child soldiers were involved in armed conflicts around the world.²⁵ Whilst this figure continues to be commonly cited by academics and other NGOs, War Child produced an estimate in 2014 which suggested ‘that there an estimated 250,000 child soldiers in the world today.’²⁶ There is no clear consensus or accurate figure that has been produced regarding how many child soldiers are present in theatres of armed conflict at any given moment. This is often difficult to gauge due to the chaotic nature of war, the lack of formal identification or birth certificates of many of the soldiers, and the difficulty in trying to establish the role certain children play.

It is also difficult to collate information on the locations in which child soldiers are present. Children working in support roles, such as in military camps, can be easily hidden

²³ Singer, P. ‘Western Militaries Confront Child Soldier Threat’, *Jane’s Intelligence Review*, January 2005, p.2.

²⁴ Betancourt, T., Borisova, I., Soudiere, M., Williamson, J. ‘Sierra Leone’s Child Soldiers: War Exposures and Mental Health Problems by Gender’, *Journal of Adolescent Health*, Volume: 49, No: 1, 2011, p. 21-28.

²⁵ ‘Factsheet on Child Soldiers’, UNICEF, 2002, taken from <http://www.unicef.org/emerg/files/childsoldiers.pdf>, accessed 3rd September 2012, np.

²⁶ ‘Child Soldiers’, War Child, 2014, taken from <https://www.warchild.org.uk/issues/child-soldiers>, accessed on 7th June 2016, np.

which hinders efforts to determine which armed groups are using child soldiers. However, in 2016 the Office of the SRSG highlighted a number of countries in which they were aware children were being recruited and used in armed conflict situations. These included Afghanistan, Central African Republic (CAR), Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Iraq, Syria, South Sudan, and Yemen.²⁷ Having acknowledged the various roles that children can play, and the regions in which children are known to operate as child soldiers, the following section will provide an overview of the various legal frameworks in place concerning the recruitment and use of children in theatres of armed conflict.

3.2 Legal Frameworks

Legal standards have been established to protect the child from being recruited or used in conflict situations. The following section will highlight the different international and regional frameworks, as well as the measures implemented to protect children associated with armed conflict. Discussions about the use of children in hostilities were first presented in the 1949 Geneva Conventions (IV) in which Article 50 stated,

The Occupying Power shall take all necessary steps to facilitate the identification of children and the registration of their parentage. It may not, in any case, change their personal status, nor enlist them in formations or organizations subordinate to it.²⁸

Whilst this Article forbade the enlistment of children into military organisations, it wasn't until the 1977 Additional Protocols (First and Second) to the 1949 Geneva

²⁷ Tremblay, S. '*International Day Against the Use of Child Soldiers: Child Soldiers are Boys and Girls we Failed to Protect*', Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary General for Children and Armed Conflict, 12th February 2016, taken from <https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/press-release/international-day-against-child-soldiers-2016/>, accessed on 7th June 2016, np.

²⁸ Article 50, Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, Geneva Convention (IV), 12th August 1949, taken from <https://www.icrc.org/applic/ihl/ihl.nsf/Article.xsp?documentId=E09D15BDEC76F8D9C12563CD0051BDCC&action=OpenDocument>, accessed on 5th May 2016.

Conventions that a minimum age of recruitment was suggested. Article 77, clause 2 of the First Additional Protocol forbade all children under the age of 15 to take part in hostilities,

The Parties to the conflict shall take all feasible measures in order that children who have not attained the age of fifteen years do not take a direct part in hostilities and, in particular, they shall refrain from recruiting them into their armed forces. In recruiting among those persons who have attained the age of eighteen years, the Parties to the conflict shall endeavour to give priority to those who are oldest.²⁹

The Article also confirmed that children should still be afforded ‘special respect’, which included the right to be ‘respected against any form of indecent assault.’³⁰ The Article also ensured that, if captured, the child should be housed separately from adult combatants³¹ and would not face the death penalty³² for their actions. Whilst the First Additional Protocol provides protection for children in international armed conflicts, the Second Additional Protocol extended these protection measures to cover children in non-international conflicts.³³ In 1989, the CRC was adopted by the United Nations which contained a number of articles designed to protect children’s rights. Article 1 of the Convention defined a child as ‘every human being below the age of eighteen years,’³⁴ whilst Article 38 stated that ‘States

²⁹ Article 77, Clause 2, First Additional Protocol to the 1949 Geneva Conventions, 8th June 1977, taken from <https://www.icrc.org/applic/ihl/ihl.nsf/Article.xsp?documentId=8F7D6B2DEE119FBAC12563CD0051E0A2&action=OpenDocument>, accessed on 5th May 2016.

³⁰ Article 77, Clause 1, First Additional Protocol to the 1949 Geneva Conventions, 8th June 1977, taken from <https://www.icrc.org/applic/ihl/ihl.nsf/Article.xsp?documentId=8F7D6B2DEE119FBAC12563CD0051E0A2&action=OpenDocument>, accessed on 5th May 2016.

³¹ Article 77, Clause 4, First Additional Protocol to the 1949 Geneva Conventions, 8th June 1977, taken from <https://www.icrc.org/applic/ihl/ihl.nsf/Article.xsp?documentId=8F7D6B2DEE119FBAC12563CD0051E0A2&action=OpenDocument>, accessed on 5th May 2016.

³² Article 77, Clause 5, First Additional Protocol to the 1949 Geneva Conventions, 8th June 1977, taken from <https://www.icrc.org/applic/ihl/ihl.nsf/Article.xsp?documentId=8F7D6B2DEE119FBAC12563CD0051E0A2&action=OpenDocument>, accessed on 5th May 2016.

³³ Article 4, Clause 3, Second Additional Protocol to the 1949 Geneva Conventions, 8th June 1977, taken from <https://www.icrc.org/applic/ihl/ihl.nsf/Article.xsp?action=openDocument&documentId=F9CBD575D47CA6C8C12563CD0051E783>, accessed on 5th May 2016.

³⁴ Article 1 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, General Assembly Resolution 44/25, 20th November 1989, taken from <http://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>, accessed on 10th May 2016.

Parties shall take all feasible measures to ensure that persons who have not attained the age of fifteen years do not take a direct part in hostilities.’³⁵

In 1999, the first regional treaty was adopted by the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, which stated that anyone under the age of 18 was a child and that, ‘State Parties to this Charter shall take necessary measures to ensure that no child shall take a direct part in hostilities and refrain in particular, from recruiting any child.’³⁶ Following this, in 2000, the Optional Protocol to the CRC on the involvement of children in armed conflict raised the minimum recruitment age for participating in hostilities to 18. The minimum age for compulsory recruitment was also set at 18 under the Optional Protocol.³⁷ The United Kingdom ratified the Optional Protocol to the CRC in 2003.³⁸ The minimum age of 18 for recruitment into an armed group was also acknowledged in the International Labour Organisation (ILO) Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention 182 in which it states, ‘the term child shall apply to all persons under the age of 18’, and that the worst forms of child labour include ‘forced or compulsory recruitment of children for use in armed conflict.’³⁹

Whilst the above legal standards stipulate the minimum age of recruitment of children into armed conflict, other measures and standards have been established related to the use of

³⁵ Article 38 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, General Assembly Resolution 44/25, 20th November 1989, taken from <http://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>, accessed on 10th May 2016.

³⁶ Article 22.2, African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, 29th November 1999, CAB/LEG/24.9/49, taken from http://www.au.int/en/sites/default/files/treaties/7773-file-charter_en_african_charter_on_the_rights_and_welfare_of_the_child_addisababa_july1990.pdf, accessed on 11th May 2016.

³⁷ Article 3, Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict, General Assembly Resolution A/Res/54/263, 25th May 2000, taken from <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/OPACCRC.aspx>, accessed on 10th May 2016.

³⁸ The United Kingdom ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on June 24th 2003, the full article can be read online here https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=IND&mtdsg_no=IV-11-b&chapter=4&lang=en#EndDec, accessed on 1st June 2016.

³⁹ Article 2 and 3, Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999, No: 182, Geneva, 17th June 1999, taken from http://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO:12100:P12100_INSTRUMENT_ID:312327:NO, accessed on 10th May 2016.

children in armed conflict. In 1996, the position of Special Representative to the Secretary General (SRSG) to Children in Armed Conflict was established to promote and raise awareness on the issue, and to provide advocacy support. The 1998 Rome Statute saw the establishment of an International Criminal Court which held jurisdiction over war crimes. Under the Rome Statute, Article 8 stipulated that any adult who recruited a child under 15 into an armed group or used them in hostilities would be guilty of committing a war crime.⁴⁰ The United Nations also produced a number of resolutions and reports on the topic of children and armed conflict, this helped to increase political attention for the subject and raised the topic onto the global agenda.

Since 2001 the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) has produced an annual report that lists the groups who continue to recruit or use children in armed conflict situations.⁴¹ The report also highlights the different regions in the world in which it is known that children continue to be involved in armed conflict. In 2005, the UNSC resolution 1612 saw the formation of the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict. This group, comprised of the 15 Security Council member states, was tasked with providing recommendations and establishing action plans in relation to the protection of children in armed conflict.⁴² With a greater political focus on the issues surrounding the use of children in armed conflict, the 2007 Paris Principles were designed to provide a definition of the child soldier which would be inclusive of gender, and the range of roles the child could carry out.⁴³ The Paris Principles also provide recommendations and guidelines on the topic of

⁴⁰ Article 8, Clause (e), sub-clause (vii), Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, 17th July 1998, Rome, taken from <https://www.icc-cpi.int/resource-library/Documents/RomeStatuteEng.pdf>, accessed on 16th May 2016.

⁴¹ United Nations Security Council Resolution 1379, United Nations, 20th November 2001, S/Res/1379, taken from [http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/1379\(2001\)](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/1379(2001)), accessed on 10th May 2016.

⁴² United Nations Security Council Resolution 1612, United Nations, 26th July 2005, S/Res/1612, taken from [http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/1612\(2005\)](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/1612(2005)), accessed on 10th May 2016.

⁴³ Clause 2.1, 'The Paris Principles: The Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups', (UNICEF, Paris, 2007), taken from [https://www.icrc.org/eng/assets/files/other/parisprinciples_en\[1\].pdf](https://www.icrc.org/eng/assets/files/other/parisprinciples_en[1].pdf), accessed on 13th May 2016, p.7.

reintegrating former child soldiers into society, which can be used by both political and humanitarian organisations.⁴⁴

The previous sections have introduced the topic of children associated with armed conflict. It has highlighted the main discussions concerned with producing a definition of the child soldier; a definition which also includes the multitude of roles associated with their conduct in theatres of armed conflict. An examination of the current legal frameworks and initiatives that have been created to provide protection to children, and limit their recruitment in armed conflict, has also been discussed. This provides an overview of the main elements associated with the topic of children in armed conflict. However, the remainder of this chapter will focus on the various narratives that have emerged related to the topic of children and armed conflict. These narratives help to inform the domestic populations' perception as to what constitutes a child soldier, and the environments these actors operate in.

Therefore, the following section will introduce the phrase 'child soldier phenomenon'; discussing the emergence of this term and the connotations associated with using it. The section will acknowledge the various organisations who seek to perpetuate the idea that the current use of child soldiers is a 'new phenomenon'. Section 3.4 of this chapter will present historical examples to counter the argument that the use of child soldiers is 'new'. It will draw on some of the key debates within the academic community to suggest that child soldiering is not a new concept, but that our perceptions of conflict and childhood have altered. The following section will then introduce the narratives that have emerged concerning the role of victimcy, agency and motivations in the child soldier discourse. This highlights a dichotomy between their narratives and those produced by the NGO community,

⁴⁴ To read the Paris Principles in full please see '*The Paris Principles: The Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups*', (UNICEF, Paris, 2007), taken from [https://www.icrc.org/eng/assets/files/other/parisprinciples_en\[1\].pdf](https://www.icrc.org/eng/assets/files/other/parisprinciples_en[1].pdf), accessed on 13th May 2016.

who focus on the innocence of the child, and acknowledge the importance of employing an ethnographic methodology as outlined by proponents of the ‘new sociology of childhood’ discourse.

The following section will include an analysis on the way the image of the child soldier is presented in popular culture. It will draw upon the elite interviews conducted with the NGO community and those working on the topic of children in armed conflict to discuss concerns associated with children’s participation in contemporary armed conflict. The conclusion will draw together the various narratives to produce a comprehensive overview of the role of the child in theatres of armed conflict, including the main challenges associated with this actor in contemporary conflict scenarios. It is important to be aware of the complexities associated with the child actor who is likely to be present in theatres of armed conflict, in order to understand the array of situations the British soldier may encounter them, and the effect this has on their attitudes, practices, and conduct in military operations.

3.3 The Child Soldier Phenomenon

In the post-Cold War era, the topic of children in warfare has received greater attention from humanitarian agencies, NGOs, charities, political organisations, and the academic community. The increased documentation and research by such organisations has resulted in the phrase the ‘child soldier phenomenon’. This term explains the increased use of children in theatres of armed conflict as a ‘post-Cold War epidemic that has proliferated to every continent with the exception of Antarctica and Australia.’⁴⁵ The demise of the Cold War resulted in a number of intra-state conflicts in which armed groups recruited children into their ranks. The conflicts in Sierra Leone (1991-2000), Uganda (1990- present), the Congo (1994-2003) and Rwanda (1990-94) helped to create a highly specific narrative

⁴⁵ Borchini, C., Lanz, S. and O’Connell, E. ‘*Child Soldiers: Implications for US Forces*’, CETO, Quantico, VA, 2002, p. 3.

concerning the helpless child soldier who had been kidnapped and forced to kill, being fed a cocktail of drugs and alcohol in order to commit the most heinous atrocities. Images were presented in the media of young African children carrying machetes or AK-47s, allegedly operating under tyrannical warlords who were keen to exploit their innocence and vulnerability. However, as Borchini and O'Connell noted⁴⁶, child soldiers were not only present in Africa, they were also involved in conflicts in Bosnia, Columbia, Burma, and the Middle East. Peter Singer argued that the outbreak of small conflicts in the early 1990s resulted not only in children becoming the 'new targets of violence and atrocities in war, but many now have also become the perpetrators.'⁴⁷ Therefore, the 'child soldier phenomenon' describes the rapid increase in the use of children in conflict zones since the 1990s, with a focus on children becoming directly involved in the hostilities as perpetrators of violence.

Proponents of the 'child soldier phenomenon'⁴⁸ concept, seek to highlight the issue of children operating in war zones, whilst lobbying political organisations to establish international regulations to eradicate the use of children in armed conflict, and establishing Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) centres to support those already affected by such events. The importance and protection of children and their childhood is a unifying theme, and has sparked interest within the humanitarian community which has seen the development of NGOs focused on the topic of children and armed conflict. Groups such as War Child, SOS Children, Child Soldiers International, Invisible Children, Save the Children, International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Amnesty International, United Nations Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), Watch List, Oxfam, and Project AK-47, have all become involved in the fight to eradicate the use and recruitment of children in

⁴⁶ Borchini, C., Lanz, S. and O'Connell, E. '*Child Soldiers: Implications for US Forces*', CETO, Quantico, VA, 2002, p. 3.

⁴⁷ Singer, P. '*Children at War*', (New York, 2005), p.6.

⁴⁸ An example of those that use the term 'child soldier phenomenon' include Peter Singer, Alcinda Honwana, Susan Shepler, Amnesty International, War Child.

armed conflict. Many of these organisations provide a mission statement which explains their role in the campaign to eradicate the use of children in conflict situations, as well as funding campaigns directed at the public in order to raise money to continue their advocacy and humanitarian work. The following mission statement is an example available on the Child Soldiers International webpage, explaining who they are as an organisation and the type of work they conduct,

We work to end the military recruitment of under-18s globally and to prevent their use in armed conflict wherever it occurs. We do this through global monitoring, in-depth work on selected countries, and research and analysis on key thematic issues relating to child soldiers.⁴⁹

These groups have also been responsible for a number of initiatives and campaigns designed to increase support and awareness on the subject of stopping the use of children in conflict. In March 2014, Leila Zerrougui, the SRSG for children and armed conflict, and UNICEF launched the *Children Not Soldiers* campaign to ‘galvanize support to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children by national security forces in conflict.’⁵⁰ Each year on the 12th February, the *Red Hand Day* campaign requests those wishing to show support, and to raise political awareness of the issues facing child soldiers, to make prints of their hands in red paint and to send along to their political representatives.⁵¹

After the CRC was opened for signature in 1989, a number of international legal standards were formulated by political bodies to help protect children and reduce their involvement in armed conflict.⁵² The increased interest by political bodies and national governments also helped to perpetuate the idea that the post-1990s conflict situations which

⁴⁹ ‘*Introducing Our Work*’, Child Soldiers International, taken from <http://www.child-soldiers.org/>, accessed on 12th August 2015.

⁵⁰ ‘*Children Not Soldiers*’, Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary General for Children and Armed Conflict, taken from <https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/children-not-soldiers/>, accessed on 28th May 2016.

⁵¹ ‘*The Red Hand Campaign*’, Red Hand Day: A Worldwide Initiative to stop the use of Child Soldiers, (2012), taken from <http://www.redhandday.org/index.php?id=5&L=0>, accessed on 28th May 2016.

⁵² Please see section 3.2 for an overview of the various pieces of legislation and political initiatives in place concerning children and armed conflict.

included children were part of a new phenomenon. Ah-Jung Lee notes that ‘the institutionalisation of children’s rights in international law has taken place in response to a deep sense of moral, political, and social crisis during the 1990s in the international humanitarian community.’⁵³ Alongside the increase in legal frameworks based on children’s rights, political bodies and organisations also increased their involvement and research on the topic.

The increased awareness that children were fighting in conflict zones around the world resulted in the UN appointing Graca Machel, an expert working for the Secretary-General of the UN, to conduct research on the subject. Her research resulted in the publication of a report entitled *The Impact of Armed Conflict on Children*⁵⁴ which received global attention as it highlighted the issues associated with children participating in armed conflict. Her report attributed the rise of children’s recruitment into armed groups to the change in political stability that occurred at the end of the Cold War, stating that it created,

a space devoid of the most basic human values, a space in which children are slaughtered, raped and maimed; a space in which children are exploited as soldiers; a space in which children are starved and exposed to extreme brutality.⁵⁵

The publication of the report resulted in the UN establishing the position of Special Representative of the Secretary General (SRSG) for Children in Armed Conflict in 1996.⁵⁶

The purpose of the SRSG is ‘to strengthen the protection of children affected by armed conflict, raise awareness, promote the collection of information about the plight of children

⁵³ Lee, A. ‘*Understanding and Addressing the Phenomenon of ‘Child Soldiers’: The Gap between the Global Humanitarian Discourse and Local Understandings and Experiences of Young People’s Military Recruitment*’, Working Paper No: 52, Refugee Studies Centre, Oxford, January 2009, p. 7.

⁵⁴ Machel, G. ‘*Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Children: Impact of Armed Conflict on Children*’, A/51/306, United Nations, New York, 26th August 1996.

⁵⁵ Machel, G. ‘*Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Children: Impact of Armed Conflict on Children*’, New York 1996, p.5.

⁵⁶ United Nations Resolution A/Res/51/77, United Nations General Assembly, 20th February 1997, taken from http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/51/77, accessed on 28th May 2016.

affected by war and foster international cooperation to improve their protection.’⁵⁷ The SRSG is also responsible for reporting to the General Assembly and Human Rights Council and ‘raises challenges faced by children in war to political bodies, such as the UN Security Council, as well as relevant Governments to maintain a sense of urgency amongst key decision makers as well as to secure political and diplomatic engagement.’⁵⁸

Media footage from war-torn countries presented the images of children carrying weapons and suffering from the consequences of war. Fergal Keane, a war correspondent, decided to break protocol in the 1990s by showing images of the brutal effects the conflict in Sierra Leone had on child soldiers and the civilian population. Fergal Keane stated,

I knew from my own conversations with Save the Children that the issue of child soldiers was escalating into a major international problem... And it also occurred to me that to describe a war as ‘brutal’ and ‘savage’ without illustrating the truth of its brutality was pointless.⁵⁹

His team were forced to make the decision as to how they could show the domestic audiences the level of suffering taking place in these regions without alienating them or causing too much distress. The decision was made to transmit the footage, however, it received a number of complaints from the domestic populations, ‘I was taken aback by the complaints. Surely what mattered was the brutal abuse being inflicted on children, not the fact that a news organisation had chosen to show what was happening.’⁶⁰ Although this incident created discussions about the 9pm watershed within the British media, it also resulted in the increased distribution of such footage by news agencies who felt they had a duty to report what was happening in such conflict zones.

⁵⁷ ‘*The Mandate of the Special Representative*’, Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, United Nations Website, taken from <https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/mandate/>, accessed on 28th May 2016.

⁵⁸ ‘*The Mandate of the Special Representative*’, UN Website, taken from <https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/mandate/>.

⁵⁹ Keane, F. ‘Media: Viewers Look Away Now’, *The Independent*, 23rd March 1999, taken from <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/media-viewers-look-away-now-1082475.html>, accessed on 2nd May 2016, np.

⁶⁰ Keane, F. ‘Media: Viewers Look Away Now’, *The Independent*, 1999, np.

NGOs and charities also established campaigns which used similar images of children suffering or carrying weapons to appeal to their audiences for financial and political support. Not only do these organisations conduct research and promote awareness on the topic of children in armed conflict, but they also establish DDR programmes and centres designed to deal with the after-effects of combat. These centres offer counselling to those who have been affected by various conflicts. They provide treatment and support for issues such as malnutrition, war wounds, alcohol or drug dependency, as well as the health effects of sexual violence, early pregnancies, and abortions. Former child soldiers can also partake in training and educational programmes to help boost their skills set and acquire qualifications to help gain employment once they are integrated back into society.⁶¹ The creation of these centres and programmes are seen as a response to the unprecedented issues arising from the recruitment of children in contemporary conflict situations. A UNICEF report highlighted that

more than 100,000 children have been released and reintegrated into their communities since 1998 in over 15 countries affected by armed conflict. In 2010 alone, UNICEF supported the reintegration of some 11,400 children formerly associated with armed forces and armed groups along with 28,000 other vulnerable children affected by armed conflict.⁶²

As well as the increased attention from NGOs, charities and political organisations, the topic of children involved in armed conflict has also received recognition within popular culture. Literature, documentaries and films about child soldiers have increased in prominence since the 1990s. Catarina Martins claims that ‘both media and art seem to be mobilized in this common effort for international awareness.’⁶³ The experience of the child

⁶¹ For a list of reintegration centres and rehabilitation programmes please see, ‘*Building a Future for Former Child Soldiers: Programs at a Glance*’, International Rescue Committee, 2016, taken from <http://www.rescue.org/program/building-future-former-child-soldiers-programs-glance>, accessed on 12th April 2016.

⁶² ‘*Child Recruitment by Armed Forces or Armed Groups*’, UNICEF, 22nd March 2011, taken from www.unicef.org/protection/57929_58007.html, accessed on 13th August 2015.

⁶³ Martins, C. ‘The Dangers of the Single Story: Child Soldiers in Literary Fiction and Film’, *Childhood*, Volume: 18, No: 4, 2011, p.434.

soldier has been told in both non-fiction and fiction literature in works such as *Little Soldier*⁶⁴, *A Long Way Gone*⁶⁵, and *Girl Soldier*⁶⁶. Each story traces the journey of the child from their life prior to the conflict, their experiences as a child soldier, and their hopes for the future. These works focus on the child who has undergone a period of suffering and are trying to make a life for themselves in the post-conflict environment. There has also been an increase in documentaries produced which focus on the child soldier. Martins notes that 'European documentary films on the child-soldier issue generally show an identical strategy: the presentation of ex-child-soldiers, found mostly in rehabilitation centres in countries like Liberia, Sierra Leone and Uganda, as they tell their stories to someone behind a camera.'⁶⁷ In 1998 the documentary, *Soldier Child*⁶⁸, was produced which focused heavily on the DDR programmes on offer to children recruited as soldiers. The film depicts the various stages of the DDR process with an emphasis on the benefits of drawing therapy which allows young children to overcome their traumatic experiences. Another, *Lost Children*⁶⁹ documented the experiences of former child soldiers in Uganda. The film was shown at the Berlin International Film Festival, and also won the UNICEF prize in 2005 for highlighting the issues these children face.

Alongside the increase in literature and documentaries, films have also been produced in which the experience of the child soldier is the principal focus, or the main story being set amongst a conflict in which child soldiers are evident. In 2006 Leonardo Di Caprio starred in *Blood Diamond*⁷⁰, a film depicting the conflict in Sierra Leone and the diamond trade, again highlighting the roles children play in conflicts in this part of the world. Other

⁶⁴ Ashley, B. *'Little Soldier'*, (Orchard Books, London, 1999).

⁶⁵ Beah, I. *'A Long Way Gone: The Story of a Child Soldier'*, (Harper Perennial, London, 2007).

⁶⁶ Akalb, G. and McDonnell, F. *'Girl Soldier: A Story of Hope for Northern Uganda's Children'*, (Chosen Books, USA, 2008).

⁶⁷ Martins, C. 'The Dangers of the Single Story', *Childhood*, 2011, p.439.

⁶⁸ *'Soldier Child'*, Director Neil Abrahamson, (Winghead Films, 1998).

⁶⁹ *'Lost Children'*, Directed by Ali Samedi Ahadi and Oliver Stoltz, (Westdeutscher Rundfunk, 2005).

⁷⁰ *'Blood Diamond'*, Directed by Edward Zwick, (Bedford Falls Production, 2006).

films such as ‘*Johnny Mad Dog*’⁷¹ show the levels of violence afforded to and by these child soldiers. *Beasts of No Nation*⁷², first published as a book before becoming a film, focuses on the journey of one child who became a soldier during an unidentified African civil war. The film received a large amount of publicity and won the Marcello Mastroianni Award in 2015. Although the child soldier has become popularised in various media forms, ‘the great majority of these narratives deal with African contexts.’⁷³

Whilst the term ‘child soldier’ may not have a long historical tradition; the growth in international concern, policy initiatives, and humanitarian campaigns have created a narrative deeply embedded in the horrors of war in which the child soldier is seen as a victim of exploitation despite their conduct in the conflict situation. This image of the vulnerable, exploited child soldier is enhanced by the media and popular culture, both of which attract audiences with stories of suffering and emotional impact. Jason Hart suggested that, ‘alongside the ‘child labourer’, the ‘street child’, and the ‘child prostitute’, the figure of the ‘child soldier’ has been deployed as a powerful symbol of morally bankrupt societies.’⁷⁴

Although the child soldier can be a perpetrator, they can also be exploited or forced to conduct violent acts. The narrative that emerged from the African context showed children being forced to fight, often committing violent acts against their own family members as part of the initiation or forced induction programme, ‘the LRA (Lord’s Resistance Army) often forced recruits to murder their parents so that they’d have no family to escape to.’⁷⁵ Children

⁷¹ ‘*Johnny Mad Dog*’, Director Jean-Stephane Sauvaire, (MNP Enterprise, 2008).

⁷² Iweala, U. ‘*Beasts of No Nation*’, (John Murray Publishers, Great Britain, 2005), Film version: ‘*Beasts of No Nation*’, Directed by Cary Joji Fukunga, (Bleeker Street Films, 2015).

⁷³ Martins, C. ‘The Dangers of the Single Story’, *Childhood*, 2011, p.434.

⁷⁴ Hart, J. ‘Saving Children: What Role for Anthropology?’, *Anthropology Today*, Volume: 22, Issue: 1, February 2006, p.6.

⁷⁵ Storr, W. ‘Kony’s Child Soldiers: When you Kill for the First Time you Change’, *The Telegraph*, 12th February 2014, taken from

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/africaandindianocean/uganda/10621792/Konys-child-soldiers-When-you-kill-for-the-first-time-you-change.html>, accessed on 13th May 2016.

may also be force fed narcotics and alcohol making them easier to control, and to bolster their confidence when fighting.⁷⁶ Proponents of the concept of the ‘child soldier phenomenon’ also focus on the high levels of recruitment amongst the child population. Jo Becker, an analyst at Human Rights Watch, noted that ‘in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, child recruitment increased so dramatically in early 2003 that observers described the fighting forces as ‘armies of children’.’⁷⁷ The way in which children were being used and treated in warfare, as well as the targeted and increased recruitment of child soldiers was seen as unprecedented and helped to perpetuate the idea that a ‘child soldier phenomenon’ was in existence.

The influx of rights-based initiatives and treaties designed to protect children from the horrors of war, also helped to further claims that a ‘child soldier phenomenon’ had occurred. This helped the mainstream narrative concerning the issue of child soldiering to be embedded in the global humanitarian narrative. This narrative focuses on the need to protect children from the horrors associated with war, allowing political and humanitarian organisations to tackle the issue of child recruitment using legal frameworks derived from Western perspectives and conceptions of childhood. Lee suggested that ‘the images and tales of child soldiers have proliferated in such a way that ‘child soldiers’ has almost become a moral and emotional issue, with activists and organisations taking it on with almost missionary zeal.’⁷⁸

Whilst the focus on emotional responses has helped to garner support and incited interest in the problem, it does little to explain whether an alleged ‘child soldier phenomenon’ is in existence and whether it represents a new challenge for the international community. Rosen suggests that, ‘in making the case against child soldiers, humanitarian organisations

⁷⁶ ‘Coercion and Intimidation of Child Soldiers to Participate in Violence’, Human Rights Watch, 16th April 2008, taken from <https://www.hrw.org/news/2008/04/16/coercion-and-intimidation-child-soldiers-participate-violence>, accessed on 13th May 2016.

⁷⁷ Becker, J. ‘Child Soldiers: Changing a Culture of Violence’, *Human Rights*, Volume:32, Issue:1, 2005, p.16.

⁷⁸ Lee, A. ‘*Understanding and Addressing the Phenomenon of ‘Child Soldiers’*’, Oxford, 2009, p. 3.

paint the picture of a new phenomenon that has become a crisis of epidemic proportions.’⁷⁹ He is critical of the current child soldier narrative, in which the use of the terms ‘new’, ‘epidemic’, and ‘phenomenon’ suggest an issue that is unprecedented, never been seen before and requiring immediate action to stop such an issue taking precedence. However, whilst the term ‘child soldier phenomenon’ suggests the use of children in conflict situations is new and unprecedented, it is important to interrogate this narrative and to see whether the depictions enhanced by the global humanitarian discourse are authentic and actually help to build our knowledge on the subject. The following section will analyse the subject of children involved in armed conflict from an historical perspective to determine whether the roles children play, and their participation in contemporary armed conflict do in fact represent a new challenge.

3.4 Children and Armed Conflict: A Historical Perspective

Although the dominant discourse on the topic of child soldiers suggests that their use is ‘new’, research suggests that children have always been involved in armed conflict. Retired Lieutenant General Romeo Dallaire acknowledged the variety of roles children have played throughout history stating that the ‘use of children in the military as porters, drummers, cooks, and in other non-combatant roles in garrison locations is a long-standing tradition dating back to ancient times.’⁸⁰ The Children’s Crusade of 1212 is one of the earliest documented recordings of children forming organised units with the intention of marching on to the Holy Land as part of the larger Crusade movement to convert Muslims to the Christianity faith.⁸¹ During the Medieval Ages, young boys from the age of eight years old were hired as Pages or Squires who would attend to their Masters, including ferrying items

⁷⁹ Rosen, D. *Armies of the Young: Child Soldiers in War and Terrorism*, (Rutgers University Press, New Jersey, 2005), p.1.

⁸⁰ Dallaire, R. *They fight like Soldiers, They die like Children*, (Arrow Books, Great Britain, 2010), p.105.

⁸¹ Raedts, P. ‘The Children’s Crusade of 1212’, *Journal of Medieval History*, Volume: 3, Issue: 4, 1977, p.279-323.

and messages to and from the battlefield.⁸² The presence of young boys on the battlefield continued into the 1800s with their use as drummer boys or messengers.⁸³ The following passage discusses the use of Drummer Boys during the American Civil War, and demonstrates the popularity of the practice,

By far the easiest way for a boy to slip into the army was as a musician, especially as a drummer or bugler. These were considered non-fighting positions, so recruiters often allowed a boy to sign on without worrying about his age. The Union Army alone had need for over forty thousand musicians, while an estimated twenty thousand served for the South.⁸⁴

However, the presence of young boys in the military was not limited to the battlefield. Young boys could also work as cabin boys on board naval ships. Their role would be to run errands for officers or to wait on the captain. For many, this role was seen as an apprenticeship in which they could rise through the ranks. The British Royal Navy recruited cabin boys from the age of 14.⁸⁵ Others worked as ‘powder monkeys’, a role which included carrying gunpowder to the on-board cannons.⁸⁶ Advocates of the ‘child soldier phenomenon’ suggest that, although children may have been present in military organisations and in conflict situations prior to 1990, they only played support roles. The notion that children in contemporary conflict situations now partake in front-line duties and play a more direct role in the hostilities is a distinguishing feature of the ‘child soldier phenomenon’. Support roles can also place children in danger; therefore, it is not possible to determine the severity of a threat level depending on the child’s position on the battlefield.

⁸² For further information, please see, Kremer, W. ‘What Medieval Europe did with its teenagers’, *BBC Magazine*, 23rd March 2014, taken from <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-26289459>, accessed on 28th May 2016, np. And Orme, N. ‘The Culture of Children in Medieval England’, *Past & Present*, No: 148, August 1995, p. 48-88.

⁸³ Smith, M. ‘End of an Era for Little Drummer Boys and the Powder Monkeys’, *The Telegraph*, 29th March 2002, taken from <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/1389146/End-of-an-era-for-little-drummer-boys-and-the-powder-monkeys.html>, accessed on 28th May 2016, np.

⁸⁴ Murphy, J. *The Boy’s War: Confederate and Union Soldiers Talk about the Civil War*, (Clarion Books, New York, 1990), p.10.

⁸⁵ Pietsch, R. *The Real Jim Hawkins: Ship Boys in the Georgian Navy*, (Seaforth Publishing, Barnsley, 2010).

⁸⁶ For further information, please see, Smith, M. ‘End of an Era for Little Drummer Boys and the Powder Monkeys’, *The Telegraph*, 29th March 2002, taken from <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/1389146/End-of-an-era-for-little-drummer-boys-and-the-powder-monkeys.html>, accessed on 28th May 2016, np. And Bingham, J. *Courageous Children*, (Raintree Publishers, London, 2011).

References to the support roles carried out by children are plentiful, however, further historical research highlighted how some of the key figures or leaders have also served or fought in armed conflict situations as children. One of the greatest strategic thinkers, Carl von Clausewitz, joined the Prussian Army at the age of 12.⁸⁷ Alexander the Great was given the position as Regent of Macedonia, leading to him quelling a rebellion at the age of 16.⁸⁸ Joan of Arc was only a young teenager when she participated in sieges as part of the Hundred Years War.⁸⁹ Historical sources suggest that she was 13 years of age when she heard a voice from God leading to her involvement in the conflict, and was burned at the stake at the age of 19.⁹⁰ Lord Nelson also began his naval career at the age of 12 as a cadet in the Royal Navy.⁹¹ However, it is the participation of children during certain major conflicts that have caused the greatest interest and contradiction of the ‘child soldier phenomenon’.

The American War of Independence (1775-1783)⁹² and the American Civil War (1861- 1865)⁹³ both involved the use of young boys who were seen as heroic fighters. David Rosen conducted a review of the varying roles of children in armed conflict throughout history and found that many of the ‘writings about boy soldiers in the aftermath of the Civil War celebrate the nobility and sacrifice of young boys in battle.’⁹⁴ His work uncovered the differing attitudes between perceptions of child soldiers in contemporary conflicts and the boy soldiers who fought in past conflicts. Rosen suggests that the child soldiers of today are

⁸⁷ Parkinson, R. ‘*Clausewitz: A Biography*’, (Cooper Square Press, New York, 2002), p.15.

⁸⁸ For further information, please see, Adams, S. ‘*Alexander the Great: The Boy Soldier Who Conquered the World*’, (National Geographic Society Publishing, London, 2005). And Thomopoulos, E. ‘*The History of Greece*’, (Greenwood Press, USA, 2012), p.38.

⁸⁹ For further information, please see, Fraioli, D. ‘*Joan of Arc: The Hundred Years War*’, (Greenwood Press, USA, 2005). And Brooks, P. S. ‘*Beyond the Myth: The Story of Joan of Arc*’, (Houghton Mifflin Company, New York, 1990).

⁹⁰ Taylor, C, (translation). ‘*Joan of Arc: La Pucelle*’, (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 2006), p.34.

⁹¹ Forester, C.S. ‘*Lord Nelson*’, (Simon Publications, Florida, 2001), p.27.

⁹² Cox, C. ‘*Boy Soldiers of the American Revolution*’, (University of North Carolina Press, USA, 2016).

⁹³ For further information, please see, Murphy, J. ‘*The Boy’s War: Confederate and Union Soldiers Talk about Civil War*’, (Clarion Books, New York, 1990), and Keese, D. ‘*Too Young to Die: Boy Soldiers of the Union Army, 1861-1865*’, (Blue Acorn Press, USA, 2001).

⁹⁴ Rosen, D. ‘Child Soldiers: Victims or Heroes?’, *FDU Magazine*, Summer/ Fall 2005, p.6.

treated as victims and pitied, whilst historically boy soldiers were treated as heroes who ‘were deemed respected citizens whose contribution to civic life was enhanced by the experience of war.’⁹⁵ For many boys, participating in war was seen as a rite of passage worthy of respect.⁹⁶ However, Elizabeth Galway claims that historically children have always been treated as innocents and victims, but that it was specific events and periods within history which allowed the narrative of the hero boy soldier to emerge. She claims that ‘the very notion of childhood is constantly in flux, and in times of military need, images of child innocence, passivity, and naivety are often replaced by depictions of children as ready, willing, and able to serve their nation.’⁹⁷

The First World War (1914-18) featured underage boys falsifying their records or lying about their age to recruitment sergeants in order to join the British Army and fight on the Western Front.⁹⁸ This practice was not just limited to the British Army, as underage boys from all national forces attempted to enlist and fight for their country.⁹⁹ Whilst underage recruitment was frowned upon, many recruiting sergeants knowingly admitted those below the required age¹⁰⁰ in order to fill their quotas.¹⁰¹ Recruitment into the British Armed Forces in the latter part of the twentieth century and the twenty-first century focused on

⁹⁵ Rosen, D. ‘Child Soldiers: Victims or Heroes?’, *FDU Magazine*, 2005, p.6.

⁹⁶ For further information concerning the role of boy soldiers and their heroic status in society see Cockerill, A.W. ‘*Sons of the Brave: The Story of Boy Soldiers*’ (Martin Secker & Warburg Ltd, London, 1984) and Dann, C. ‘*The Revolution Remembered: Eyewitness Accounts of the War for Independence*’, (The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1983).

⁹⁷ Galway, E. ‘Competing Representations of Boy Soldiers in WW1 Children’s Literature’, *Peace Review: A Journal of Social Justice*, Volume: 24, No: 3, 2012, p.298.

⁹⁸ For further information regarding underage recruitment into the British Army please see, Chapter 4, Section 4.4.2.

⁹⁹ For further information, please see, Black, D. and Boileau, J. ‘*Old Enough to Fight: Canada’s Boy Soldiers in the First World War*’, (James Lorimer & Company, Toronto, 2013), and ‘*Boy Soldiers on the Roll of Honour for the First World War*’, Australian War Memorial, taken from <https://www.awm.gov.au/encyclopedia/boysoldiers/first/>, accessed on 29th May 2016, and Budanovic, N. ‘The Youngest Soldier in WW1 was a Serbian Boy, Aged 8’, *War History*, 13th March 2016, taken from <https://www.warhistoryonline.com/world-war-i/youngest-soldier-wwi-serbian-boy-aged-8.html>, accessed on 30th March 2016.

¹⁰⁰ In 1914, males had to be 18 years of age to enlist in the Army, and 19 years to serve overseas. The age of overseas deployment was lowered to 19 years of age due to heavy losses on the Western Front in 1918.

¹⁰¹ Van Emden, R. ‘*Boy Soldiers of the Great War*’, (Bloomsbury Publishers, London, 2012), p. xviii- xix.

psychological maturity rather than physical maturity, which seemed to be the qualifying factor in the first half of the twentieth century. Those fighting in the First World War could be found on the front-line, usually in infantry positions, and if their real age was discovered they would be returned home or given an auxiliary role away from the front.¹⁰² The Second World War infamously involved children in two key events; children fought in the European resistance movement¹⁰³ and for the Hitler Youth during the defence and subsequent fall, of Berlin in 1945.¹⁰⁴ In both examples, children were given weapons and expected to fight. Children recruited as part of the Nazi forces also manned anti-aircraft machinery,¹⁰⁵ thereby disproving the idea that children's direct involvement in conflict was a result of the proliferation of light weaponry. The units formed of Hitler Youth were tasked to defend the capital of Germany in the final weeks of the conflict and their use can be attributed to a feeling of desperation by the Nazi government. With no eligible male adults to answer the call, children were called upon to fill the quota and to bolster Germany's defence. Matthew Happold notes that

the Second World War had been fought largely by mass conscript armies and only in extremis, such as in Germany in 1945, has any of the major powers conscripted children into their armed forces. Where children had participated in hostilities it has been as irregulars – partisans or resisters.¹⁰⁶

Prior to the 1990s, children took up arms or undertook military duties for various nationalist movements. The Vietcong adopted child fighters during their struggle against the

¹⁰² Van Emden, R. *Boy Soldiers of the Great War*, (London, 2012).

¹⁰³ For further information, please see, Cross, R. *Children and War: World War II*, (Diane Publishing Company, USA, 1994), Sevier, E. *Resistance Fighter: A Teenage Girl in World War II France*, (Sunflower University Press, New York, 1998), Cleaver, H. 'Teenage Rebels who fought Nazis are honoured at last', *The Telegraph*, 25th June 2005, taken from <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/germany/1492771/Teenage-rebels-who-fought-Nazis-are-honoured-at-last.html>, accessed on 3rd June 2016, np., and Rosen, D. *Armies of the Young: Child Soldiers in War and Terrorism*, (Rutgers University Press, New Jersey, 2005), Chapter 2.

¹⁰⁴ Lepage, J. *Hitler Youth, 1922-1945: An Illustrated History*, (McFarland & Company Ltd, North Carolina, 2008), p.154, and Beevor, A. *Berlin: The Downfall 1945*, (Penguin, London, 2002).

¹⁰⁵ Seidler, H. and Baxter, I. *Hitler's Boy Soldiers: The Hitler Jugend Story*, (Pen & Swords Books Ltd, Barnsley, 2013).

¹⁰⁶ Happold, M., *Child Soldiers in International Law*, (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 2005), p.55.

United States of America in the Vietnam War.¹⁰⁷ The Tamil Tigers have and continue to use children as part of their operations in Sri Lanka.¹⁰⁸ Yet the use of children in such conflict situations has been regarded as 'brave' and many were given hero status for enlisting in armed groups voluntarily for their country. Rather than being looked upon as victims of armed conflict, these children were seen as patriotic and heroic. Kirsten Fisher suggested that children joined the Tamil Tigers as they were

drawn to the propaganda machine of the fighting force: speeches and videos, public displays of war paraphernalia, funerals and posters of fallen heroes, and heroic, melodious songs and stories that serve to draw out feelings of patriotism and a 'martyr cult'.¹⁰⁹

Lee also acknowledged the heroic reception given to underage fighters in two key events of the twentieth century; 'thousands of under-18 British soldiers who fought in World War One were (and are still) regarded as 'brave young men' who responded to their historical call'¹¹⁰ and 'the militant child and youth activists in the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa during the 1970s and 1980s were hailed as heroes.'¹¹¹ Countries that once hailed their own underage fighters as heroic for their desire to fight for their country, now blacklist other countries that have underage combatants whilst portraying the child as a victim for their role in armed conflict.

This paradox was evident during my visit to the many international child protection agencies' headquarters in New York City. Situated less than five miles from the United Nations headquarters and surrounding international NGO headquarters, on the island of Manhattan, lies the Vietnam War Memorial Plaza. Amongst the names of US war dead there

¹⁰⁷ For further information, please see, Tynes, R. 'Child Soldiers as Tactical Innovation', *Air and Space Power Journal*, Volume: 3, 2008, p.4, and Lawrence, M. *The Vietnam War: A Concise International History*, (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2010), and Pike, D. *The Vietcong Strategy of Terror*, (Unpublished Monograph, Saigon, 1970), p.96.

¹⁰⁸ Becker, J. 'Child Recruitment in Burma, Sri Lanka and Nepal', taken from Gates, S. and Reich, S. ed. *Child Soldiers in the Age of Fractured States*, (University of Pittsburgh Press, USA, 2009).

¹⁰⁹ Fisher, K. *Transitional Justice for Child Soldiers: Accountability and Social Reconstruction in Post-Conflict Contexts*, (Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2013), p.26.

¹¹⁰ Lee, A. *Understanding and Addressing the Phenomenon of 'Child Soldiers'*, Oxford, 2009, p.3.

¹¹¹ Lee, A. *Understanding and Addressing the Phenomenon of 'Child Soldiers'*, Oxford, 2009, p.3.

lies a plaque which commemorates the death of Private First Class Dan Bullock (Appendix C). Bullock was fifteen years old when he was killed on active duty in Vietnam, having doctored his birth certificate to hide his real age. The memorial plaque highlights his particular story, claiming he was ‘the youngest American serviceman killed in action.’¹¹² His age is the focal point of the plaque, and is a key feature of the memorial; he is one of three personnel to have a separate eulogy complete with photograph, letter of commendation from the US military, and information about his service.

Whilst examples of children being formally conscripted into national armed forces are limited, it is important to acknowledge that children in Western societies have also played a role in theatres of armed conflict, in both support and front-line roles. Due to the global humanitarian discourse that presents the issue of child soldiers as a new phenomenon, the historical presence of children in theatres of armed conflict has become an uncomfortable memory for many Western nations. Perceptions focus on the heroic child soldier who offered their service during times of military need, which differs to the image created by the humanitarian narrative of the exploited child forced to partake in hostilities.

Drawing upon historical sources, this chapter has demonstrated that the presence of children in theatres of armed conflict is now new; but that the perspective and manner in which the issue is discussed has altered. The global humanitarian discourse has become the dominant approach in which the topic of child soldiering is analysed. This narrative suggests that the ‘child soldier’ actor, as well as the issues associated with them, are part of a new phenomenon which relies on media and humanitarian activists to garner sympathy from the political bodies and domestic populations to raise awareness and achieve progress on the subject. Therefore, as it has become evident that a dichotomy exists between the two

¹¹² ‘*Honor Plaques: Private First Class Dan Bullock*’, New York City Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall Plaza, taken from <http://www.vietnamveteransplaza.com/virtual-tour/honor-plaques/>, accessed on 5th October 2015.

narratives, the following section will draw upon the current academic debates within the field which focus upon the role of victimcy, agency and motivations of the child soldier, in order to build a more authentic depiction of the issue of the child soldier in contemporary armed conflict situations.

3.5 The Child Soldier: Using an Ethnographic Approach

Although humanitarian organisations suggest that the presence of children in contemporary armed conflict is new, due to increased levels of recruitment and their role in front-line capacities, the historical analysis has demonstrated that children have never really been absent from the battlefield. Children have been present on the front line, as well as in support roles throughout history, not too dissimilar to some of the positions they are seen in today. However, perceptions regarding the role of children and the nature of childhood have altered. The 1989 CRC brought the responsibility of providing and respecting the rights of children to the forefront of political consciousness. Academic interest in the child as an actor increased, as noted in section 2.5.1, which contributed to an increased awareness regarding their position in society. The sociological turn known as the *new sociology of childhood*, seeks to acknowledge the child as a subject worthy of research; focusing on the agency of the child and their position as a social actor. It is the increased interest in the role of the child and global humanitarian discourse which, according to Lee, is ‘dominated by the rights-based approach’¹¹³, that has created a distinct narrative in which the child is presented as a passive, innocent victim in need of greater protection and attention.

Although the global humanitarian discourse acknowledges that these children are not physically innocent, due to their role and experience as a combatant, the child is still presented as being morally innocent due to their predominant position as a child. Those

¹¹³ Lee, A. ‘*Understanding and Addressing the Phenomenon of ‘Child Soldiers’*’, Oxford, 2009, p. 6.

conforming to the global humanitarian discourse seek to present the child as an innocent, with little appreciation of the agency and motivations of the child, as it fails to fit their stereotypical narrative. This section argues that in order to understand the roles and motivations of the child soldier and to build knowledge on the topic, the subject needs to be examined using an ethnographic approach. The term ethnography refers to the study of people (or culture) and allows the researcher to observe the issue from the point of view of the subject themselves.¹¹⁴ As discussed in section 2.5, the *new sociology of childhood* also calls upon academics to adopt an ethnographic approach which recognises the agency of children. Therefore, this section will draw upon a range of ethnographic research studies in the field of children in armed conflict in order to analyse the character, motivations and agency of the child soldier.

A core criticism of the global humanitarian discourse is the notion that there is a universal definition of childhood that is applicable to all children and acknowledged by all cultural and political bodies. It has become widely accepted that there is no universal definition of childhood, despite popular consensus in the ratification of the CRC.¹¹⁵ Regardless of these political and humanitarian organisations stipulating that childhood ends at the age of 18, a number of state and non-state armed groups continue to disregard the alleged universal norms in favour of local traditions and practices. The transition from childhood to adulthood is not only culture specific, but based upon gender, class and societal factors too. Therefore, this section will adopt an ethnographic approach to discuss the

¹¹⁴ For further information, please see, Agar, M. *The Professional Stranger: An Informal Introduction to Ethnography*, (Emerald Group Publishing, Bingley, 2008), and Atkinson, P. Hammersley, M. *Ethnography: Principles in Practice*, (Third Edition, Routledge, London, 2007).

¹¹⁵ To date the Convention on the Rights of the Child has been ratified by 195 countries, with only the USA and South Sudan yet to endorse the treaty. Source: <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=49845#.V3VUvvrLIU>, accessed on 28th May 2016.

construction of childhood in particular regions, including those relevant to this thesis, to highlight the multiplicity of childhoods that exist.

Joanne Westwood sought to acknowledge the various constructions of childhood in different cultures in her work *Childhood in Different Cultures*. She suggests that the dominant views about childhood are dominated by ‘Western traditions and beliefs that stifle local, traditional and culturally specific practices.’¹¹⁶ Westwood uses an ethnographic approach to provide an insight into the construction of childhoods in different cultures and contrasts them to knowledge about children from Western viewpoints. For example, ‘in the Indian sub-continent it is not unusual for girls to be married at 12. In the Western context, this is seen as exploitative.’¹¹⁷ Although Westwood acknowledges the importance of conducting ethnographic research, she also recognises that the construction of childhood remains rooted in Western traditions due to ethnocentrism which is ‘the belief that one’s own culture and way of behaving is the correct way; all others are judged by this standard.’¹¹⁸ This thought is reiterated in a paper by Dominic Pasura et al. which examines the social construction of childhood and child sexual abuse in the Caribbean, ‘some of these Western ideas of children have been exported and globalised through the process of colonialization and democratisation and continue to be propagated through the child protection policies of international development agencies.’¹¹⁹

The process in which a child enters adulthood is also different depending on cultural and gender factors. In some cultures, females are regarded as entering adulthood when

¹¹⁶ Westwood, J. ‘Childhood in Different Cultures’, taken from Maynard, T. and Powell, S. ed. *An Introduction to Early Childhood Studies*, (Sage Publishers, London, 2013), p.12.

¹¹⁷ Westwood, J. ‘Childhood in Different Cultures’, (London, 2013), p.14-15.

¹¹⁸ Westwood, J. ‘Childhood in Different Cultures’, (London, 2013), p.12.

¹¹⁹ Pasura, D., Jones, A.D., Hafner, J., Maharg, P., DeCaires, K., and Janagan, E. ‘Competing Means of Childhood and the Social Construction of Child Sexual Abuse in the Caribbean’, *Childhood*, Volume: 20, Issue: 2, 2013, p.202.

married or when they have given birth, this could be at any stage in their pubescent years.¹²⁰ In Afghanistan, a boy is deemed to become an adult when he is able to grow facial hair.¹²¹ Whilst in certain regions in Africa, a boy becomes an adult when his elders have passed on and he then succeeds them as the eldest male.¹²² The legal frameworks which focus on the concept of childhood are rooted in the Western discourse, therefore alienating any alternative cultural narratives within the field. Susan Shepler acknowledges how the concept of childhood has implications for the way child soldiers are viewed, 'our sense that child-soldiering is worse than adult soldiering comes from our beliefs about childhood, beliefs built on a modern ideology that sees children as innocent and separates childhood as a special time.'¹²³ It is the alleged globalisation of a universal concept of childhood that has reinforced the idea that children and soldiering should be two distinct concepts. As Malcolm Harris notes 'our recent attention to the practice of child soldiering is less about changes in the nature of modern combat and more to do with the globalising idea of childhood as a sheltered period of development.'¹²⁴

This is evident within the campaign literature used by various humanitarian organisations, charities and NGOs in which they seek to raise awareness on the topic of children in armed conflict. These groups often use images of a young child soldier, usually aged 10 and under, to accompany their campaign slogans in order to appeal to public audiences; these can be in the form of advertising billboards, television commercials, posters

¹²⁰ 'Marriage Rites', Davis, T. 'Rites of Passage: African Cultural Initiation Rites', October 2011, African People Project, taken from <http://www.africanholocaust.net/ritesofpassage.html>, accessed on 11th March 2013, np.

¹²¹ 'Afghanistan: Taliban Child Soldier Recruitment Surges', Human Rights Watch, 17th February 2016, taken from <https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/02/17/afghanistan-taliban-child-soldier-recruitment-surges>, 24th May 2016, np.

¹²² 'Adulthood', Davis, T. 'Rites of Passage: African Cultural Initiation Rites', October 2011, African People Project, taken from <http://www.africanholocaust.net/ritesofpassage.html>, accessed on 11th March 2013, np.

¹²³ Shepler, S. 'The Social and Cultural Context of Child Soldiering in Sierra Leone', Paper for the PIRO sponsored workshop on Techniques of Violence in Civil War held in Oslo, 20th-21st August 2004. p.2.

¹²⁴ Harris, M. 'When a Child Goes to War', *The New Inquiry*, 1st June 2015, taken from www.aeon.co/magazine/society/is-the-child-soldier-a-victim-or-a-hero/, accessed on 1st August 2015.

or information sheets. These campaign images often focus on the child involved in the African conflict environment. The comparison to Western children and childhood is evident in some of these campaigns, which appeals to the emotions of Western audiences and thus creates a narrative based on the innocence of the child, and the need to protect this vulnerable actor. The following pictures form part of the *Tune in World* campaign which was launched by Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers to raise awareness concerning the use of children in theatres of armed conflict. This campaign included three posters aimed at the domestic populations of Germany, the USA, and the UK.¹²⁵ These advertisements were designed to juxtapose national child protection measures and concerns against the image of a child soldier or child involved in armed conflict.



(Figure 3.1)

‘And in Germany health experts warn against heavy school bags’¹²⁶

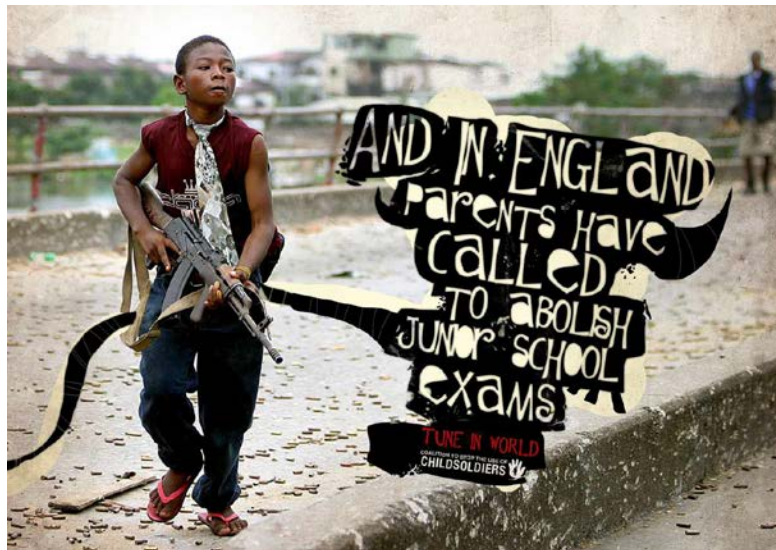
¹²⁵ Permission to use these images was obtained from Ruchir Sachdev (Copywriter) and Sara Kujundzic (Art Director), Miami Advertising School Europe, Hamburg, Germany via email correspondence on the 12th April 2016. Copies of the permission email are held by myself and can be provided on request.

¹²⁶ ‘Germany’, ‘Tune in World’ campaign by the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, Ads of the World, Miami Ad School (Europe), published September 2009, taken from http://adsoftheworld.com/media/print/coalition_to_stop_the_use_of_child_soldiers_germany, accessed on 12th March 2013.



(Figure 3.2)

‘and in America violent video games must come with an R rating’¹²⁷



(Figure 3.3)

‘And in England parents have called to abolish junior school exams’¹²⁸

By framing the image of the child soldier against national child protection concerns, it highlights the absurdity between the two perceived issues. It also suggests that the Western

¹²⁷ ‘USA’, ‘Tune in World’ campaign by the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, Ads of the World, Miami Ad School (Europe), published September 2009, taken from http://adsoftheworld.com/media/print/coalition_to_stop_the_use_of_child_soldiers_germany, accessed on 12th March 2013.

¹²⁸ ‘England’, ‘Tune in World’ campaign by the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, Ads of the World, Miami Ad School (Europe), published September 2009, taken from http://adsoftheworld.com/media/print/coalition_to_stop_the_use_of_child_soldiers_germany, accessed on 12th March 2013.

notion of childhood is the one the child soldier should be experiencing. National concerns and issues regarding the implementation of the child protection measures seem trivial in comparison to the image of the child involved in conflict being shown to the audience. It compares the image of the child involved in armed conflict with the expected norms associated with childhood as experienced by children in the West. Not only does this create an image in which the child is presented as a victim, due to not experiencing the same type of childhood as their Western counterparts, but it fails to acknowledge the varying experiences and needs of the child caught up in such a situation. The image is simplistic and focuses on the victim status of the child rather than the reality and varied experiences of the child.

Sukanya Podder focused her research on the identity of child soldiers, acknowledging the role of the Western media in creating a victim narrative when discussing children in armed conflict. She notes that ‘child soldiers in the Western media are commonly portrayed with qualities which children and societies ought not to have’¹²⁹ and that the social construction of childhood ‘within IR continues to fall within the *innocence-victimhood* and *vulnerability* paradigm.’¹³⁰ Katrina Lee-Koo also recognises the various ways children are presented in the Global North in order to promote a sense of victimcy. She notes that ‘children are presented as politically innocent beings whose childhoods have been corrupted by chaotic, violent, and tribal new war.’¹³¹ Lee-Koo acknowledges that the type of victimcy associated with the child differs depending upon the context, ‘unlike the child soldiers on the African continent who tote AK-47s, Afghanistan’s militarized child is styled as a suicide bomber, mis-used by the Taliban.’¹³² Whilst Western media choose to present the child

¹²⁹ Podder, S. ‘Neither Child nor Soldier: Contested Terrains in Identity, Victimcy and Survival’, taken from Ozerdem, A. and Podder, S. ed. ‘*Child Soldiers: From Recruitment to Reintegration*’, (Palgrave Macmillan, Hampshire, 2011), p.141.

¹³⁰ Podder, S. ‘Neither Child nor Soldier: Contested Terrains in Identity, Victimcy and Survival’, (2011), p.144.

¹³¹ Lee-Koo, K. ‘Horror and Hope: (Re)presenting Militarized Children in Global North-South Relations’, *Third World Quarterly*, Volume: 32, No: 4, 2011, p.736.

¹³² Lee-Koo, K. ‘Horror and Hope’, *Third World Quarterly*, 2011, p.737.

soldier within the victim paradigm, this approach decreases the opportunity for children to discuss their experiences and denies them a sense of agency. As highlighted in section 2.5, it is important to recognise that the child has agency in order to construct a more authentic understanding of children, and in particular the issue of child soldiers. Adopting an ethnographic approach to research on this subject will increase awareness on the topic, as well as acknowledging the needs of the child.

Ethnographic research conducted by those within the academic community have highlighted that children participating in armed conflict do not necessarily fit the innocent victim status produced by narratives within the global humanitarian discourse. The narratives within this discourse focus upon child soldiers being forcibly recruited or abducted in order to take part in hostilities. However, research suggests that there are a number of factors which can explain children's motivations for participating in armed conflict. Within their handbook, *Children as the Opposing Force*, researchers at NATO suggested that 'the various methods of recruitment range from physical to psychological such as being drugged, abducted, ostracised from home due to forced participation in murder, orphaned, indoctrinated, religious pressure or as a willing volunteer.'¹³³

Although forced recruitment does occur, many of the children partaking in armed conflict volunteer for service. Those that volunteer can be influenced by socio-economic factors. Poverty is a key element which enhances a child's vulnerability to military recruitment. The opportunity of food, security, shelter, and a potential wage drives those from the poorer sectors within society into the arms of military institutions. Around the world, military recruiters enhance the attraction of a life in the armed forces by offering further

¹³³ 'Child Soldiers as the Opposing Force', North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) TM-HFM-159, January 2011, taken from https://www.cso.nato.int/ACTIVITY_META.asp?ACT=1416, accessed on 28th September 2012, p.5-12.

advantages to the already economically deprived individuals. Not only do they offer the basic needs regarding food and shelter, but they use further incentives such as the opportunity to travel, to partake in an adventurous lifestyle, and to hold a position of power and respect within a society in which the individual may have felt they had previously been overlooked. For many children growing up in impoverished or failed states, the opportunity to escape poverty and join the military is highly desirable. Other factors which influence the child's decision to partake in hostilities can be due to; education, family and friends, politics and ideology, cultural expectations, and family traditions.

Whilst children can choose to partake in theatres of armed conflict for a number of factors, the voluntary nature of the child soldier's participation is often overlooked. Laetitia Dumas and Michaelle de Cock discovered that 'volunteers accounted for two-thirds of child soldiers interviewed in four central African countries.'¹³⁴ However, the actual *voluntary* element of recruitment can be difficult to ascertain due to external pressures and factors that influence their choice which may detract from the *actual* voluntary nature of their decision. The decision to enlist may be the best choice from a selection of poorer choices. The age in which a child can make an informed decision regarding voluntary participation also needs to be considered. Whilst the international standard suggests that the age of 18 is the benchmark for adult understanding and rationality, it must be recognised that this is often a social construct and the point of rationality within humans varies according to developmental and societal factors. Children can also make a strategic choice regarding volunteering themselves for military service; for some the choice they make is part of a survival strategy in which taking up arms or joining an armed group would provide greater security and protection.

¹³⁴ Dumas, L. and De Cock, M. 'Wounded Childhood: The Use of Child Soldiers in Armed Conflict in Central Africa', (International Labour Organisation, Geneva, 2003), p. viii.

Girls under the age of eighteen that become combatants are said to ‘most commonly cite escape from domestic exploitation and abuse as their motive for joining armed forces.’¹³⁵

Rosen suggested that nationalism and pride also played a vital role for many children, he highlighted how ‘many under-age combatants chose to fight with their eyes open, and defend their choice, sometimes proudly.’¹³⁶ In his autobiography, *A Long Way Gone*, Ishmael Beah stated that revenge was a motivating factor in his decision to fight as a child soldier in Sierra Leone. Beah stated that ‘every time I stopped shooting to change magazines I saw my two young lifeless friends, I angrily pointed my gun into the swamp and killed more people.’¹³⁷ Emmanuel Jal served as a child soldier in Sudan and wrote in his autobiography how ‘the women did as I said. I was a soldier not a child.’¹³⁸ Despite his young age, Jal viewed his primary identity with his employment as a soldier, rather than an age related indicator. Motivations for taking part in armed conflict are various, and through communication with the child it is possible to determine some form of agency in their choice and rationalisation of the subject.

Academics such as Alcinda Honwana and David Rosen suggests that children involved in armed conflict have a greater sense of autonomy and agency than previously suggested by the global humanitarian narrative. They build on the work by Allison James, Chris Jenks and Alan Prout¹³⁹ which suggests that children can be social actors who participate in society with their own degree of agency. Honwana adopts an ethnographic approach to examine the roles and motivations behind children’s involvement in armed conflict. By conducting interviews with children in Angola and Mozambique, she uses their stories and experiences to demonstrate their agency and motivations for involvement.

¹³⁵ Wells, K. ‘*Childhood in a Global Perspective*’, (Polity Press, Cambridge, 2009), p.156.

¹³⁶ Rosen, D. ‘*Armies of the Young*’, (New Jersey, 2005), p.17.

¹³⁷ Beah, I. ‘*A Long Way Gone*’, (London, 2007), p.119.

¹³⁸ Jal, E. ‘*War Child: A Boy Soldier’s Story*’, (Abacus, Great Britain, 2010), p.102.

¹³⁹ James, A., Jenks, C. and Prout, A. ‘*Theorising Childhood*’, (Polity Press, Cambridge, 2010).

Honwana suggests that children's involvement in warfare is not unusual, yet is deemed to be new due to the changes in the nature of warfare and perceptions of childhood.¹⁴⁰ Regarding the desire of NGOs to establish the Straight 18 position¹⁴¹, Honwana noted that

most of the people I spoke with in the field were not aware of these debates, and when I mentioned them people would say that they would rather have the international community focus on ways to stop the recruitment of younger children under the age of fifteen rather than start by raising the existing minimum age, which was not observed anyway.¹⁴²

Rosen also challenges the ideas prevalent in the global humanitarian discourse, by suggesting that children have agency and those working on the subject of children and armed conflict must acknowledge the range of motivations which makes it necessary for children to take up arms.¹⁴³ These include the need for survival, protection, desire to fight, or the need to provide an economic income.

The ethnographic approach has also been adopted by other academics who seek to contribute to the topic of children and armed conflict. Brocklehurst acknowledged the discrepancies between research carried out by those who had interviewed former child soldiers, and the narratives offered by NGOs, claiming that 'anthropologists' field interviews with current and former child soldiers have little connection with the depictions offered in the humanitarian literature.'¹⁴⁴ Research conducted with former child soldiers provides a wealth of information which enhances knowledge on the subject, and helps to build a more accurate representation of the role of children in armed conflict situations. Myriam Denov conducted interviews with former child soldiers in Sierra Leone in order to gain an understanding of individual motivations for partaking in conflict and the success of post-conflict DDR

¹⁴⁰ Honwana, A. *Child Soldiers in Africa*, (University of Pennsylvania Press, Pennsylvania, 2006).

¹⁴¹ The Straight 18 position is a campaign led by the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers which seeks to raise the minimum age of military recruitment to 18 for all state and non-state armed groups.

¹⁴² Honwana, A. *Child Soldiers in Africa*, (Pennsylvania, 2006), p.38.

¹⁴³ Rosen, D. *Armies of the Young*, (New Jersey, 2005).

¹⁴⁴ Brocklehurst, H. 'Child Soldiers', taken from Collins, A. ed. *Contemporary Security Studies*, (Second Edition, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2010), p.458.

programmes.¹⁴⁵ Her findings reinforced the notion that children can be both victims and perpetrators, as the interviews with former child soldiers revealed a sense of agency and an awareness that by presenting themselves as victims of the conflict they could benefit from NGO assistance.¹⁴⁶ Alongside Andi Buccitelli, Denov uses the term social navigation to describe the processes and strategies used by children to tactfully claim victim status to ensure their survival in post-conflict terrains.¹⁴⁷ Eric Greitens acknowledged this in his discussions about child ex-combatants in Liberia, ‘children are also able to exert agency by using the popular image of their victimisation. By portraying themselves as vulnerable victims, they may help themselves to better access to rehabilitation and reintegration programmes.’¹⁴⁸ This suggests that children have the agency and opportunity to be social actors, utilising the victim status afforded to them to ensure their own survival within their political and social worlds.

Krijn Peters and Paul Richards¹⁴⁹ also interviewed former Sierra Leonean child soldiers to inform debates about their participation and conflict experiences. Their research discovered that there was a sense of agency amongst the participants who discussed their motivations for joining armed groups and participating in the conflict. Michael Wessells conducted interviews with 400 former child soldiers from various regions around the world in order to discuss their motivating factors for joining armed groups, their post-conflict lives, and reintegration back into society.¹⁵⁰ Again, his work demonstrates that these former child

¹⁴⁵ Denov, M. ‘*Child Soldiers: Sierra Leone’s Revolutionary United Front*’, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2010).

¹⁴⁶ Denov, M. ‘*Child Soldiers*’, (Cambridge, 2010), p. 90.

¹⁴⁷ Denov, M. and Buccitelli, A. ‘Navigating Crisis and Chronicity in the Everyday: Former Child Soldiers in Urban Sierra Leone’, *International Journal of Security and Development*, Volume: 2, No: 2, 2013, p.1-18.

¹⁴⁸ Greitens, E. ‘The Treatment of Children during Conflict’, taken from Stewart, F. and Fitzgerald, V. ed. ‘*War and Underdevelopment – Volume 1: The Economic and Social Consequences of Conflict*’. (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2001), p.61.

¹⁴⁹ Peters, K. and Richards, P. ‘Why we fight: Voices of Youth Combatants in Sierra Leone’, *Africa Journal of the International Africa Institute*, Volume: 68, No: 2, 1998, p.183-210.

¹⁵⁰ Wessells, M. ‘*Child Soldiers: From Violence to Protection*’, (Harvard University Press, Massachusetts, 2006).

soldiers held a degree of agency concerning their motivations for participating in armed conflict. Through his interviews, Wessells also showed how former child soldiers could successfully integrate themselves back into civilian society and are not the victims NGOs portray them as.

Although Western narratives suggest that children should be sheltered from armed conflict, the current global humanitarian discourse seeks to highlight the ‘child soldier phenomenon’ as new and has resulted in issues surrounding the topic becoming one dimensional. This narrative denies children associated with armed conflict any agency or contextual experience which is needed to acknowledge the complex issues associated with their existence in this environment. Brocklehurst suggests that ‘the child soldier problem is unwittingly perpetuated and complicated by well-meaning accomplices.’¹⁵¹ NGOs seek to remove children from armed conflict scenarios and to protect them from the effects of war; however, by denying children a voice in which to discuss their needs, concerns and desires for the future, they are limiting their ability to provide effective and appropriate assistance to the child. Katrina Lee-Koo, Bina D’Costa, and Kim Huynh also discuss the need to strike a balance between accepting that children have agency and that they also need protection. In their work, they argue that there are two schools of thought; the Care-taker approach which seeks to protect the child and believes all children are worthy of protection, and the Free-ranger approach which ‘views children as beings in their own right, with their own identities, and values.’¹⁵² They suggest there is a ‘need to balance the protection agenda with one that includes a consideration of the capacity for some children to be meaningful participants in conflict and its resolution.’¹⁵³

¹⁵¹ Brocklehurst, H. ‘Childhood in Conflict: Can the Real Child Soldier Please Stand Up?’ (England, 2009), p.260.

¹⁵² Huynh, K., D’Costa, B., and Lee-Koo, K. ‘*Children and Global Conflict*’, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2015), p.4.

¹⁵³ Huynh, K. et al. ‘*Children and Global Conflict*’, (2015), p.5.

The failure to acknowledge the agency of the child hampers popular understandings of this particular actor and their needs. This is apparent within the interviews with former child soldiers in rehabilitation centres or reintegration programmes. Shepler's research discovered that some former child soldiers were disappointed that they were not treated as legitimate members of the armed forces, therefore were ineligible for the benefits of the demobilisation packages. There was a feeling of contention amongst those who had been demobilised but classified as 'child soldiers'. Those classified as 'child soldiers', including those who were now adults but had been recruited as minors, were not entitled to the \$300 resettlement allowance that regular adult soldiers could receive.¹⁵⁴ Although they may have been recruited whilst under-age, or were under the age of recruitment (18) at the point of demobilisation, these former soldiers felt they too had played a role in the conflict. Therefore, having made the same sacrifices and were now unemployed with an uncertain future, should also be entitled to the same demobilisation programmes and allowances as those they fought alongside.

Some child soldiers were removed from the conflict situation despite the war on-going. For those who had enlisted due to a sense of civic duty or felt an obligation to fight, their removal created a sense of confusion and resentment. Ishmael Beah noted in his autobiography that 'we (child soldiers in his unit) thought we were part of the war until the end'¹⁵⁵, commenting that 'we were excellent fighters and were ready to fight the war til the end.'¹⁵⁶ His views on the rehabilitation efforts by NGOs were less than approving, stating that

¹⁵⁴ Shepler, S. '*Conflicted Childhoods: Fighting Over Child Soldiers in Sierra Leone*', PhD Thesis, Department of Social and Cultural Studies in Education, University of Berkeley, USA, 2005. p.189.

¹⁵⁵ Beah, I. '*A Long Way Gone*', (London, 2007), p.130.

¹⁵⁶ Beah, I. '*A Long Way Gone*', (London, 2007), p.133.

perhaps the naïve foreigners thought that removing us from the war would lessen our hatred for the RUF (Revolutionary United Front). It hadn't crossed their minds that a change of environment wouldn't immediately make us normal boys; we were dangerous and brainwashed to kill.¹⁵⁷

Irina Kyulanova highlights how the complexities associated with the child soldier are often ignored at the demobilisation stage, she noted that 'while becoming a soldier is associated with the loss of childhood and the gain of maturity, withdrawal from military life is supposed to transform the young soldiers back into children.'¹⁵⁸ Although DDR centres provided medical aid, psychological support and reintegration assistance to former child soldiers, the staff tailored their responses and services to the 'vulnerable', 'kidnapped' child, as encouraged by the global humanitarian discourse. This alienated groups of child soldiers who had been placed in such centres and were confused as to why they had been removed from their position and demobilised whilst the war was ongoing.

Not only do those working within the global humanitarian discourse, such as NGOs and charities, focus on childhood being inherently linked to a period of protection and innocence, but their focus is centred on the Western discourse and rights associated with the Western concept of childhood. As Alison Watson notes, 'the childhood that they (NGOs) want to give back is the Western conception of childhood,'¹⁵⁹ this alienates the child and continues to deny the child a voice in which they can articulate their own needs during the DDR process. As children's voices are absent from post-conflict discussions, they are not counted as stakeholders in their own future due to the dominant discourse on the subject being rooted in a rights-based narrative. By not acknowledging the experiences of children

¹⁵⁷ Beah, I. *A Long Way Gone*, (London, 2007), p.135.

¹⁵⁸ Kyulanova, I. 'From Soldiers to Children: Undoing the Rite of Passage in Ishmael Beah's *A Long Way Gone* and Bernard Ashley's *Little Soldier*', *Studies in the Novel*, Volume: 42, No: 1 & 2, Spring and Summer 2010, p.30.

¹⁵⁹ Watson, A. 'The Child that Bombs Built', *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Volume: 27, No: 3, 2004, p.166.

who differ from the victim narrative suggests that the ‘generic account of ‘child soldiers’ in which the appalling experiences of one individual stands for all.’¹⁶⁰ By failing to acknowledge the contextual environment the child is a part of, and their agency, the individual needs of the child are often overlooked and expected norms embedded in Western global humanitarian discourse are placed upon them.

By adopting an ethnographic approach to research concerning children and armed conflict, it is possible build awareness and knowledge of this particular actor. Discussions with the former child soldier highlighted how children have a sense of agency regarding their motivations for enlisting in armed groups and conducting violence. This contradicts the narrative conveyed by those conforming to the global humanitarian discourse who suggest that the child lacks the agency to participate, therefore are exploited victims. Eugenia Kiesling highlighted that the global humanitarian discourse ‘fails to recognise that armed children are not victims of adult manipulation but thinking agents of their own destiny.’¹⁶¹ This is not to suggest that all children involved in armed conflict are free to make their own decisions or participate voluntarily; some children are forcibly recruited, whilst others volunteer as it is the best option available to them. Through ethnographic research with the child soldiers themselves, it is possible to determine that there are a wealth of narratives concerning the child involved in armed conflict which are not evident within the global humanitarian discourse.

3.6 Contemporary Conflicts and Challenges

Drawing together the various narratives associated with children and armed conflict helps to build awareness and broadens knowledge regarding the type of children involved in

¹⁶⁰ Hart, J. ‘Saving Children’ *Anthropology Today*, 2006, p.6.

¹⁶¹ Kiesling, E. ‘*Let the Children Kill*’, Review of Rosen, D. ‘*Armies of the Young: Child Soldiers in War and Terrorism*’, (Rutgers University Press, New Jersey, 2005), published for US Military Academy, January 2006, p.1.

armed conflict. This includes knowledge concerning the roles they play, motivations for their enrolment and conduct in war, and the regions they operate in. However, the varying narratives have also highlighted a number of challenges concerning the way knowledge is produced on the subject, and how these narratives can have implications in attempts to understand the role of children in contemporary conflict situations. This section will discuss these challenges, as well as highlighting the main concerns associated with the use of children in contemporary theatres of armed conflict.

By using an ethnographic approach, the voice of the child is able to be heard and it provides a rich insight into the child's motivations for enlisting in an armed group, and demonstrates a sense of awareness and agency for their own actions. However, many of the authors who partook in ethnographic research conducted interviews with former child soldiers who had served in Africa. This helped to perpetuate the notion that the 'child-soldier problem' was an African issue. Journalist Jimmie Briggs, who has written extensively on the subject of children involved in armed conflict, stated that 'the phenomenon of children in combat is not ... solely an issue in African countries, as many assume.'¹⁶² Images produced by humanitarian organisations, the media and NGOs to raise awareness of the issues surrounding the child involved in armed conflict tend to focus on the African context. During the elite interviews conducted with those working for NGOs, there were two main reasons presented as to why the African context continues to dominate their research and campaign literature. The first concerns access to different conflict regions, Jo Becker stated that

for years we said Burma has the largest number of child soldiers in the world, but it was a closed country, you couldn't get in...war was raging so pretty dangerous...same thing with the Tamil Tigers when the war was raging, it was pretty dangerous to go into Tamil territory so you know those images were really hard to get as well, so I think a lot of journalists if they ran a story they went for what was readily available which was images of kids from Africa.¹⁶³

¹⁶² Briggs, J. *Innocents Lost: When Child Soldiers go to War*, (Basic Books, New York, 2005), p. xii.

¹⁶³ Interview with Jo Becker, Human Rights Watch, New York City, April 2014, Interviewed by Michelle Jones, Aberystwyth University.

The other reason was based on the complexities involved with promoting narratives from other regions. The story of the abducted African child is one which is much easier to sell in terms of preserving a child's innocence, whereas the Afghan boy who believes in his religion, defending his family is a harder story to sell, as the narratives are more complicated.¹⁶⁴ However, progress is being made within the field to demonstrate the multitude of voices, roles and experiences belonging to the child. Jimmie Briggs conducted interviews in Rwanda, Columbia, Uganda and Afghanistan, opting for Afghanistan due to acknowledging the implications encountering these actors have for US soldiers.¹⁶⁵ The conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan have pushed certain academics in the West to acknowledge that children exist in an operational landscape different to the African context, which not only needs to be discussed because of its contextual relevance but because of the implications for Western forces when operating in the vicinity of these child actors. Discussions about children's involvement in theatres of armed conflict has been dominated by research, campaign literature, and popular culture media focusing on the African perspective. However, the use of children in armed conflict is not limited to a geographical area, and a challenge within the field is to acknowledge the diversity of regions, experiences and motivations, in which children are involved to build a comprehensive understanding of the subject.

The images presented by the global humanitarian discourse also need to be interrogated as they do not necessarily offer an accurate depiction of the child associated with armed conflict, or the needs of such actors. NGO literature and imagery suggests that children involved in armed conflict are quite young, with many campaign posters depicting a child around the age of ten, often male, carrying an AK-47 and deemed to be a frontline fighter,

¹⁶⁴ Interview with representative attributable to a policy organisation working within the field of children and armed conflict, New York City, April 2014, Interviewed by Michelle Jones, Aberystwyth University.

¹⁶⁵ Briggs, J. *Innocents Lost*, (New York, 2005).

whilst being set in the African context. The focus of these narratives rests on the loss of innocence, loss of childhood, and the forced recruitment or kidnapping of the child by adult actors. However, as the ethnographic research suggests, children have a greater degree of agency than presented in these cases, and there exists a range of motivational factors as to why a child becomes involved with an armed group. Mark Drumbl highlighted that a contradiction existed between academic research on the subject and the images presented by humanitarian organisations, he noted that most of the children operating in conflict situations are aged between 15 and 17, many of whom have volunteered and do not operate in a front-line capacity.¹⁶⁶ Drumbl suggested that by creating this passive, innocent victim who lacked a voice to tell his own story; humanitarian groups, policy makers and those working within the field are missing the opportunity to provide relevant solutions to address the problems as acknowledged by the child experiencing them. By ignoring the voice of the child, organisations are providing support and assistance based on their own presumptions of the child's needs, which are heavily embedded within narratives associated with the Western concept of childhood. These may not be relevant to the child seeking assistance and support, therefore it is important to include discussions with the child regarding their own needs in the demobilisation and reintegration process.

The use of ethnographic research highlights how children can have agency and awareness with regard to the decisions made concerning their enlistment into, and conduct as, part of an armed group. Whilst the *voluntary* nature of 'voluntary recruitment' needs to be acknowledged, it still demonstrates how the child had the agency to make a choice from a wider set of alternatives. This contradicts the notion inferred by the global humanitarian discourse that children are the innocent victims of adult manipulation. Therefore, the notion

¹⁶⁶ Drumbl, M. '*Reimagining Child Soldiers in International Law and Policy*', (Oxford University Press, New York, 2012).

that children involved in armed conflict situations can be both victims *and* perpetrators will be recognised within this thesis. This is not to suggest that all children participate voluntarily; but that the reasons for recruitment and motivations for partaking in hostilities are diverse, with no monolithic tale attributable to the role of children in theatres of armed conflict. This thesis recognises that there is a diverse range of motivations and experiences concerning the child involved or associated with armed conflict.

Happold, whilst commenting on the role of international law and the child soldier, suggested that the public need to be aware that these children are victims of human rights abuses but that they are also violators.¹⁶⁷ Although children associated with armed conflict have a dual identity, many of the narratives produced by the media and within popular culture focus on the child as either a victim *or* a perpetrator. This is evident within recent popular culture media in which film narratives depict the children or child as either innocent victims *or* evil protagonists. Child soldiers portrayed in films such as *Blood Diamond*¹⁶⁸ and *Beasts of No Nation*¹⁶⁹ are shown to be kidnapped and abused, often being depicted as helpless victims with the film showing their journey as a soldier embedded in an emotional and tragic narrative. If the child is shown to be a dangerous actor, it is often under duress or the direction of an adult. The film *American Sniper*¹⁷⁰ shows a young male child carrying an RPG towards an American patrol in Iraq, with a focus on the decision-making process of the sniper. However, the build up to the event on screen shows the young boy being handed the grenade and pushed out of a doorway by an adult, reducing the child's agency and demonising the enemy for using the child in such a way.

¹⁶⁷ Happold, M., '*Child Soldiers in International Law*', (Manchester, 2005), p.2.

¹⁶⁸ '*Blood Diamond*', Directed by Edward Zwick, (Bedford Falls Production, 2006).

¹⁶⁹ '*Beasts of No Nation*', Directed by Cary Joji Fukunga, (Bleeker Street Films, 2015).

¹⁷⁰ '*American Sniper*', Director Clint Eastwood, (Warner Brothers, 2014).

The film *Hurt Locker*¹⁷¹ is one of the few cinematic productions that causes the audience to question the role of the child. The protagonist, a bomb disposal expert, forms a relationship with a young local boy who sells DVDs at a US base in Iraq; it is questionable whether the child is legitimately attempting to earn a living or being used by the enemy to gather intelligence. However, the protagonist is later called to a body bomb, in which the bomb has been placed inside the child. The sense of loss over the death of a child is a theme, despite the questionable nature of the role of the child in befriending the American soldiers. However, it is the recent film *Eye in the Sky*¹⁷² which acknowledges how the presence of children can have strategic and psychological implications for military forces. The film follows the decision-making process concerned with conducting an attack via a drone on a target in Kenya. Having noticed that a young child is present, and likely to be injured by the strike, the drone pilot hesitates and seeks further clarification before engaging. Again, the child in this narrative is an innocent, a young girl selling bread. Within popular culture, such as literature and films, children lack a dual identity and can only be classified with one status or the other, as Happold notes ‘child soldiers have been stereotyped as either feral children, amoral and dangerous or the innocent and helpless victims of adult wiles.’¹⁷³ To date, the child as both a victim *and* perpetrator has yet to be acknowledged or presented in mainstream media narratives.

Another challenge concerning the topic of children in armed conflict arises from the roles associated with the actor. The historical narrative demonstrated that children have always been present in conflict zones, either in support or combatant roles, yet the role of the child has now evolved to include the child participating in a terror attack or as a suicide bomber. It is the use of children by terrorist organisations or violent extremist groups that is

¹⁷¹ *The Hurt Locker*, Director Kathryn Bigelow, (Lions Gate Home Entertainment, UK, 2008).

¹⁷² *Eye in the Sky*, Director Gavin Hood, (Bleeker Street Media, USA, 2016).

¹⁷³ Happold, M., *Child Soldiers in International Law*, (Manchester, 2005), p.1.

possibly the biggest advancement and concern in the twenty-first century. Although the Tamil Tigers used children within their organisation as suicide bombers in the 1970s and 1980s, it was seen as an isolated case.¹⁷⁴ However, the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan have shown a worrying trend of children partaking in this type of role or being used to handle and plant explosives.¹⁷⁵ In 2007, the head of MI5 spoke about the use of children in Afghanistan, claiming that ‘they are radicalising, indoctrinating and grooming young vulnerable people to carry out acts of terrorism. This year we have seen individuals as young as 15 and 16 implicated in terrorist-related activity.’¹⁷⁶ Children are used by terrorist organisations to deliver or plant explosives, proving advantageous in their role as they are less likely to be stopped and searched. Singer highlights that ‘children offer terrorist group leaders cheap and easy recruits, who provide new options to strike at their foes.’¹⁷⁷ He suggests that ‘captured Al Qaeda training videos reveal young boys receiving instruction in the manufacturing of bombs and the setting of explosive booby traps.’¹⁷⁸ John Sullivan showed that ‘child terrorists have been employed by several groups, including Al-Qaeda, Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, Ejercito de Liberacion Nacional (ELN), FARC [Fuerzas Armadas

¹⁷⁴ For further information, please see, Somasundaram, D. ‘Child Soldiers: Understanding the Context’, *British Medical Journal*, Volume: 324, 2002, p.1268-71., and Wade, M. ‘Kill or be Killed: 11 year olds forced to fight for Tamil Tigers’, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 5th May 2009, taken from <http://www.smh.com.au/world/kill-or-be-killed-11-year-olds-forced-to-fight-for-tamil-tigers-20090504-asm4.html>, accessed on 3rd June 2016, np.

¹⁷⁵ For further information, please see, ‘Afghanistan: Taliban should stop using children as suicide bombers’ Human Rights Watch, 31st August 2011, taken from <https://www.hrw.org/news/2011/08/31/afghanistan-taliban-should-stop-using-children-suicide-bombers>, accessed on 3rd June 2016., and Farmer, B. ‘Afghan Boy Suicide Bombers tell how they are brainwashed into believing they will survive’, *The Telegraph*, 13th January 2012, taken from <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/afghanistan/9014282/Afghan-boy-suicide-bombers-tell-how-they-are-brainwashed-into-believing-they-will-survive.html>, accessed on 3rd June 2016., and ‘Human Rights Report’, United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq, 1st July – 31st December 2007, taken from http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/IQ/double_quarterly_1july-31dec2007_engl.pdf, accessed on 12th May 2015.

¹⁷⁶ Evans, M. and Webster, P. ‘Children of 15 groomed to carry out terrorist attacks, MI5 Head says’, *The Times*, 6th November 2007, taken from www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/uk/article2810656.ece, accessed on 12th December 2012.

¹⁷⁷ Singer, P. ‘*Children at War*’, (USA, 2005), p. 105.

¹⁷⁸ Singer, P. ‘*Children at War*’, (USA, 2005), p. 106.

Revolucionarias de Colombia or the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Columbia] and LTTE [Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam].'¹⁷⁹

However, it is the use of children as suicide bombers by groups such as ISIS (Islamic State in Iraq and Syria) and Boko Haram that provide a challenge to international organisations. Although children have been used as suicide bombers by the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka, and against Western forces in the recent conflicts in Afghanistan (post- 2001) and Iraq (post- 2003), the trend by Boko Haram and ISIS to kidnap women and children to use for suicide missions is unprecedented.¹⁸⁰ In May 2016, the UN reported that 1 in 5 recorded suicide bombing incidents by Boko Haram involved a child.¹⁸¹ Using children as suicide bombers has two key advantages; the first is that even with an explosive vest attached, military or security actors are likely to hesitate; the second is psychological, the fear factor associated with a weapon with human attributes, especially when affiliated with the innocence of childhood, can have implications for personnel. Therefore, the contemporary use of children as suicide bombers represents a clear departure from the historical roles of children, especially by groups who forcibly recruit and kidnap minors for the role. This presents a challenge for those working in the same regions as these organisations, who need to provide support and security to the local population and potentially deal with the threat of such violence.

Within the elite interviews conducted with those working in the field of children and armed conflict, a number of challenges and concerns regarding the future of the topic and the

¹⁷⁹ Sullivan, J. 'Child Soldiers: Despair, Barbarization and Conflict', *Air & Space Power Journal*, 2008, p.5.

¹⁸⁰ Please see, 'Syrian Arab Republic', Report of the Secretary-General to the Security Council, 5th June 2015, Office of the Special Representative to the Secretary General for Children and Armed Conflict, A/69/926–S/2015/409, taken from <https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/countries/syria/>, accessed on 2nd June 2016, np., and Iaccino, L. 'ISIS Urging Nigeria's Boko Haram to stop using children as suicide bombers, claims US Military', *International Business Times*, 22nd June 2016, taken from <http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/isis-urging-nigerias-boko-haram-stop-using-children-suicide-bombers-claims-us-military-1566935>, accessed on 28th June 2016, np.

¹⁸¹ Jeffreys, A. 'Nearly one in five suicide bombers used by Boko Haram is now a child- says UN', *UN News Centre*, 16th May 2016, taken from <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=53949#.V3gh-fkrLIU>, accessed on 2nd June 2016, np.

role of children became apparent. Such information emerged organically from discussions with those working for humanitarian organisation, NGOs, or as researchers in the field, and were not prompted by the interviewer. One interviewee highlighted the biggest concern facing NGOs is how to ensure the recruitment of children is seen as a liability.¹⁸² It was acknowledged that children offered a specific set of advantages to armed groups, such as not being searched at checkpoints, cheap labour, or not being fired upon. Therefore, in order to limit the use of children in conflict zones the advantages of using children in such a way would have to be removed. Another challenge was also highlighted regarding the attempt to eradicate the use of children in armed conflict. One interviewee noted that,

commanders who use child soldiers in Sri Lanka and Columbia and other places they do digest the media as well, so I think there has been recognition that it is not good for their image to have those pictures or images on frontlines in their struggles....they find other roles for them...or use them very strategically.¹⁸³

They highlighted that whilst current media campaigns have blacklisted organisations and armed groups who use children, it has not necessarily halted the recruitment of children. Rather these groups have been forced to use children in different ways or hidden their use of children, which has made it difficult for humanitarian organisations to gain access to these children to conduct research or to provide assistance. Difficulties concerning access to children in certain regions has already been discussed, yet Jo Becker makes a valid point that not being able to access children in particular conflicts or who are part of particular armed groups can limit the potential for research and knowledge in the field.¹⁸⁴

A common theme across a number of the interviews was the increased use of children as suicide bombers. This worrying trend was acknowledged, with most of the interviewees

¹⁸² Interview with representative attributable to a policy organisation working within the field of children and armed conflict, New York City, April 2014, Interviewed by Michelle Jones, Aberystwyth University.

¹⁸³ Interview with Jimmie Briggs, Journalist and Author of *'Innocents Lost: When Child Soldiers go to War'*, (Basic Books, New York, 2005), New York City, April 2014, Interviewed by Michelle Jones, Aberystwyth University.

¹⁸⁴ Interview with Jo Becker, Human Rights Watch, New York City, April 2014, Interviewed by Michelle Jones, Aberystwyth University.

who commented on the subject making references to their use in the recent conflict in Afghanistan (2001-14). One interviewee noted that, ‘in Afghanistan the use of children to commit suicide bombings has been because being children they are less suspicious.’¹⁸⁵ Again, this refers back to the point made by an NGO representative that in order to eradicate children from conflict zones, the advantageous reasons for using them must be removed. Another interviewee highlighted that the use of children as suicide bombers represented a challenge for those seeking to remove children from hostilities, as well as being able to provide protection for peacekeepers working in the same region. The need to create advice and documents for peacekeepers which was operational in its language was important. Such information needed to be understood and bear relevance to their missions.¹⁸⁶ As these interviews were conducted in spring 2014, groups such as ISIS and Boko Haram had yet to receive the same level of media attention as they do today, therefore these groups were not mentioned during the discussions.

The images used by NGOs and the media was also raised as a concern by some interviewees. One NGO representative highlighted that severe images (images showing very young children or depicting violent acts) were used to show the extremities of the problem. This way advocacy groups were more likely to get attention, receive funding and get justice.¹⁸⁷ However, they acknowledged that the images shown are not necessarily untruthful, but that images are chosen to achieve a greater emotional impact and response from their audiences. A similar narrative emerged during an interview with another NGO representative who suggested that the images used in campaigns was quite simple and did not represent the

¹⁸⁵ Interview with Jeremie Labbe, Research Fellow at International Peace Institute (IPI), New York City, April 2014, Interviewed by Michelle Jones, Aberystwyth University.

¹⁸⁶ Interview with UN Government Representative, New York City, April 2014, Interviewed by Michelle Jones, Aberystwyth University.

¹⁸⁷ Interview with Anonymous (2) NGO Representative, New York City, April 2014, Interviewed by Michelle Jones, Aberystwyth University.

complexities involved. The interviewee suggested that these images are used because it is assumed that the audience would not be able to understand or handle the far more complex issues concerning children's involvement in armed conflict.¹⁸⁸ The need to produce campaign images which focus on the diversity of issues concerning children's involvement in armed conflict is needed; however, the challenge exists as to how to do this whilst still appealing to their audiences. Another interviewee acknowledged that work conducted by humanitarian organisations did not incorporate the wide range of combat experiences and motivations held by all children. They noted that only children who fitted into the narrative concerning kidnap or forced recruitment would access help and support. This meant that these organisations only had experience working with, and understood the conflict experiences of, one particular narrative concerning children involved in armed conflict. The interviewee noted that 'these young people are not likely to claim that they made a choice to fight or to commit atrocities as such admissions could affect their chances of being accepted back into society and getting help.'¹⁸⁹ This discussion acknowledges the social navigation framework outlined by Denov and Buccitelli, which suggests that children have the agency to develop strategies so that they may tactfully claim victim status to ensure access to DDR programmes and to seek help.¹⁹⁰ The interviews conducted with those working within the field of children and armed conflict highlight what they perceive to be the main challenges regarding children's involvement in contemporary armed conflict situations. The examples used are not meant to be representative, but have been included to provide an insight into the subject area.

¹⁸⁸ Interview with Anonymous (3) NGO Representative, New York City, April 2014, Interviewed by Michelle Jones, Aberystwyth University.

¹⁸⁹ Interview with Anonymous (1) NGO Representative, New York City, April 2014, Interviewed by Michelle Jones, Aberystwyth University.

¹⁹⁰ Denov, M. and Buccitelli, A. 'Navigating Crisis and Chronicity in the Everyday: Former Child Soldiers in Urban Sierra Leone', *International Journal of Security and Development*, Volume: 2, No: 2, 2013, p.1-18.

3.7 Conclusion

Discussions involving the roles and issues associated with children's presence in theatres of armed conflict are embedded within the global humanitarian discourse, in which the child is presented as an exploited victim. However, this thesis seeks to counter the claims that a 'child soldier phenomenon' is in existence, instead it relies upon historical sources and ethnographic research to build a more critical and comprehensive understanding of the child present in conflict zones. Academics such as Brocklehurst¹⁹¹ and Watson¹⁹² recognise that discussions about the child are often missing from the fields of international relations and security studies. Brocklehurst, in particular, has sought to introduce the concept of the child as a non-traditional security issue into the field of security studies. Therefore, it is hoped that this thesis will contribute towards the small but growing literature within security studies that recognises the agency of the child and their ability to be a potential security challenge.

In order to acknowledge how the presence of children in theatres of armed conflict can affect British military personnel and their operations, it is important to have a clear understanding of the type of actor they may have to face. The global humanitarian discourse has helped to increase awareness concerning the topic, which has resulted in a number of legal frameworks and initiatives implemented which seek to end the use and recruitment of children in conflict zones, as well as providing support and assistance to former child soldiers. However, this discourse presents the topic of children associated with armed conflict in a one-dimensional manner, in which the child is represented as an exploited victim of war. Any awareness or agency associated with the child regarding their enlistment or motivations for taking part are absent from this narrative. Whilst NGOs may have the best interests of the

¹⁹¹ Brocklehurst, H. *'Who's Afraid of Children?'*, (England, 2006).

¹⁹² Watson, A. 'Children and International Relations: A New Site of Knowledge?', *Review of International Studies*, Volume: 32, No: 2, 2006, p.237-250.

child at heart, their methods of raising awareness can inadvertently cause harm. The child who seeks assistance may not access such programmes as they feel they do not belong to the 'victim' child category, or the help they do receive may not be tailored to their needs.

Creating the innocent child soldier image detracts from the multitude of experiences these actors face, it denies them a voice to articulate their needs, and creates a one-dimensional view of the topic. These organisations attribute the expected characteristics associated with the Western concept of childhood to children in different regions of the world, ignoring the child's own cultural perspectives and narratives concerning their employment in armed groups.

However, the historical and ethnographic narratives provide a broader understanding of the roles of children, the regions they operate in, and motivations for partaking in conflict. These narratives contradict the notion that a 'child soldier phenomenon' is in existence by drawing upon historical examples to demonstrate that children have always been present in theatres of armed conflict, and that they have conducted both support and combatant roles. Those who conducted ethnographic research on the subject of children's involvement in armed conflict have produced a narrative which demonstrates that children have the ability to make rational choices regarding their recruitment and motivations for taking up arms. As previously mentioned, this does not suggest that all children who partake in armed conflict volunteer or share the same experiences. However, the emergence of ethnographic data on the subject highlights the range of divergent experiences held by children which offer a different insight to the narrative imposed by humanitarian organisations. Some children may be forced to participate, others may volunteer as a means of survival, whilst others may actively seek to enlist in armed groups. Whatever the motivations, the incorporation of historical and ethnographic narratives provides an alternative method to view and understand the topic of children associated with armed conflict.

Having acknowledged that children can participate voluntarily, this thesis recognises that children associated with armed conflict can be both victims *and* perpetrators. The child involved in armed conflict can be a victim due to the way in which they have been recruited or used by the enemy force. Due to perceptions about the Western concept of childhood, it is possible to view the child as morally innocent due to their status as a child, yet physically non-innocent due to their role as a combatant. Or the child can be viewed as a perpetrator, due to their conduct during hostilities. By accepting that children involved in armed conflict can be both victims *and* perpetrators, this thesis recognises the complexities involved in the subject and does not ally itself to one particular narrative, rather it recognises that the various narratives associated with children's involvement in armed conflict can provide important contributions to the formulation of knowledge on the subject.

Drawing together the information provided in the various narratives, it is possible to build a detailed picture of the child associated with armed conflict. The Paris Principles highlighted that child soldiers can be either male or female, and there is no evidence that the different sexes adopt different roles within the conflict environment. The child can be used for sexual purposes, front line combat duties, and in support roles, regardless of their gender. Although the humanitarian narrative focuses on the role of child soldiers in the African context, it is important to acknowledge that children can be present in conflict situations anywhere in the world. Children can also be present in both urban and rural settings. Whilst tales from Sierra Leone and Uganda recount stories of living and fighting in the jungle,¹⁹³ children also participate in urban environments, for example Iraq and Syria. The issue concerning children's involvement in armed conflict situations is not just limited to one environment, or regional landscape. The types of organisations and groups the child can be

¹⁹³ For further information, please see, Beah, I. *'A Long Way Gone'*, (London, 2007), and Jal, E. *'War Child'*, (Great Britain, 2010).

associated with are also varied; however, non-state armed groups and terrorist organisations remain the largest recruiters of children below the age of 18. Children can be employed in a combatant or auxiliary role. The child can be used as a fighter, a suicide bomber, a spy, to plant explosives, or to act as a minesweeper. They can also be used to provide camp duties, for sexual services, to courier items through checkpoints, act as a messenger, or to manufacture weapons.

However, it is important to note that children can also be used by groups due to the tactical advantage the child offers. Children can be used inadvertently by armed groups in the role of human shields, or to courier items unknowingly. The growing trend by Boko Haram and ISIS to use kidnapped children to conduct suicide bombing missions is an example where the child is an active participant, but not directly recruited or employed by the armed group. Through the ethnographic research conducted, it has been possible to examine the range of motivations a child has for partaking in armed conflict. Some are forced to fight; they can be kidnapped by recruiters or may have volunteered for service as a means of survival. Others choose to participate due to religious, political or nationalist sentiments. By extracting data and experiences from the narratives associated with children and armed conflict, it is possible to build a detailed understanding of the child actor. This section has highlighted the various roles they play, motivations for taking part, and regions in which they operate in order to provide a wider understanding of the child actor, rather than reliance on the narrative perpetuated by the 'child soldier phenomenon'.

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of the topic concerning children and armed conflict, in order to contribute an understanding as to the type of actor that could be present within the same operational landscape as the British soldier. Although children may not be trained to the same sophisticated level as the professional soldier, their presence on the battlefield can still be effective. The child combatant can incite fear, and due to the

evolution of small arms, are more than capable of firing a weapon effectively. Children provide certain advantages over adult soldiers, therefore can be used to carry out duties such as; couriering items through checkpoints, watching military patrols, or distracting soldiers. They can also be used for tasks such as minesweeping or carrying out suicide bombing missions. This chapter recommends that a more ethnographic lens is needed to understand the status of the child actor, who has the potential to be both a victim *and* a perpetrator. Although the child may lose physical innocence due to their role as a combatant, theoretical assumptions about the child which are deeply rooted in the Western concept of childhood suggest that the child can still be viewed as a morally innocent character. This can lead to an ethical or moral dilemma for the professional soldier, and it is this dichotomy that will be examined in the fifth chapter of this thesis, *Children Associated with Armed Conflict: The Soldier's Perspective*. It is important for those operating and working in the same environment as the hostile child actor to recognise the diverse, complex role they play and the potential ethical and moral dilemma their presence brings to the conflict situation.

Therefore, the aim of the following two chapters is to acknowledge how the British soldier encounters the child in theatres of armed conflict, drawing upon their own experiences to provide an overview of the various roles children have played. This will also provide an ethnographic insight into the roles children can conduct in theatres of armed conflict, from the perspective of the British soldier. As this chapter, has demonstrated, children can be *exposed to* or *involved* in theatres of armed conflict in a multitude of ways and have the ability to pose a lethal threat; therefore, the remainder of this thesis seeks to analyse how the British Army responds to such an actor, and how the presence of the child can affect British military operations, and the attitudes and practices of the individual British soldier. The following chapter will introduce the British Army as an organisation, in order to understand the type of institution the British soldier belongs to. The chapter will then analyse the British

Army's relationship with children, both British children and the children they encounter when deployed on overseas operations. Using a top-down perspective, this chapter seeks to gather information and analyse the organisational perspective of the British Army, regarding the potential interactions their personnel may have with children in theatres of armed conflict. It will draw upon literature provided by the British Army and MoD to determine what training and guidelines the British soldier receives concerning the topic of interacting and encountering children in conflict zones.

Chapter Four

The British Army and Children in Armed Conflict

4.1 Introduction

The United Kingdom (UK) is ranked fifth in the world in terms of its military strength.¹ It has a reputation for strong military capabilities, a history of military successes, and experience in force projection. Whilst military strength encompasses all three services (army, navy and air force), it is the British Army that continues to provide the bulk of British war-fighting capability in terms of manpower. As of mid-2015, official figures indicated that the total number of armed forces personnel (trained and untrained) stood at 196,690.² The Army has 120,490 personnel in its ranks, compared to 37,000 in the Royal Air Force (RAF) and 38,200 in the Royal Navy (RN).³ Today, despite technological advancements relevant to air and sea power, land forces remain a key component of any fighting force. As most battles continue to be fought on land, governments around the world are keen to place resource and manpower emphasis on their armies. Fighting on land, the British Army is the service most likely to encounter enemy combatants at close quarters and to interact with the local civilian population. This means that deployed members of the British Army are more likely than personnel from the RAF or RN to encounter and interact with children in conflict zones.

As a military organization entrenched in the Western tradition, how does the British Army approach the subject of operating amongst, and potentially encountering children in

¹ 'Chapter Two: Comparative Defence Statistics', *The Military Balance*, International Institute for Strategic Studies, Volume: 115, No: 1, February 2015, p.21.

² Berman, G. and Rutherford, T. 'Defence Personnel Statistics', SN/SG/02183, House of Commons Briefing Paper, published 19th September 2013, taken from www.parliament.uk/briefing-papers/sn02183.pdf, accessed on 3rd December 2013, np.

³ 'UK Armed Forces Quarter Personnel Report', Ministry of Defence, London, 14th May 2015, taken from https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/426880/QPR_Apr2015.pdf, accessed on 28th June 2015, np.

such a hostile environment? As this chapter will show, there is a lack of publicly available literature to determine how the British Army react and respond to such an issue. The 2011 NATO report *Child Soldiers as the Opposing Force* discovered that ‘the literature search by the British MoD in 2006 on the consequences of facing child soldiers has uncovered very little data relating specifically to the psychological impact of child soldiers on armed forces personnel.’⁴ Through my own research project I conducted a similar literature review, focusing specifically on the British experience, and discovered that even a decade later there was little publicly available data. Three ‘freedom of information’ (FOI) requests⁵ were also submitted to the MoD in relation to the subject, each response provided basic information concerning the situation of the child actor in relation to military doctrine and soldiers’ training, but nothing specific or related to the child as a potential hostile actor. To understand the challenge of encountering children for British Army personnel it is important to analyse the relationship between the organisation and children.

This chapter examines the British Army’s relationship with children from an organisational perspective and will be relevant to those seeking to understand more about British military culture. This chapter hopes to contribute to existing literature within the field of military studies as it examines the formation of the British Army as a professional fighting force, the culture of the organisation, and the organisation’s relationship with children. Using a macro-level or top-down approach is useful to examine the outlook of the organisation itself in relation to the topic of children in armed conflict and the guidance it provides to its personnel. This information will contribute to the organisational or official narrative provided

⁴ ‘*Child Soldiers as the Opposing Force*’, NATO TM-HFM-159, January 2011, taken from https://www.cso.nato.int/ACTIVITY_META.asp?ACT=1416, accessed on 28th September 2012, p. ES-1.

⁵ *Freedom of Information Response FOI2015/02562*, received on 13th April 2015, no URL available; *Freedom of Information Response FOI2015/07194*, received on 8th September 2015, taken from https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/460424/PDFSCANS_Document_1.pdf; *Freedom of Information Response FOI2015/08438*, received on 1st October 2015, taken from https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/467733/20151002-FOI2015_08438_REDACTED-U.pdf.

by the British Army. The chapter contains an overview of the literature and training methods the British Army are currently utilising and providing their soldiers. This will provide a contextual understanding as to the British soldier's comprehension of the issue which can be used to analyse their experiences and attitudes in chapter five, *Children Associated with Armed Conflict: The Soldier's Perspective*. Firstly, it is important to consider the role of the British Army and its evolution as a fighting and peacekeeping force. The chapter will trace the creation of the British Army, providing a historical background to its formation, evolution and ethos which gives an insight into the organisation itself, its traditions, outlook and approaches. This provides a contextual understanding as to the type of organisation the British soldier belongs to, including the ethos and attitudes they are expected to conform to when operating on the battlefield. The chapter will then examine the British Army's relationship with children, both within its own military community and with children in theatres of armed conflict. This section will attempt to build an understanding of the position of children within the British Army narrative; examining the use of images within its own advertisements and any narratives associated with children, as produced by the organisation themselves.

Although this thesis is concerned with British soldiers encountering children in conflict zones, the current discussions concerning the recruitment of under-18s will also be acknowledged briefly. The campaign for the United Kingdom to raise their recruitment age to 18 is led by the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers⁶ and it is important to include the perspective of the British Army in debates concerning the use of children by military forces, including their own recruitment methods. Finally, this chapter will examine the guidelines

⁶ Although the campaign to raise the minimum recruitment age to 18 was established by the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, the organisation changed its name to Child Soldiers International in 2011. Although they are the same organisation, the title of the organisation will be referred to interchangeably within this thesis when making reference to published documents depending on the name of the organisation at the point of publication.

and training materials produced by the British Army in order to understand its current position concerning its interactions with non-British children when deployed overseas.

4.2 The British Army as an Organisation

In order to analyse the organisation's response and attitudes to the issue of children being present in theatres of armed conflict, it is important to understand the type of organisation and its ethos. The British Army website contains the following definition of the organisation stating that

The British Army is made up of Regulars who work full time and Reservists who work in their spare time. The British Army is actively engaged in operational duties across the globe. The work we do ranges from peacekeeping to providing humanitarian aid, from enforcing anti-terrorism measures to helping combat the international drugs trade.⁷

This provides the reader with information concerning its personnel composition and the range of roles they conduct. However, the British Army as an organisation has undergone significant transformations since its formal origins (as the standing army of England) in 1689.⁸ Whilst 1689 was the year of the official Parliamentary authorisation 'it is, strictly speaking, only correct to refer to the British Army from the Act of Union with Scotland in 1707.'⁹ The identity and culture that is associated with the British Army today only began to be formed in the 1870s. Prior to this time, the Army had had an uneasy relationship with a British population that feared soldiers' involvement in civil affairs. Such fear is attributable, for example, to the Army's harsh repression of the Chartists in the 1830s and of other political protest movements.¹⁰ During this time, the Army also attracted considerable attention, with popular opinion tiring of stories of drunkenness and loose morals often

⁷ 'What is the British Army', taken from www.army.mod.uk/home, accessed on 2nd December 2013, np.

⁸ For further information concerning the establishment of the British Army as an official organisation please see Beckett, I. and Chandler, D. 'The Oxford History of the British Army', (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1994) and French, D. 'Military Identities: The Regimental System, the British Army and the British People c.1870-2000', (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2005).

⁹ Beckett, I. and Chandler, D. 'The Oxford History of the British Army', (Oxford, 1994), p. xv.

¹⁰ Streets, H. 'Martial Races: The Military, Race and Masculinity in British Imperial Culture, 1857-1914', (Manchester University Press, Manchester 2004), p.21.

associated with garrison towns.¹¹ The reforms of the 1870s helped to restructure the British Army and to create an institution with traditions and values that continue to resonate strongly with British society today.¹²

The Cardwell-Childers Reform created the regimental system which ensured that every regiment within the British Army had a permanent depot within a geographically defined recruiting area. This was designed to create a relationship between the British Army and the local community. It was believed that

a soldier serving in his local regiment, (who) knew that in a few short years he would be returning to his local community, ... would be careful of his conduct lest bad reports got back to his friends and family and damaged his prospects when he returned to civilian life.¹³

The regimental system helped to instil a sense of pride and camaraderie amongst groups of soldiers. Sporting events were organised in which local regiments formed teams and competed for trophies and prizes. Local museums were established based on the regiment's own history and successes, which continue to hold specialist documents and archives today. The pride attached to the regimental system was important in forming the British Army's identity and the recent disbandment and amalgamation of regiments was met with dismay by many serving and former soldiers.¹⁴ Allan Mallinson, a British Army historian, acknowledged the importance of regimental identity and the effect of the changes in the twenty-first century when 'the cull and reorganisation of 2006 left only one county

¹¹ Please see Berkovich, I. 'Discipline and Control in Eighteenth Century Europe', taken from Linch, K and McCormack, M. ed. *Britain's Soldiers: Rethinking War and Society, 1715-1815*, (Liverpool University Press, Liverpool, 2014), and Strachan, H. *Wellington's Legacy: The Reform of the British Army, 1830-1854*, (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1984).

¹² Please see French, D. *Military Identities*, (Oxford, 2005), and Strachan, H. *Wellington's Legacy*, (Manchester, 1984).

¹³ French, D. *Military Identities*, (Oxford, 2005), p.15.

¹⁴ For further information please see Harding, T. 'Entire Army Battalions to be disbanded, memo discloses', *The Telegraph*, 24th July 2011, taken from <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/defence/8657833/Military-cuts-Entire-Army-battalions-to-be-disbanded-memo-discloses.html>, accessed on 28th June 2015, and Wilkins, L. 'Why do Regiments Matter?', *BBC News*, 6th December 2004, taken from <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/4049875.stm>, accessed on 28th June 2015.

name in the whole of the army as the regiments disappeared into ‘regional’ – or, in the case of Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales, national – multi-battalion groupings.’¹⁵

At the birth of the regimental system, the British Army also improved soldiers’ living standards and accommodation, and it sought, as an organization, to instil in all officers and men (women were not permitted to enlist) a common set of beliefs, standards and procedures. This included a unified set of values¹⁶ which are expected to be adhered to, with limited room afforded to initiative and individualism. Rather, the Army sought to highlight that, by ‘taking the King’s shilling’; the soldier was expected to conform to the British Army ‘way of life’. From 1871, officers were commissioned on the basis of an individual’s skill and merit rather than his ability to purchase a commission. This reform enhanced recruitment of officers from non-wealthy sections of society, fostered closer relations between personnel, and the army became more meritocratic. Mallinson highlighted the benefits of removing the purchase system, stating that ‘there was a marked increase in ‘field promotion’ – promotion without purchase as reward for merit, or in strict seniority to fill dead men’s boots.’¹⁷

The First World War (1914-18) and the Second World War (1939-45) resulted in further changes to the British Army’s organisational structure. At the beginning of the First World War there were effectively three armies operating under the umbrella of the ‘British Army’: the Regular Army and the Territorial Army (frequently known as the British Expeditionary Force or BEF), an army comprised of volunteers from Kitchener’s campaign¹⁸, and the third formed of conscripts¹⁹. As the First World War progressed, ‘rapid expansion threw together volunteers from all occupations and classes, changing the army’s social

¹⁵ Mallinson, A. *The Making of the British Army: From the English Civil War to the War on Terror*, (Transworld Publishers, Great Britain, 2009), p.139.

¹⁶ Further discussion of the Values and Standards of the British soldier will be acknowledged later in this chapter under the section 4.3 entitled ‘British Army in the Twenty-First Century’.

¹⁷ Mallinson, A. *The Making of the British Army*, (Great Britain, 2009), p.138.

¹⁸ The Kitchener campaign was led by Horatio Kitchener, Secretary of State for War, and sought to create a new section comprised of men who volunteered their services due to the outbreak of hostilities in 1914.

¹⁹ Conscription was introduced in January 1916.

composition beyond all recognition.’²⁰ The differing social composition of personnel also helped to vary their support network and relations with British society. Technological progress made during the war and the birth of the Royal Air Force²¹, cemented the notion that Britain must continue to invest in and develop its armed forces even in times of peace. Although the number of British soldiers decreased in the 1930s, the Army continued to be deployed overseas and received experience in many regions of the British Empire before participating in the Second World War.²² This war had more far-reaching consequences for the British Army as an organisation. In the years that followed, colonial unrest required the British Government to maintain a large standing army, but the high death toll from the Second World War had reduced the pool of potential recruits. ‘National Service’ was seen as the solution, and in 1948 the British Army changed again; from an organisation exclusively for those who wanted employment in a military institution to one in which, for some, membership was compulsory as a consequence of one’s British citizenship, however unlike conscription which was introduced in January 1916, the UK were not involved in a large scale conflict.²³ By 1960, National Service had ended and the British Army had begun resuming its status as an all-volunteer professional organisation.²⁴ The British Armed Forces was seen as a viable career option for many school leavers choosing to ‘enlist for adventure,

²⁰ Simkins, P. ‘The Four Armies 1914-18’, taken from Beckett, I. and Chandler, D. ed. *The Oxford History of the British Army*, (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1994), p.248.

²¹ The Royal Air Force introduced the boy entrant scheme in the 1930s. This scheme allowed boys between the ages of 15 and 17.5 to learn a trade within the RAF. The British Army and Royal Navy did not have a similar scheme. For further information, please see Carlin, B. *Boy Entrant: The Recollections of a Royal Air Force Brat*, (Kindle Edition, Lulu Press, USA, 2006), and ‘*New Permanent Exhibition Honours Boy Entrants*’, RAF Museum Cosford, 24th September 2009, taken from http://www.rafmuseum.org.uk/documents/press_releases/cosford/Boy_Entrant_Exhibition.pdf, accessed on 20th June 2016.

²² Mallinson, A. *The Making of the British Army*, (Great Britain, 2009).

²³ For further information on National Service please see, Schindler, C. *National Service: From Aldershot to Aden*, (Sphere, Great Britain, 2012), and Royle, T. *National Service: The Best Years of Their Lives*, (Carlton Publishing, Great Britain, 2011).

²⁴ Vinen, R. ‘Ending National Service’, taken from Vinen, R. *National Service: A Generation in Uniform, 1945-63*, (Penguin Books, London, 2015).

the chance to travel, and because they hoped to learn a trade that would be useful to them when they returned to civilian life.’²⁵

It was during the post-Second World War era that the British Army began to build a reputation as a professional fighting force with expertise in certain conflict scenarios. In his work *Fighting the Mau Mau: The British Army and Counter Insurgency in the Kenya Emergency*²⁶, Huw Bennett suggests that the end of colonial rule helped the British Army to create a distinct identity and sense of superiority concerning their conduct in counter-insurgency (COIN) operations, which became the orthodox view within the field. Despite the end of colonial rule the British were keen to acknowledge they were still in control by way of their conduct and professionalism, most notably their use of minimum force which was born from Victorian morality and the understanding that excessive force would be detrimental to the creating peace.²⁷ He notes that ‘this is a seductive interpretation because it softens the loss of empire by elevating the British Army to a professional standard that all others failed to achieve’²⁸, and thus creating the notion that the British Army were superior in their knowledge of counter-insurgency operations. Whilst this traditional view of British conduct and the use of minimum force is said to be inherent within the British Army’s identity, Bennett argues that this stance must continue to be reviewed in the context of more modern operations.

The 1990s saw the British Army enter another transformational phase. The Cold War mind-set based on potential nuclear and conventional war was largely replaced by the perceived need to conduct peacekeeping operations and provide humanitarian support to failing states. As the Cold War threat diminished, so did the British military budget and her

²⁵ French, D. *Military Identities*, (Oxford, 2005), p.311.

²⁶ Bennett, H. *Fighting the Mau Mau: The British Army and Counter-Insurgency in the Kenya Emergency*, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2015).

²⁷ Bennett, H. *Fighting the Mau Mau*, (Cambridge, 2015), p.1-2.

²⁸ Bennett, H. *Fighting the Mau Mau*, (Cambridge, 2015), p.3.

need for overseas bases. Recruitment narrowed, and greater focus on technological capabilities resulted in a smaller, professional force. Overseas operations were conducted collaboratively with other states, further reducing the necessity for a large standing army. Rupert Smith noted that this was a new feature of modern warfare in which ‘we tend to conduct our confrontations and conflicts in some form of multinational grouping, whether it is an alliance or a coalition.’²⁹ The British Army may have decreased in size but it continues to draw on its wealth of experience and professional status in order to conduct operations around the world based on domestic and international interests. This includes changing its warfighting capabilities, to include the ability to conduct peace-keeping and counter-insurgency style operations.

The ability to interact with local populations and to conduct operations in an urban environment has become increasingly important due to the nature of conflict British forces have recently engaged in. Whilst counter-insurgency campaigns or asymmetrical warfare are by no means a new phenomenon, the recent campaigns fought by the British Army in Afghanistan (2001-14) and Iraq (2003-11) suggest that conflict is entering a new phase, one known as ‘war amongst the people’. These type of conflicts, as Smith concluded in his book *The Utility of Force*, have moved from the old paradigm which was heavily focused on inter-state industrial wars to a new paradigm defined as ‘war amongst the people’ in which ‘political and military developments go hand in hand.’³⁰ This new type of conflict has been described by Smith as having ‘no secluded battlefield upon which armies engage, nor are there necessarily armies.’³¹ This conflict scenario is challenging as there is no clear enemy or battlefield, yet traditional military forces are expected to conduct a myriad of tasks in an environment composed of both non-combatants and combatants to further a campaign with

²⁹ Smith, R. *The Utility of Force: The Art of War in the Modern World*, (Penguin Books, London, 2005), p.301.

³⁰ Smith, R. *The Utility of Force*, (London, 2005), p. xiii.

³¹ Smith, R. *The Utility of Force*, (London, 2005), p.3.

both political and military objectives. Smith expands his definition of war amongst the people claiming that it is

the reality in which the people in the streets and houses and fields- all the people, anywhere- are the battlefield. Military engagements can take place anywhere in the presence of civilians, against civilians, in defence of civilians. Civilians are the targets, objectives to be won, as much as the opposing force.³²

Whilst Smith proposes that a new paradigm has emerged, there are strong similarities between his concept of 'war amongst the people' with the more historical understanding of irregular warfare. Both involve an unclear battlefield and an adversary who cannot be categorised by the traditional combatant status, which is suggested to have a clearly defined uniform or hierarchical structure, however within this thesis I would like to use the concept 'war amongst the people' to examine the operational landscape in which British forces are conducting their operations, both at home and abroad. One of the key notions of Smith's 'war amongst the people' concept focuses on the importance of winning the will of the people. Whilst this has always been a core factor in counter-insurgency campaigns, the will of the people continues to play an increasingly important and crucial role in modern conflicts.

People are more connected than ever before due to advancements in technology and the globalised, around-the-clock media. Therefore, it is not only the will of the people immediately within the parameters of a military campaign that are important, but the will of the people who contribute to the worldwide audience who have the potential to scrutinise every movement of the military force. Military operations are more likely to take place in heavily populated areas, meaning that military forces have to be trained and equipped to conduct operations in an environment where the need to protect and provide security to the local population has a higher strategic advantage than eradicating the enemy, an enemy who is likely to use the civilian population to their own advantage. This can be difficult for a

³² Smith, R. *The Utility of Force*, (London, 2005), p.3-4.

military force that retains the mind-set that they are fighting a traditional enemy within the norms of inter-state conflict.

Operating amongst the people is both difficult and highly dangerous; one must be alert at all times as to a potential attack by an adversary whilst also being aware that the will of the people is the main objective, which must be won in order to achieve success. Another complexity that has arisen from conducting operations in wars amongst the people concerns the role of the media. Fighting amongst the people undoubtedly brings harm and even fatalities to an innocent civilian population, any incidents can be projected via the media to international audiences thus damaging the reputation of the military force in question and their military effectiveness. As Charles Dunlap acknowledges

The kind of asymmetrical warfare future adversaries may wage is not that which seeks to actually defeat US or Western military forces, but rather that which assaults the psyche and will of the populations *whose* political support is required by Western democracies to sustain military operations.³³

At the start of the twenty-first century, the British Army was seen as an all-volunteer, professional military fighting force with the ability to conduct operations around the world whilst continuing to develop their technological prowess on the battlefield. The roles being performed by the British Army have expanded from self-defence and international conflict to include peace-keeping or stabilisation operations. The differing nature of operations being conducted has not only redefined the identity of the British Army, but also the expectations and identity of the soldier employed by such an organisation.

³³ Dunlap Jnr, C.J. 'Preliminary Observations: Asymmetrical Warfare and the Western Mind set', taken from Matthews, L.J. ed. '*Challenging the United States Symmetrically and Asymmetrically: Can America be Defeated?*', (US Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute, Pennsylvania, July 1998), p. 11.

4.3 The British Army in the Twenty First Century

The trend towards imposing conscription is declining and many states are now opting for an all-volunteer force, allowing their militaries to be formed of personnel who choose a career in the armed forces as their desired profession. This led to the term the ‘professional soldier’, a member of an all-volunteer military force who opts for a career in the armed forces. All members of a state military are required to follow IHL and the Just War principles, a distinguishing feature of the professional armed force compared to many non-state groups who tend to show complete disregard for such laws. These principles are incorporated into the training of professional soldiers often termed as Military Ethics courses or Ethics of War Training. The soldier employed by the professional military force has volunteered for service and chosen to conform to their values and ideals. Professional military ethics have been adopted and entrenched in personnel serving in the forces which boosts morale and gives a unity of purpose. Many of these ideals and values are spoken about orally within militaries and are entrenched within the value system taught at basic training. However, the British Army has produced two pamphlets entitled *Values and Standards of the British Army*³⁴ and *A British Soldier’s Values and Standards*³⁵. Both pamphlets outline the values and standards expected of an individual soldier and those of the organisation as a whole, ‘the values guide and develop us into the sort of people we should be: the standards explain how we should behave.’³⁶

The British Army pamphlet states that the ‘value and standards directly contribute to the Army’s ethos and fighting power. They are a moral requirement and have functional

³⁴ ‘*Values and Standards of the British Army*’, British Army, January 2008, taken from www.army.mod.uk/documents/general/v_s_of_the_british_army.pdf, accessed on 30th June 2015.

³⁵ ‘*A British Soldier’s Values and Standards*’, British Army, March 2008, taken from www.army.mod.uk/documents/general/v_s_soldiers_ed.pdf, accessed on 30th June 2015.

³⁶ ‘*A British Soldier’s Values and Standards*’, British Army, 2008, p.3.

utility. Upholding them is the collective responsibility of all members of the Army.’³⁷ The British Army asks all recruits to swear to an oath of allegiance³⁸ which embodies the context in which they fight and operate.³⁹ Each soldier is also expected to abide by six core values; which are selfless commitment, courage, discipline, integrity, loyalty and respect for others.⁴⁰ These values express the expected behaviour of the soldier towards their own comrades in order to maintain morale and team spirit. Soldiers are also expected to use these values when on operational duty, and when interacting with local civilian populations, ‘respect for others, including civilians, detainees and captured enemy forces, means treating people decently.’⁴¹ The standards expected by the British Army are designed to ensure that behaviour of soldiers is lawful, appropriate, and totally professional. The pamphlet states that

The Army needs to be tough and aggressive and in doing your job, you will face people who break the law. This does not mean that you can break the law. You must always keep your self-control, however angry or provoked you might be, because no soldier is ever above the law.⁴²

Abiding by these values and standards helps to unify the behaviour and duties of the soldiers; promoting the ethos of the army and the professional status of the army as an organisation. The Army Doctrine Publication highlights the importance of acknowledging a common ethos within the organisation, ‘the societies from which the British Army recruits have increasingly diverse ethical and moral codes. Hence the army has a fundamental duty to its soldiers, and those they serve to articulate its common ethos and moral basis.’⁴³

The British Army publication entitled *Soldiering* is keen to promote the professional nature of the service, stating ‘the British Army...is composed of volunteers who are servants of the Crown. British soldiers are professionals who choose to serve because they want to be

³⁷ ‘*Values and Standards of the British Army*’, British Army, 2008, p.7.

³⁸ Please see Appendix D for a copy of the Ministry of Defence Oath of Allegiance or Attestation.

³⁹ ‘*Values and Standards of the British Army*’, British Army, 2008, p.9.

⁴⁰ ‘*A British Soldier’s Values and Standards*’, British Army, 2008, p.5-10.

⁴¹ ‘*A British Soldier’s Values and Standards*’, British Army, 2008, p.10.

⁴² ‘*A British Soldier’s Values and Standards*’, British Army, 2008, p.12.

⁴³ ‘*Army Doctrine Publication: Soldiering The Military Covenant*’, (Ministry of Defence, London, 2000), p.1-1 to 1-2.

soldiers.’⁴⁴ The British Army is not a citizen army as it does not rely solely on recruits from the United Kingdom. Rather its recruits come from Nepal, the Republic of Ireland, and the Commonwealth.⁴⁵ As the British Army is ‘not a citizen army, it does not directly reflect national society like a citizen or conscript army, it operates rather on military effectiveness, but must understand the society on whose behalf it goes to war.’⁴⁶

The British Army in the twenty-first century relies on volunteers who abide by the values and standards which are integral to informing the army’s ethos and practices. The British Army needs to continually update its practices and training to ensure that it operates within the ever-evolving frameworks of the laws which regulate armed conflict. In order to maintain its reputation as a professional fighting force, the British Army must ensure it continues to adhere to the principles outlined in IHL. By following these principles, militaries are more likely to maintain the support from the domestic and international populations, which is an essential factor when conducting operations in the twenty first century.

In order to comprehend the British Army’s experiences and practices relating to children in conflict zones, it is important to acknowledge their relationship with British children. This will provide an insight into how the British Army as an organisation categorise children and interact with this particular group within society. The following section will examine the British cadet movement, the historic recruitment of minors into the British Army, and their current recruitment policies.

⁴⁴ ‘*Soldiering The Military Covenant*’, (London, 2000), p.3-10.

⁴⁵ ‘*Foreign and Commonwealth Citizens*’, British Army Website, taken from <http://www.army.mod.uk/welfare-support/23209.aspx>, accessed on 7th July 2015, np.

⁴⁶ ‘*Soldiering The Military Covenant*’, (London, 2000), p.3-10.

4.4 The British Army and British Children

The British Army's formal relationship with the children of Britain was established toward the latter part of the nineteenth century at the same time as the Cardwell-Childers reforms. Secretary of State for War, Richard Burdon Haldane, sought to raise the profile of the British and Territorial Army, and relations amongst the civilian population by placing cadet programmes into schools.⁴⁷ Whilst this formal arrangement continues to exist today, this section will also examine the British Army's more informal relationship with children; the role of boy soldiers and the current debates surrounding the recruitment of minors. The British Army belongs to a nation that recognises the narratives associated with the Western concept of childhood. These narratives focus on the social construction of childhood as a time of innocence and play, in which children lack agency and deserve to be protected.

4.4.1 *The British Cadet Movement*

The origins of the British cadet movement can be traced back to the latter stages of the Crimean War when small groups of teenage boys under the age of 18 had the opportunity to train with the rifle corps units. Although never deployed overseas, these small groups of teenagers would be expected to defend their homeland should the need arise. The establishment of these groups was to 'offer boys with the purpose of protecting Britain in the event of an attack from overseas.'⁴⁸ National pride for the British army was at a high due to the Crimean War and, coupled with the threat of a French invasion, these types of organisations proved popular amongst teenage boys. In 1860, public schools began to form cadet units which allowed their male pupils to don a uniform, learn new skills and to partake in adventurous training. This partnership between the military and educational establishments

⁴⁷ Penn, A. *Targeting Schools: Drill, Militarism, and Imperialism*, (Routledge, London, 1999).

⁴⁸ 'Our History', RAF Air Cadets, taken from www.raf.mod.uk/aircadets/whoweare/history.cfm, accessed on 2nd July 2015, np.

continues today in the form of the Combined Cadet Force (CCF) and remains a strong tradition for many public schools in Britain in which ‘boys were trained to be ‘leaders’, absorbing an ethos combining notions of command, duty and privilege.’⁴⁹ However, the cadet movement was not just a public school venture. The social reformer Octavia Hill, believed that cadet organisations would be beneficial to those living in some of the more deprived areas of Britain, as it could provide a ‘constructive alternative to the criminal temptations that faced impoverished young people.’⁵⁰

In 1908 the title ‘Cadet Force’ was established and these units began to be reorganised; with the Territorial Army overseeing the funding and administration of these groups. The popularity of the cadet movement increased during the First World War and the increase in numbers for the cadet force resulted in the formation of the British National Cadet Association (BNCA) which helped to secure government support and widened the opportunities for boys to take part in the movement. Prior to 1939, the cadets were formed into two distinct sections; the Sea Cadets and the Army Cadets. However, the Second World War saw the formation of the Air Training Corps (ATC), the Royal Air Force section of the cadet force. The last major change to the cadet organisation in Britain occurred in the mid-1980s when girls were permitted to become members. The Army Cadet Force (ACF) estimates that today around 30% of their intake are girls.⁵¹ In 2010 the Army Cadet Force celebrated its 150th anniversary and continues to play a role in the lives of many school age teenagers in the United Kingdom today.

⁴⁹ Otley, C.B. ‘Militarism and Militarization in the Public Schools, 1900-1972’, *British Journal of Sociology*, Volume: 29, No: 3, September 1978, p.321.

⁵⁰ Chesshyre, R. ‘The Young Guns of the Army Cadet Force who will be the soldiers of tomorrow’, *The Telegraph*, 12th November 2009, taken from www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/defence/6543573/The-young-guns-of-the-army-cadet-force-who-will-be-the-soldiers-of-tomorrow, accessed on 13th June 2015, np.

⁵¹ ‘Our History’, Army Cadet Force, taken from www.armycadets.com/about-us/our-history, accessed on 12th June 2015, np.

Although the cadet movement was established with the Army Cadet Force, it has evolved considerably since 1860 now offering young people more choice and greater opportunities to become involved with the cadets and their local community. Children between the ages of 13 to 18 can opt to join the cadet force operating in their local community; the Army Cadet Force, Sea Cadets or the Air Training Corps. The CCF also continues to have a partnership between public schools and the MoD, in which cadet activities run alongside the academic curriculum. The MoD acknowledges that

in return for the school's commitment, the MoD gives significant support to the CCF by providing uniform, weapons and ammunition, training advice and assistance, loans of stores and equipment, access to military transport and remuneration to School Staff Instructors (SSIs) and officers.⁵²

Offering a sociologist's approach, C.B. Otley, examined the relationship between British public schools and the British military in his 1978 paper entitled *Militarism and Militarization in the Public Schools*, suggesting that 'public schools have been the main source of new officers for the British Army over the past century.'⁵³ Otley discovered that military culture was evident in many of the public schools in his study. Many had long established CCF sections, with teachers having often completed a period of military service themselves, and there were 'favourable admissions for sons of officers.'⁵⁴ The schools also had their own plaques on the walls providing details of the old boys who had lost their lives in either the First or Second World Wars. Traditionally, the role of the CCF within schools was seen as route to a commission⁵⁵, and for many boys who did not wish to enter university this option proved attractive. Whilst there was no obligation for school leavers to sign up to military service, Otley concluded that,

⁵² 'The Cadet Forces and MoD Youth Work', Ministry of Defence, 3rd November 2014, taken from www.gov.uk/the-cadet-forces-and-mods-youth-work, accessed on 13th June 2015, np.

⁵³ Otley, C.B. 'Militarism and Militarization, 1900-1972', *British Journal of Sociology*, 1978, p.321.

⁵⁴ Otley, C.B. 'Militarism and Militarization, 1900-1972', *British Journal of Sociology*, 1978, p.322.

⁵⁵ Chesshyre, R. 'The Young Guns of the Army Cadet Force who will be the soldiers of tomorrow', *The Telegraph*, 2009, np.

the school cadet system has, over the past three quarters of a century, functioned to orient boys towards military service to encourage them to take up military careers, to equip them with a modicum of necessary skills, and to implant habits of thought and action consistent with military roles. It has also helped to promote militaristic and nationalistic sentiment. The outcome has been a stream of suitably processed young men flowing into the officer corps of the three services.⁵⁶

Whilst this may have been true in 1978, the cadet force today is attempting to dispel myths that they use the cadet organisations as a recruiting pool for potential new recruits into the regular armed forces. The ‘cadet’ information section on the British Army website clearly states that ‘the ACF⁵⁷ is not a recruiting ground for the Armed Forces but seeks to promote a sense of understanding of what the Armed Force’s roles and responsibilities are.’⁵⁸ Robert Chesshyre conducted interviews with children who took part in the Army Cadet Force in order to examine their motivations for joining and their plans for the future. He discovered that ‘the ACF is forbidden from recruiting for the regular Army. But if cadets show an interest, officers will point them in the right direction.’⁵⁹ During his interviews, Chesshyre noted that ‘the fact remains – which is always expected – that the vast majority of cadets do not join the Army. I met several wannabe teachers and at least two would- be doctors.’⁶⁰ The Army Cadet Force is a youth organisation that seeks to offer a variety of opportunities to British teenagers, whilst it may pique the interest of those seeking a potential career in the Armed Forces there is no obligation to enlist or serve.

The Army Cadet Force remains a large youth organisation providing a range of opportunities for young people from various backgrounds. It markets itself as an organisation

for action and adventure, fun and friendship, the Army Cadet Force (ACF) is hard to beat. With around 41,000 cadets (aged 12 to 18) and 9,500 adult volunteers in 1,700 locations in every corner of the UK, the ACF is one of the country’s largest voluntary youth organisations. It is also one of the oldest, and celebrated its 150th anniversary in 2010.⁶¹

⁵⁶ Otley, C.B. ‘Militarism and Militarization, 1900-1972’, *British Journal of Sociology*, 1978, p.332.

⁵⁷ Army Cadet Force.

⁵⁸ ‘Cadets’, British Army, taken from www.army.mod.uk/structure/32324.aspx, accessed on 12th June 2015, np.

⁵⁹ Chesshyre, R. ‘The Young Guns of the Army Cadet Force who will be the soldiers of tomorrow’, *The Telegraph*, 2009, np.

⁶⁰ Chesshyre, R. ‘The Young Guns of the Army Cadet Force who will be the soldiers of tomorrow’, *The Telegraph*, 2009, np.

⁶¹ ‘The Cadet Forces and MoD Youth Work’, Ministry of Defence, 2014, np.

The Army Cadet Force charter describes the role of the organisation and their aims, stating that,

The Army Cadet Force is a national voluntary youth organisation. It is sponsored by the Army and provides challenging military, adventurous and community activities. Its aim is to inspire young people to achieve success in life with a spirit of service to the Queen, their country and their local community, and to develop in them the qualities of a good citizen.⁶²

The core focus of the cadet force is to provide opportunities to young people living in Britain which will develop their skills and allow them to be an active member of their wider communities, whilst also promoting good citizenship. Cadets are expected to take part in community projects, develop their first aid skills, conduct adventurous training and field craft exercises, and learn skills-at-arms. These types of opportunities will develop skills such as leadership, team work, confidence, self-reliance, and respect.⁶³ Cadets also have the opportunity to work towards a number of qualifications which are tailored to their experiences and skills learnt during their time in the cadet organisation. The Army Cadet Force allows cadets to complete the Army Proficiency Certificate (APC), Duke of Edinburgh Awards (bronze, silver and gold), Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) in Public Services, and the Institute of Leadership and Management (ILM) in Team Leading. The MoD acknowledges that this ‘range of nationally recognised qualifications will help them with their future education and careers.’⁶⁴

The aim of the organisation is to develop the child, both as an individual and a team-player, which affords them a range of skills, qualifications and positive character traits which will be beneficial in their later lives. This outlook falls into the traditional narratives associated with the concept of childhood; that this period of a child’s life is about ‘becoming’ an adult. Therefore, the British Army’s involvement in the cadet force helps to provide

⁶² ‘Army Cadet Force Charter’, taken from www.armycadets.com/about-us/acf-charter/, accessed on 13th June 2015, np.

⁶³ ‘Cadets’, British Army, np.

⁶⁴ ‘The Cadet Forces and MoD Youth Work’, Ministry of Defence, 2014, np.

children with skills and opportunities useful for their development into adulthood. Since its origins, the British cadet force has had to develop and evolve in order to remain relevant to the society in which it operates. This can be related to the discourse associated with the *new sociology of childhood*. Here, Prout⁶⁵ and Corsaro⁶⁶ acknowledge that childhood is a structural form, or a static category that has an ever-changing membership. The British Army seem to recognise this concept as they evolve the aims, membership, and opportunities associated with the British cadet force to ensure it meets the needs and interest of its ever-changing audience, British children.

As well as funding local youth organisations, the British Army as an organisation also conducts a lot of fundraising for various children's charities throughout the year. Various sporting and fundraising events are set up annually in order to raise money for different children's charities throughout the UK and overseas.⁶⁷ This reinforces the idea that the British Army acknowledges that children are an important part of society.

However, the British Army's relationship with British children has not always been positive. The recent and historical recruitment of minors has caused controversy and negativity towards the British Army, as well as creating discussions regarding the Army's recruitment policies. Firstly, this section will examine the historical use of children within the British Army and the changing attitudes towards recruitment. Current debates concerning the

⁶⁵ Prout, A. 'Taking a Step Away from Modernity: Recognising the New Sociology of Childhood', *Global Studies of Childhood*, Volume: 1, No: 1, 2011, p.4-14.

⁶⁶ Corsaro, W. A. *The Sociology of Childhood*. (Third Edition, Sage Publishers, London, 2011).

⁶⁷ Examples of this can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/government/world-location-news/british-army-officer-helps-childrens-charity-in-kosovo> and <http://www.army.mod.uk/news/news.aspx>, both accessed on 26th August 2014.

age of recruitment into the British Army will then be explored in order to analyse allegations that the British Army recruits ‘child soldiers’.⁶⁸

4.4.2 Britain’s Child Soldiers in the World Wars

In 2014, Britain marked the centenary of the start of the First World War which renewed interest in the ‘boy soldiers’ who served their country. Although it has been difficult to establish exact ages of these boy soldiers due to the falsification of identity records, it has been estimated that ‘as many as 250,000 boys under the age of 18 served in the British Army during World War One.’⁶⁹ When conflict broke out in August 1914, males had to be 18 to enlist in the army but to serve overseas they needed to be 19.⁷⁰ Due to the heavy losses on the Western Front in early 1918, the age for overseas deployment was lowered to 18. However, these stipulations did little to stop boys falsifying their identity records in order to enlist. Prior to conscription being introduced in 1916, the British Army relied on volunteers to offer their service and a number of under-age boys were keen to sign up. The first British fatality of the First World War was Private John Parr who was killed in August 1914, he was officially recorded as being 20 years of age but the Commonwealth War Graves Commission later discovered that he was in fact 17-years-old.⁷¹ Jack Cornwell is perhaps the most famous underage fighter to emerge from the First World War. Jack lied about his age in order to join the Royal Navy during the war. In 1916, at the age of 16, he was fatally wounded during the Battle of Jutland. Despite receiving serious injuries Jack continued to man his gun post and

⁶⁸ For further information, please see, Owen, J. ‘UK under fire for recruiting an ‘army of children’, *The Independent*, 25th May 2014, taken from <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/uk-under-fire-for-recruiting-an-army-of-children-9431966.html>, accessed on 1st June 2015, np.

⁶⁹ Keane, F. ‘The Teenage Soldiers of World War One’, *BBC Magazine*, taken from <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-29934965>, accessed on 2nd July 2015, np.

⁷⁰ Van Emden, R. ‘*Boy Soldiers of the Great War*’, (Bloomsbury Publishers, London, 2012), p.xix.

⁷¹ Van Emden, R. ‘*Boy Soldiers of the Great War*’, (London, 2012), p. viii.

direct fire towards the enemy. He was posthumously awarded the Victoria Cross for his actions, and is one of the youngest soldiers to receive the medal.⁷²

The motivations of the boys to enlist are numerous. Some came from the poorer sectors of society and were ‘happy to escape hard, humdrum lives.’⁷³ Others ‘were gripped by patriotic fervour, sought escape from grim conditions at home or wanted adventure.’⁷⁴ The war was expected to be short and many felt that volunteering for overseas service would be an adventure. For many ‘the army may have had a romantic attraction for the young.’⁷⁵ Lord Kitchener’s ‘Your Country Needs You’⁷⁶ campaign evoked a sense of patriotism for many of the young men who volunteered. Those soldiers who were under-age may have succumbed to the same national sentiment when choosing to enlist. Dick Trafford, a former British Army soldier, falsified his records in order to enlist and claimed that ‘I’ve never regretted anything at all from joining up to today because I knew what I was doing. I must have done, else I wouldn’t have done it, that’s the way I look at it.’⁷⁷ Similar to the work conducted by Morrow⁷⁸ and Lowe⁷⁹, it is possible to draw upon historical evidence to demonstrate how multiple childhoods have always been in existence. The decision for these young boys to enlist in the British military shows that, within Britain children were experiencing different childhoods; which were dependent upon their gender, location, and class. The above statements also demonstrate the agency present in the young boys’ decisions to participate in armed conflict. Although the global humanitarian discourse denies a voice to children

⁷² For further information, please see, War Office, ‘*Jack Cornwell: The Story of John Travers Cornwell, V.C. Boy – 1st Class*’, (Naval & Military Press Ltd, London, 2009).

⁷³ Van Emden, R. ‘*Boy Soldiers of the Great War*’, (London, 2012), p.28.

⁷⁴ Keane, F. ‘The Teenage Soldiers of World War One’, *BBC Magazine*, 2015, np.

⁷⁵ Van Emden, R. ‘*Boy Soldiers of the Great War*’, (London, 2012), p.11.

⁷⁶ The campaign was led by Lord Kitchener, calling upon men of military age to volunteer their services to the military. The recruitment poster is now one of the most iconic images of the First World War featuring an image of Lord Kitchener and the words ‘Your Country Needs You’.

⁷⁷ Van Emden, R. ‘*Boy Soldiers of the Great War*’, (London, 2012), p.355.

⁷⁸ Morrow, V. ‘*Understanding Children and Childhood*’, 2011.

⁷⁹ Lowe, R. ‘*Childhood through the Ages*’, (London, 2004).

regarding their participation in armed conflict, this section highlights that children are social actors who are able to demonstrate their agency and motivations for involvement.⁸⁰

Whilst many of the under-age recruits falsified their records and gave fraudulent references, the British Army and Government can also be held responsible for the number of under-age soldiers sent to the Front. Prior to conscription being introduced in 1916, the Army were keen to build their numbers quickly and were happy to accept the majority of those who volunteered. Richard Van Emden highlights the role of the ‘political elite of the time, who might have turned a blind eye to under-age enlistment, or the military or civil officers who frequently overlooked a boy’s palpable youth so that he could fight.’⁸¹ Many of the recruiters within the army would also allow under-age recruits as ‘every recruiting sergeant was paid two shillings and sixpence (about £6 in today’s money) for each man attested into the infantry.’⁸² If the boy looked as though he may be strong or old enough, then many recruiters would allow them to enlist. The following extract is from Van Emden’s work *Boy Soldiers* and recalls a conversation from one young soldier, George Head, regarding his experience of enlisting;

“‘How old are you?’ asked the sergeant. I replied, ‘Eighteen.’

‘Yes, that will do for enlisting but not for Imperial Service Overseas. If you want to join in the war, go over there,’ and he pointed to a table on which lay some newspapers. ‘Have a read and perhaps when you return you will have grown another year older.’

Burney, who was with me, being over nineteen, explained this riddle and so I returned and when asked the age question again, I replied, ‘Nineteen.’”⁸³

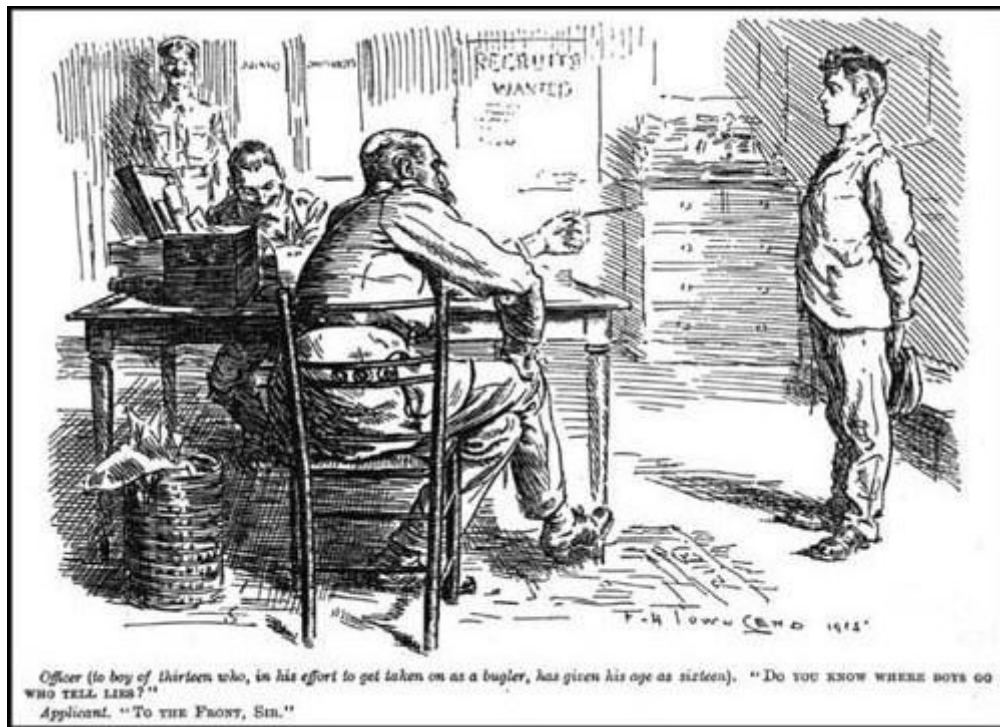
⁸⁰ For further information please see, James, A. and Prout, A. ‘*Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood*’, (London, 2015)., Prout, A. ‘Taking a Step Away from Modernity’, *Global Studies of Childhood*, 2011, p.4-14., and Jacob, C. ‘Children and Armed Conflict’, *Critical Studies on Security*, 2015, p. 14-28.

⁸¹ Van Emden, R. ‘*Boy Soldiers of the Great War*’, (London, 2012), p.viii- xix.

⁸² Van Emden, R. ‘*Boy Soldiers of the Great War*’, (London, 2012), p.43.

⁸³ Van Emden, R. ‘*Boy Soldiers of the Great War*’, (London, 2012), p.24.

The following cartoon appeared in the satirical magazine *Punch* in August 1916. The picture depicts a young boy attending an army recruitment office with the slogan “Officer (to a boy of 13 who has given his age as 16): ‘Do you know where boys go who tell lies?’ Applicant: ‘To the Front, Sir!’”



(Figure 4.1) ⁸⁴

Whilst the British Army may have known about some of the under-age soldiers in their ranks, the inclusion of these enlistees also caused problems for the army and morale. Some of the soldiers were too weak or small in stature to be able to conduct certain tasks, which led to rifts between the men. If a soldier explained that he had falsified his records he would be removed from the front lines and kept at a base camp, if he was close in age to the legal requirement. If not, then he would be returned to the UK and to his parents or guardians.⁸⁵ The fear of ‘going over the top’⁸⁶ and the potential for close-quarter combat

⁸⁴ Townsend, F.H. ‘Army Recruitment’, *Punch Magazine*, 11th August 1916, np.

⁸⁵ Van Emden, R. ‘Boy Soldiers of the Great War’, (London, 2012), p. 282-3.

⁸⁶ ‘Going over the top’ is the colloquial phrase which refers to soldiers leaving their trenches and having to fight.

resulted in many under-age soldiers admitting to their superiors that they had lied about their age and thus were sent back to the base camp. This often had an impact on morale. As the numbers of dead and wounded increased, other soldiers began to suggest they too had lied about their age. The checking of records was time consuming and hampered operational effectiveness, so in 1916 the War Office agreed to send home any under-age soldier if their parents sent the relevant documents proving they had lied about their age.⁸⁷ This was not always an effective method of removing under-age soldiers from the Front as some did not have parents to provide documentation, or even have the original documentation to prove they had lied.⁸⁸ Whether a boy was returned to the UK was also dependent upon the regiment in which he served.⁸⁹ Whilst all had an obligation to remove the boy from the Front, some opted to keep them at the base camp to conduct tasks such as tailoring or working in the cookhouses.

Whilst the enlistment of under-age boys may have caused implications for the British Army during the conflict, the 'boy soldiers' of the Great War are often remembered in a positive light. Those that received medals and honours, such as Jack Cornwell, have been acknowledged as heroes with memorials or street names dedicated in their honour. Enlisting under-age has been regarded as patriotic and is often romanticised; 'on the Western Front, the younger the boy soldier was at the time of his death, the more 'popular' his grave has become, often with several poppy crosses in front of the headstone.'⁹⁰ There is a greater sympathy and sense of loss for a person who lost their life at a younger age as it is felt they still had much to live for.

⁸⁷ Van Emden, R. *'Boy Soldiers of the Great War'*, (London, 2012), p. 215.

⁸⁸ Van Emden, R. *'Boy Soldiers of the Great War'*, (London, 2012), p. 41.

⁸⁹ Van Emden, R. *'Boy Soldiers of the Great War'*, (London, 2012), p. 218.

⁹⁰ Van Emden, R. *'Boy Soldiers of the Great War'*, (London, 2012), p. xvii.

Boys still attempted to falsify their records during the Second World War but it was not at the same level seen during the First World War. Nick Hewitt, a historian at the Imperial War Museum, notes that ‘under-age boys joining up were less common in World War II than in World War I, as the first war kept less reliable records.’⁹¹ However the practice of under-age enlistment still existed and the youngest fatality was named as Reginald Earnshaw who died aged 14 years and 152 days on the 6th July 1941.⁹² Many of the motivations were similar to those from the First World War, ‘there are lots of reasons why these boys did it – a sense of doing your bit, perhaps their older brother or other boys from the village had gone, a sense of adventure, boredom at home.’⁹³

Both the First and Second World Wars stirred nationalist sentiment amongst the British population resulting in large numbers of volunteers, including many young boys who did not meet the legal age requirement yet continued to offer their services. Although they were never encouraged to join, the British Army could be accused of turning a blind eye during the First World War, and recruiters actively allowing young boys to enlist in order to meet their quotas. Once the under-age soldier’s true identity had been realised, the British Army took measures to have the boy returned to the UK. This hampered morale and operational effectiveness rather than providing any beneficial gain to the army. Whilst under-age soldiers may have partaken in conflicts after the Second World War, they are not as widely acknowledged, celebrated or mourned as those who took part in the First and Second World Wars. This could be due to the changing nature of conflict post 1945 and the rationale for becoming involved in overseas operations. Under-age soldiers existed in the British Army and although they were not formally recruited, they did serve, with many paying the ultimate

⁹¹ ‘Youngest World War II Service Casualty Identified’, *BBC News*, 5th February 2010, taken from <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/8498113.stm>, accessed on 5th July 2015, np.

⁹² ‘Youngest World War II Service Casualty Identified’, *BBC News*, 2010, np.

⁹³ ‘Youngest World War II Service Casualty Identified’, *BBC News*, 2010, np.

sacrifice. Whilst their actions may have been a hindrance to the army, they have subsequently been viewed as heroes; offering their services to their nation despite not being legally obliged or expected to do so. The fixation on the age of these soldiers and interest in their stories compared to other soldiers of the time highlights this dichotomy between child and soldier. It is recognised that the age of the person makes their action seem extraordinary as their stories are distinct from those of other soldiers (those above the age of recruitment), many of whom do not have their war stories told, therefore it shows that the British Army is aware that children are not part of the normative proceedings of armed conflict.

4.4.3 Children in the British Army

Although the British Army, seem to be aware that children are not part of the normative proceedings of armed conflict, the MoD is currently facing accusations from humanitarian groups that suggest they are recruiting ‘child soldiers’. Although the United Kingdom ratified the Optional Protocol to the CRC in 2003⁹⁴, which established the minimum age as 18-years-old to be involved in hostilities, the British Army continues to recruit 16-year-olds. According to a parliamentary briefing paper devised by Child Soldiers International, it is the only country in the European Union (EU) and one of ‘fewer than 20 countries in the world which still allow in law the direct recruitment of 16 year olds by their armed forces.’⁹⁵ Child Soldiers International, formerly the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers⁹⁶, is a UK-based organisation which seeks to remove children from warzones and also established the straight-18 campaign. This campaign advocates raising the minimum age

⁹⁴ The United Kingdom ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on June 24th 2003, the full article can be read online here https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=IND&mtdsg_no=IV-11-b&chapter=4&lang=en#EndDec, accessed on 1st June 2016, np.

⁹⁵ Taylor, R. ‘*The British Armed Forces: Why Raising the Recruitment Age Would Benefit Everyone*’, Child Soldiers International, Parliamentary Briefing Paper, 18th May 2016, taken from http://www.child-soldiers.org/research_report_reader.php?id=866, accessed on 5th June 2016.

⁹⁶ For the purpose of referencing, Child Soldiers International and Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers will be used interchangeably within this section depending upon the name of the organisation at the time of the source being published.

of recruitment to 18 for all nation states and armed force groups. When using examples of other countries that continue to recruit at 16, the UK is often placed in the same category as North Korea and Iran.⁹⁷ Both are seen as rogue and authoritarian states, therefore placing the UK in the same category can be seen as an attempt to embarrass UK policy-makers and the MoD.

Article 3, clause 3 of the CRC stipulated that those who seek employment within the Armed Forces under the age of 18, must do so on a voluntary basis and provides the following safeguards,

States Parties that permit voluntary recruitment into their national armed forces under the age of 18 years shall maintain safeguards to ensure, as a minimum, that:

- (a) Such recruitment is genuinely voluntary;
- (b) Such recruitment is carried out with the informed consent of the person's parents or legal guardians;
- (c) Such persons are fully informed of the duties involved in such military service;
- (d) Such persons provide reliable proof of age prior to acceptance into national military service.⁹⁸

Whilst the British Armed Forces does not deploy under-18s into hostilities and all recruitment is voluntary, Child Soldiers International suggest that raising the minimum age of recruitment to 18 would have a positive impact on the well-being of the soldier, as well as providing financial and practical benefits for the organisation.⁹⁹ A core concern for organisations who advocate raising the age of recruitment to 18, is the notion that British military recruitment policies are not aligned to British domestic laws which set the age of 18

⁹⁷ Owen, J. 'UK under fire for recruiting an 'army of children', *The Independent*, 25th May 2014, taken from <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/uk-under-fire-for-recruiting-an-army-of-children-9431966.html>, accessed on 25th June 2015, or Burns, A. 'Should the Armed Forces continue to recruit 16-year-olds?', *The Big Issue*, 5th November 2013, taken from <http://www.bigissue.com/mix/news/3196/should-armed-forces-continue-recruit-16-year-olds>, accessed on 25th June 2015.

⁹⁸Please see *Article 3, Clause 3 of the Optional Protocol of the Convention on the Rights of the Child*, February 2002, taken from <http://www.crin.org/en/library/legal-database/optional-protocol-un-convention-rights-child-involvement-children-armed>, accessed on 25th June 2015, np.

⁹⁹ Taylor, R. 'The British Armed Forces: Why Raising the Recruitment Age Would Benefit Everyone', Parliamentary Briefing Paper, 2016.

as the permission threshold for a number of tasks, therefore it has been argued that ‘the minimum recruitment age is out of step with the minimum legal age for other activities.’¹⁰⁰ These activities include being able to sign legal contracts, vote, serve on a jury, watch violent films or pornography, bet, drive certain vehicles, work in the emergency services, have a tattoo, or purchase items such as tobacco, alcohol or fireworks. It has been suggested that ‘many activities are restricted to under-18s in the UK due to the recognition that people below this age may not be mature enough to fully comprehend the nature of the commitment or risk they are undertaking.’¹⁰¹ Therefore, it can be seen as a contradiction that a person at the age of 16 may join the military and undergo training, yet is unable to purchase a violent film until they reach the age of 18.

Child Soldiers International and the Joint Committee on Human Rights cite the potential impact on welfare as the main reason to raise the minimum recruitment age to 18. The young are deemed to be more vulnerable, and are more likely to be bullied, or face harassment, or self-harm. Younger recruits ‘also have a higher risk of alcohol problems, depression and suicide than those who signed up as adults.’¹⁰² Those recruited as young recruits, between the ages of 16 and 18, are bound by minimum terms of service which are longer than those imposed on adult recruits.¹⁰³ For those joining under the age of 18, they must serve until their 22nd birthday, this could result in a minimum of 6 years’ service. Those who sign up after their 18th birthday are required to complete a minimum of 4 years’ service. Personnel who have tried to leave without permission have faced court martial and

¹⁰⁰ ‘Catch 16-22, *Recruitment and Retention of Minors in the British Armed Forces*’, Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, (London, March 2011), taken from http://www.child-soldiers.org/research_report_reader.php?id=290, accessed 14th May 2015, p.8.

¹⁰¹ ‘Catch 16-22, *Recruitment and Retention of Minors in the British Armed Forces*’, 2011, London, p.9.

¹⁰² Atkins, C. ‘Young British Army Recruits at Higher Risk of PTSD and Suicide’, *The Guardian*, 28th October 2013, taken from <http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2013/oct/28/young-british-army-ptsd-suicide-soldiers>, accessed on 31st October 2013, np.

¹⁰³ ‘Catch 16-22, *Recruitment and Retention of Minors in the British Armed Forces*’, 2011, London, p.1.

imprisonment in military correction centres¹⁰⁴ and young recruits are more likely to go AWOL¹⁰⁵ (absent without leave) than their older counterparts.

Research has also found that ‘four out of five minors who join the British Armed Forces enlist in the army’¹⁰⁶, and within the army, are likely to be offered roles in the infantry due to the lower qualification entrance levels needed. Joining the ranks of the infantry is considered a higher risk career pathway with an increased chance of being deployed into warzones and operating on the front line. Legal issues have been mentioned as part of the discussions about raising the age to 18, suggesting that ‘the enlistment contract signed by 16-year-old recruits binds them into adulthood. This means that once they reach 18 years of age recruits can be sent to the frontline based on an agreement they entered into while they were still legally a child.’¹⁰⁷ However, the MoD stipulates that it complies with all legal aspects associated with the voluntary recruitment of children and the CRC. In a report published in 2007, the MoD state the involvement of parents or legal guardians of potential recruits is of paramount importance and that

clear and precise explanation of the nature of duties involved in military service to both the individual and their parent(s) or guardian(s) and explaining the demands of military life to the individual volunteer and establishing that he/ she remains a genuine volunteer, the requirement that the parent(s) or guardian(s), having been similarly informed, freely consent to the individuals entry into the Armed Forces and duly countersign the appropriate

¹⁰⁴ For an analysis of those who have gone Absent Without Leave (AWOL) or deserted without permission during the period 2000 -2010 and the punishments they received can be found at ‘*AWOL stats 2000 to 2010 including prosecution and sentences for desertion*’, Freedom Of Information Request, Ministry of Defence, 4th November 2010, taken from https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/16803/FOI20082010160944005_AWOL_20002010.pdf, accessed on 6th June 2015, np.

¹⁰⁵ Harvey, R. ‘The NGO Report to the Committee on the Rights of the Child: The Children and Armed Conflict Unit’s Submission’, *Children and Armed Conflict Unit*, Issue 187, June 2002, taken from https://www.essex.ac.uk/armedcon/story_id/000035.pdf, accessed on 13th June 2015, p. 2.

¹⁰⁶ Defence Analytical Services and Advice (2011): ‘*UK Regular Forces Intake and Outflow By Age For Financial Year 2009-10*’, taken from www.dasa.mod.uk (accessed 11th June 2012), taken from ‘One Step Forward: The Case for Ending Recruitment of Minors by the British Armed Forces’, a study produced by Forces Watch and Child Soldiers International, April 2013, p.4.

¹⁰⁷ ‘*Catch 16-22, Recruitment and Retention of Minors in the British Armed Forces*’, 2011, London, p.1.

application or other appropriate recruitment process forms. These safeguards are still in place and continue to be applied regularly.¹⁰⁸

Child Soldiers International and Forces Watch worked together to provide a cost-effective analysis for the MoD in which they compared the financial costs involved for recruiting at 16 and at 18. Their results ‘indicate that in 2013-14, it cost the taxpayer approximately £50 million more for the army to recruit from age 16 than it would had all enlisted been aged 18 or above.’¹⁰⁹ The report suggested that

the substantially higher cost of training Junior Soldiers is mostly due to two factors a) the relatively high dropout rates among Junior Soldiers when compared to adult recruits (35.9% vs. 25%); and b) the longer duration of their Phase 1 training (12 months vs. 3 months).¹¹⁰

The MoD are unable to deploy personnel under the age of 18 or use them in hostilities, therefore they are not a practical or cost-effective resource. The House of Commons Defence Committee has requested the MoD to complete a report focused on constructing a cost benefit analysis concerning the recruitment of under 18s, however, to date, this has yet to be published.¹¹¹

A key concern of many humanitarian groups is the UK’s failure to implement the total prohibition of deployment of under-18s, when many other countries have acknowledged the Straight 18 position. When the UK ratified the Optional Protocol to the CRC, they added a clause which stipulated that

The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland will take all feasible measures to ensure that members of its armed forces who have not attained the age of 18 years do not take a direct part in hostilities. The United Kingdom understands that article 1 of the Optional Protocol would not exclude the deployment of members of its armed forces under the age of 18 to take a direct part in hostilities where: -

¹⁰⁸ Ministry of Defence, First Report by the United Kingdom on the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict, (September, 2007), published by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Paragraph 28, taken from Gee, D. *‘Informed Choice? Armed Forces Recruitment Practice in the United Kingdom’*, funded by Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust, November 2007, p. 69.

¹⁰⁹ *‘Army Recruitment: Comparative Cost-effectiveness of recruiting from age 16 versus age 18’*, (Forces Watch; Child Soldiers International, London, September 2014), p.1.

¹¹⁰ *‘Army Recruitment: Comparative Cost-effectiveness of recruiting from age 16 versus age 18’*, (London, 2014), p.2.

¹¹¹ Atkins, C. ‘Defence Ministry does Cost-benefit Analysis of recruiting under 18s’, *The Guardian*, 2013, np.

- a) there is a genuine military need to deploy their unit or ship to an area in which hostilities are taking place; and
- b) by reason of the nature and urgency of the situation: -
 - i) it is not practicable to withdraw such persons before deployment; or
 - ii) to do so would undermine the operational effectiveness of their ship or unit, and thereby put at risk the successful completion of the military mission and/or the safety of other personnel.¹¹²

The decision to place such a clause contradicts the UK's position on the use of under 18s in armed conflict situations. It advocates that children should not be present within conflict scenarios and openly condemns those who continue to recruit children, yet they have reserved the right to deploy when needed.¹¹³ The British Armed forces enlist approximately 22,000 people each year, of which around 4,700 are under-18 years of age.¹¹⁴ The continued recruitment of under-18s has been a cause of concern for a number of human rights groups and those interested in the welfare of children. Increasing the recruitment age to 18 would be more ethical, as it would remove any issues concerning legalities, operational effectiveness, whilst also providing financial benefits. It has been suggested that

the fact that 16 has been, in practice, the minimum recruitment age for at least the past 40 years does not mean that it is necessarily the most appropriate minimum age recruitment age today given advancements in our understanding of children's rights and protection needs, evolving international standards and best practice.¹¹⁵

The MoD need to recognise some of the debates concerning recruitment of under-18s in order to ensure that its recruitment strategies work well for its personnel, its operational capabilities, and its standing within the international community. Despite criticism the MoD state that 'under-18s joining the army enjoy a wide range of benefits, training and

¹¹²Declaration made by the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland submitted at the time of the UK's ratification to Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict', 25th May 2000, taken from <http://treaties.un.org/doc/Publication/MTDGS/Volume%20I/Chapter%20IV/IV-11-b.en.pdf>, accessed on 1st September 2013, p.22.

¹¹³Declaration made by the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland submitted at the time of the UK's ratification to Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict', 2000, p.22.

¹¹⁴ Defence Analytical Services and Advice (2011): 'UK Regular Forces Intake and Outflow By Age For Financial Year 2009-10', www.dasa.mod.uk, p.3.

¹¹⁵ 'Catch 16-22, Recruitment and Retention of Minors in the British Armed Forces', 2011, London, p.9.

experiences,’¹¹⁶ and that ‘many individuals thrive in the armed forces, which provide opportunities, a career and lifestyle very different to any other.’¹¹⁷ Whilst both perspectives provide valid points to support their arguments, this thesis seeks to make the reader aware of the discussion regarding British military recruitment policies and how it has become part of the tale concerning the British Army and children.

In order to understand the experiences of the British soldier, it is important to acknowledge the organisation they belong to and the cultural beliefs adhered to. The British Army is entrenched in Western liberal democratic values in which the ‘child’ is an actor worthy of special treatment, in which they are attributed different values to an adult. This is apparent with regard to the narratives associated with underage fighters during the First and Second World Wars. Their stories are distinct from other soldiers in which they are given special recognition and ‘hero’ status, namely because they chose to fight under the required age for recruitment and conscription. However, the lines become blurred when discussing the role of children in modern conflicts and the British Army due to the current Straight 18 campaign. Whilst British under-18s are not deployed into conflict theatres and therefore not in harm’s way, they are an important component of the British Army as an organisation. British soldiers have experience working with those between the ages of 16 and 18-years-of-age, therefore are not immune from the concept of children being involved in military groups. However, these children are not being encountered in a hostile environment, nor are they operating *against* the British soldier.

The lack of literature and position regarding children in conflict zones, could be due to the alleged hypocritical nature of the British Army being the only European country to continue to recruit under-18s. As this project developed, the British recruitment of under-18s

¹¹⁶ Hickman, L. ‘Why do the British Armed Forces Still Allow 16 year olds to enlist?’, *The Guardian*, 23rd April 2013, np.

¹¹⁷ ‘*Catch 16-22, Recruitment and Retention of Minors in the British Armed Forces*’, 2011, London, p.9.

remained a topical narrative within the media and NGO community, with criticism being levelled at the MoD for not updating their recruitment policies in line with other national armed forces. This ongoing debate may have closed all avenues for discussion with the British Army regarding their position with children and armed conflict. Whilst the British Army do not deploy under-18s on operations, they recognise that a dichotomy exists between the age of 16 and 18, where a child is not legally old enough to be involved in a theatre of armed conflict but is old enough to join a military institution. The following section will explore the British Army's relationship with non- British children in conflict zones.

4.5 The British Army and Children in Conflict Zones

Whilst it is important to understand the British Army's relationship with British children, it is their perceived relationship with children in conflict scenarios that requires greater analysis. The British Army's relationship with British children provides an insight into the values and cultural expectations associated with the child actor, and it is these assumptions that are likely to continue and be associated with non- British children present in conflict environments. The British Army's Counter-Insurgency manual contains a brief section about soldiers working with local populations including helping children and building schools.¹¹⁸ However, we know little about their interaction with children when deployed, other than relying upon soldier's individual testimonies or official military sources which may contain an element of bias. It is the visual images, such as photographs and news footage, that help to provide the domestic population with an insight into the British Army's relationship with children when operating overseas. However, these images are also likely to contain an element of bias depending upon the source that published them. This section of the thesis explores the British Army's relationship with children in conflict zones based on the

¹¹⁸ *'British Army Field Manual Volume 1 Part 10 Countering Insurgency'*, British Army, October 2009, p.4-10.

information provided by the organisation themselves. This involves a discussion of the images produced by the British Army, as well as an overview of the literature provided by the organisation for their personnel.

Whilst Bordwell's film comprehension framework¹¹⁹, drew inferences from motion pictures to explain what was directly being shown to the audience, this section will use the same model to make inferences from the visual images displayed on the British Army's official website.¹²⁰ It will explain exactly what is being shown in the image presented to highlight the organisational narrative. As mentioned in chapter two, the organisational narrative is important as it provides an insight into the type of knowledge an organisation wishes to divulge to a particular audience. The British Army's website is open access and available to members of the public, it contains a number of sections detailing the organisation's history, recruitment policies, and current news. The website also contains a number of videos and images involving members of their personnel. A number of visual images show military personnel interacting with the civilian populations when deployed overseas; most of the images depict the soldier with children rather than adults. Photographs are displayed under the various regimental sections of the British Army website.

¹¹⁹ Bordwell, D. *Making Meaning: Inference and Rhetoric in the Interpretation of Cinema*, (First Harvard University Press, USA, 1991).

¹²⁰ Permission was obtained from the Army Media Communications Centre, granted by email correspondence on the 12th April 2016 and the Head Office Chief Photographer & DDC Photo and Video Team Leader, Defence Imagery Team, Ministry of Defence, granted by email correspondence on the 25th April 2016. Copies of the email permissions can be shown on request.

For example, the photograph used for the Royal Logistics Corp (Figure 4.2) shows a British soldier kneeling next to three young children.



(Figure 4.2) ¹²¹

The soldier's weapon is pointed to the ground, therefore is not at a threatening angle when talking to the children. The soldier is also kneeling down, therefore is eye-level with the children he is communicating with.

Another image (Figure 4.3) used by the Royal Military Police (RMP) also depicts a soldier with young children. This image also contains two other British soldiers but they are not seen to be interacting with the children in the picture.

¹²¹ 'Royal Logistics Corps Careers', (unknown author), taken from section 'Royal Logistics Corp', British Army, taken from <http://www.army.mod.uk/logistic/23443.aspx>, accessed on 24th August 2014.



(Figure 4.3) ¹²²

The image shows a soldier, a member of the military police as outlined on his badge, reaching out to a young Afghan boy. Both are smiling at each other. Two smaller children look on, whilst another child is watching a second soldier by his vehicle. Again, the soldier's weapon is facing downwards towards the ground.

Under the Royal Regiment of Scotland section (Figure 4.4), a soldier is shown to be talking with two young children, it looks as though one of the children is shaking the soldier's hand. The soldier is kneeling down and is eye level with the children. Both the children are pictured smiling, with one child smiling towards the camera.

¹²² 'Provost', (unknown author), taken from section 'Adjutant General's Corps', British Army, taken from www.army.mod.uk/agc/23202.aspx, accessed on 24th August 2014.



(Figure 4.4)¹²³

The Welsh Guards section contains a photograph (Figure 4.5) depicting a driver, passenger, and gunner smiling down at a group of children who are stood around their vehicle. Again the weapon on top of the vehicle is pointing away from the children they are looking at.



(Figure 4.5)¹²⁴

¹²³ 'Royal Regiment of Scotland', (unknown author), British Army, taken from <http://www.army.mod.uk/infantry/regiments/23992.aspx>, accessed on 24th August 2014.

¹²⁴ 'Welsh Guards', (unknown author), British Army, taken from www.army.mod.uk/infantry/regiments/23991.aspx, accessed on 24th August 2014.

All of these images presented are taken from the British Army website, in which a survey of the site was conducted and any images containing a reference to a child was noted and displayed. Although these photos may have been staged, this offers an insight into the image the British Army might be trying to promote: that being a soldier is about more than just killing in combat, it involves working with local populations, state-building and peace-keeping. The depiction of children in these images helps to highlight the varied role of the modern-day British soldier, and it serves to downplay the notion of aggression commonly associated with soldiering. Most of the images depict the soldier's weapons pointing away from the child with the soldier adopting positive body language, either in the form of a smile or shaking hands with the child.

Whilst the British Army has opted to use the above images on its website, there is little other available information concerning the organisation's relationship with non-British children evident from their online website. Therefore, the following section involved a literature review of the guidelines produced by the MoD which are available to all British soldiers. Any advice concerning the child as an actor, both as a hostile threat or an innocent bystander, was noted. Three FOI requests were also submitted to the MoD to ensure that all publicly available resources and information had been accounted for. This section will also draw upon information provided by two MoD trainers, who I met with to discuss the various training guidelines provided to British soldiers. As discussed in the *Introduction*, the purpose of this meeting was to inform the thesis therefore direct quotations will not, and cannot be used. This section will also draw upon the interviews conducted by myself with former British soldiers to discuss the training and guidance they received during their time in the British Army. As the interview participants served at different stages within a twenty-five-year timeframe (1990-2015), and in different conflicts, their experiences will provide an understanding as to how training methods have evolved. Firstly, the following section will

examine the information provided to British soldiers concerning the laws associated with children in armed conflict. The section will then examine the guidance and training provided to British soldiers concerning the potential interaction with children, either as innocent bystanders or active participants, in theatres of armed conflict.

4.6 The British Army: Laws, Guidelines and Training

As previously mentioned, the Just War principles govern the nation state's decision to go to war, *Jus ad bellum*, and the way in which they conduct war, *Jus in Bello*. However, military forces must also ensure that their personnel are well-versed in International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and the Laws of Armed Conflict (LOAC) during initial training and prior to deploying on operations. Under Article 83 of the First Additional Protocol to the 1949 Geneva Conventions, all nation states are required to disseminate the LOAC to all of their military personnel and ensure they receive the appropriate training.¹²⁵ The British Army includes a training session on the LOAC as part of their pre-deployment package which is available to all personnel.¹²⁶ The Joint Services Publication (JSP) 898 *Defence Direction and Guidance on Training, Education and Skills*¹²⁷ provides further information concerning the material that is covered during these training sessions, and the stages in which personnel should receive such training. However, to date, the MoD does not provide training on the LOAC in relation to the child combatant. Within their response to a FOI request, the MoD stipulated that

¹²⁵ Article 83, Clause 1, First Additional Protocol to the 1949 Geneva Conventions, 8th June 1977, taken from <https://www.icrc.org/applic/ihl/ihl.nsf/Article.xsp?action=openDocument&documentId=A2DB8BF8F37D0CB1C12563CD0051E172>, accessed on 14th June 2016.

¹²⁶ *Freedom of Information Response FOI2015/02562*, received on 13th April 2015, no URL available, and during the conversation with MoD trainers on 18th March 2015.

¹²⁷ 'Defence Direction and Guidance on Training, Education and Skills', Joint Services Publication 898 (Ministry of Defence, London, November 2014), taken from https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/433761/20141126-JS_898_Part1_Direction_v1_1.pdf, accessed on 1st May 2016.

At present, the three Armed Services (Army, Royal Navy and Royal Air Force) do not deliver any training that focuses on just children. The Law of Armed Conflict (LOAC) training is provided to all Service personnel from their initial training and at frequent intervals throughout their career. This training covers the behaviour of soldiers and the treatment of combatants and non-combatants, but not specifically children.¹²⁸

Whilst child combatants may not be mentioned specifically, the follow legal guidance is provided to all personnel. The 1949 Geneva Conventions contains information that details the protection provided to both combatants and civilians. Article 4 of the Geneva Conventions refers to the status of the child; in which it stipulates that the child is deemed a special category of persons¹²⁹

In times of peace, the High Contracting Parties and, after the outbreak of hostilities, the Parties thereto, may establish in their own territory and, if the need arises, in occupied areas, hospital and safety zones and localities so organised as to protect from the effects of war, wounded, sick and aged persons, *children under fifteen*, expectant mothers and mothers of children under seven.¹³⁰

Whilst this article highlights the protection afforded to certain categories of non-combatants, the First Additional Protocol to the 1949 Geneva Conventions extended the protection to cover children involved in hostilities. Article 77, clause 3 states that

If, in exceptional cases, despite the provisions of paragraph 2, children who have not attained the age of fifteen years take a direct part in hostilities and fall into the power of an adverse Party, they shall continue to benefit from the special protection accorded by this Article, whether or not they are prisoners of war.¹³¹

This extension of rights is applicable for British soldiers encountering children in armed conflict; regardless of whether the child is a combatant, they are still entitled to special protection. The 1989 CRC created a set of principles which acknowledged the specific human

¹²⁸ *Freedom of Information Response FOI2015/02562*, received on 13th April 2015, no URL available.

¹²⁹ See *Article 4 of the Fourth Geneva Convention Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War*, Geneva Conventions, 12th August 1949, taken from <https://www.icrc.org/applic/ihl/ihl.nsf/Article.xsp?action=openDocument&documentId=78EB50EAD6EE7AA1C12563CD0051B9D4>, accessed on 14th April 2015.

¹³⁰ Article 14, Part II General Protection of Populations Against Certain Consequences of War, 1949 Geneva Conventions IV, taken from *Documents of the Laws of War*, Roberts, A. and Guelff, R. (3rd Edition, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2000), p.306.

¹³¹ *Article 77, clause 3 of the 1977 First Additional Protocol to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts (Protocol I)*, 8 June 1977, taken from <https://www.icrc.org/applic/ihl/ihl.nsf/WebART/470-750099>, accessed on 2nd July 2015.

rights measures designed to protect children. The 2000 Optional Protocol furthered the protection of children by raising the minimum recruiting age from 15 to 18.¹³² Knowledge of child recruitment policies is important for the professional soldier as they need to be able to differentiate between a child combatant and adult combatant in order to ensure the child's special status is adhered to and appropriate legal guidelines are abided by.

The definition of a combatant and civilian have been developed through customary law. A combatant is defined as 'all members of the armed forces of a party to the conflict are combatants, except medical and religious personnel.'¹³³ Whereas Rule 5 acknowledges that 'civilians are persons who are not members of the armed forces. The civilian population comprises all persons who are civilians.'¹³⁴ The first rule explains the principle of distinction between civilians and combatants stating 'the parties to the conflict must at all times distinguish between civilians and combatants. Attacks may only be directed against combatants. Attacks must not be directed against civilians.'¹³⁵ British soldiers have the right to defend themselves against children who are combatants, but they must ensure they adhere to the four principles of the LOAC. These are military necessity, unnecessary suffering, distinction or discrimination, and proportionality,¹³⁶ and have been discussed in the *Methodology and Principal Concepts* chapter of this thesis. However, it is important to reiterate the importance of the principle of distinction, which requires personnel to distinguish between combatants and non-combatants. For a civilian to be eligible for

¹³² *Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict*, 25 May 2000, taken from <https://www.icrc.org/applic/ihl/ihl.nsf/INTRO/595?OpenDocument>, accessed on 2nd July 2015.

¹³³ *Definition of Combatants*, Rule 3, Chapter 1, Customary International Humanitarian Law, taken from https://www.icrc.org/customary-ihl/eng/docs/v1_cha_chapter1_rule3, accessed on 2nd July 2015.

¹³⁴ *Definition of Civilians*, Rule 5, Chapter 1, Customary International Humanitarian Law, taken from https://www.icrc.org/customary-ihl/eng/docs/v1_cha_chapter1_rule5, accessed on 2nd July 2015.

¹³⁵ *The Principle of Distinction between Civilians and Combatants*, Rule 1, Chapter 1, Customary International Humanitarian Law, taken from https://www.icrc.org/customary-ihl/eng/docs/v1_cha_chapter1_rule1, accessed on 2nd July 2015.

¹³⁶ Please see '*The Laws of Armed Conflict: Basic Knowledge*', International Committee of the Red Cross, June 2002, taken from https://www.icrc.org/eng/assets/files/other/law1_final.pdf, accessed on 17th May 2016.

protection in times of conflict, they must ensure that they do not partake in hostilities. The following information is provided to British Soldiers in the *Joint Service Manual (JSM) of the Law of Armed Conflict*

If he makes reasonable efforts to gather intelligence, reviews the intelligence available to him and concludes in good faith that he is attacking a legitimate military target, he does not automatically violate the principle of distinction if the target turns out to be different and civilian in nature.¹³⁷

Whilst the principle of distinction is important to assess whether someone is a combatant or civilian, war is chaotic and contemporary operations have shown the difficulty in attempting to identify the adversary. Although a combatant, the enemy can disguise themselves as a civilian in order to carry out an attack or to protect themselves from harm. This issue also extends to the topic of children in theatres of armed conflict; it can be difficult to determine whether the child is a civilian or lethal threat depending on the nature of the conflict. The importance of timely intelligence about the enemy and the situation is vital when the soldier is faced with this type of dilemma. Having as much knowledge as possible on the potential threat prior to engaging will help the soldier determine whether their actions were morally and legally justifiable. The principle of proportionality is also important as any action taken must be proportional to be able to achieve the military objective. The MoD incorporate the modern example of human shields to explain the proportionality rule

Even when human shields are being used the proportionality rule must be considered. However, if the defenders put civilians or civilian objects at risk by placing military objectives in their midst or by placing civilians in or near military objectives, this is a factor to be taken into account in favour of the attackers in considering the legality of attacks on those objectives.¹³⁸

This situation is particularly relevant due to evidence of human shields being used by adversaries in some of the recent conflicts the British Army have been involved in. Although

¹³⁷ *The Joint Service Manual of the Law of Armed Conflict*, Joint Service Publication 383, (2004 Edition, Ministry of Defence, Joint Doctrines Concepts Centre, Wiltshire), p.78.

¹³⁸ *The Joint Service Manual of the Law of Armed Conflict*, JPS 383, (2004, Ministry of Defence), p.26.

children or child soldiers may not be mentioned during training on LOAC, the *Joint Service Manual* does contain a reference to child soldiers.¹³⁹ The manual reinforces that children under the age of 15 should not be involved or partake in hostilities but that if they do, and are captured as prisoners of war (POW), then they should receive special protection.

Parties to an armed conflict are required to take all feasible measures to ensure that children who have not attained the age of 15 years do not take a direct part in hostilities. They must refrain from recruiting such children into their armed forces. In recruiting children aged 15 and over but under 18, the oldest are to be recruited first. If captured, under-aged members of the armed forces are entitled to be treated as prisoners of war, but are also entitled to the special protection afforded to children.¹⁴⁰

This section reiterates the legal obligations concerning recruitment and treatment of child soldiers in theatres of armed conflict, as highlighted in the LOAC, but it does not provide any legal guidance or discussions about engagement with child soldiers in a hostile environment.

The LOAC and IHL provide the framework in which British Armed Forces have to work within. The MoD is also responsible for ensuring that soldiers receive the appropriate level of training in order to operate by such legal standards. However, it is the Rules of Engagement (RoE) which provide the directives as to how military personnel should conduct operations. The Rules of Engagement are described by the British Army as

Permissions and prohibitions which govern where armed forces can go, what they can do, and to an extent, how and when certain actions can be carried out. They are designed to ensure that action taken by UK forces is lawful and consistent with government policy.¹⁴¹

¹³⁹ *The Joint Service Manual of the Law of Armed Conflict*, JSP 383, (2004, Ministry of Defence).

¹⁴⁰ *The Joint Service Manual of the Law of Armed Conflict*, JSP 383, (2004, Ministry of Defence), p.102.

¹⁴¹ *Operations*, Army Doctrine Publication, (Ministry of Defence, Shrivenham, 2010), p2-14.

Whereas the *Joint Service Manual of the Law of Armed Conflict* defines Rules of Engagement as

directives for operational commands and will be subject to constant review, within the constraints of law, according to the political and military assessment of national or multinational interest as it relates to the mission to be accomplished and the circumstances facing the force.¹⁴²

Rules of Engagement alter depending upon the nature of the operation and the objectives of the military force. The RoE for each operation are provided to all personnel in the form of a card which they carry with them at all times when deployed on military operations. Details regarding the RoE for British personnel remains restricted and is only accessible via security clearance. It is commonly understood that RoE does not limit the right for the soldier to use self-defence if fired upon; however, they must ensure that the force used is proportional and necessary.¹⁴³ As stated in the *Joint Services Publication 0-01*, ‘while rules of engagement may limit activity, they do not limit the legal right to act in self-defence, where such activity is both reasonable and necessary.’¹⁴⁴ The soldier also has a duty to protect the lives of their fellow comrades and civilians in the local area.

Whilst IHL and the LOAC establish the legal frameworks in which British soldiers must adhere to, and the Rules of Engagement provide the operational commands, the following section will focus on the guidelines and training provided by the MoD for their personnel. A review of the literature and information provided by the FOI requests and MoD trainers, highlighted that there was a lack of guidelines or training material provided to British military personnel which focused specifically on the child or child combatant. However, the need for such material and training for professional military personnel has been

¹⁴² *The Joint Service Manual of the Law of Armed Conflict*, JSP 383, (2004, Ministry of Defence), p.53.

¹⁴³ Cole, A., Drew, P., McLaughlin, R., Mandsager, D. ‘*Sanremo Handbook on Rules of Engagement*’, (International Institute on Humanitarian Law, Sanremo, November 2009).

¹⁴⁴ ‘*Joint Services Publication 0-01, UK Defence Doctrine*’, 5th Edition, November 2014, Ministry of Defence, taken from https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/389755/20141208-JDP_0_01_Ed_5_UK_Defence_Doctrine.pdf, accessed on 14th May 2016, p.49.

emphasised in a number of reports and research papers published since the early 2000s.¹⁴⁵

The Global Strategic Trends programme run by the Development Concepts Doctrine Centre and the MoD, produced a publication which acknowledges potential future threats which the MoD are likely to face. The following extract was produced in a publication that predicts future concerns until 2040, it states

As integrated approaches are adopted, the roles and activities of civilian and military personnel *will* make the distinction between combatants and non-combatants difficult to discern at an individual level. Extensive use of PMSCs [Private Military Security Companies] *will* add further complexity to the operating environment. Regular military forces *will* deploy in environments where armed irregular forces, for example gangs, bandits, semi-official militias, PMSCs, terrorists, child soldiers, criminal elements, cyber warriors and tribal groups and insurgents, are operating, often as adversaries, but sometimes as neutrals or even as partners.¹⁴⁶

Although child soldiers are mentioned as part of the environment in which regular militaries may have to operate, the document makes no further reference to the child actor nor have any further publications acknowledged the potential concerns surrounding this particular actor. Children are mentioned sporadically within the literature provided by the MoD, but are rarely acknowledged as an actor who can cause potential harm or be a threat to military personnel. The following section will provide an overview of the various guidance provided to British military personnel in military manuals and literature by the MoD concerning the topic of children.

During the Afghanistan (post- 2001) and Iraq (post- 2003) conflicts, the MoD produced a number of manuals with a focus on civil-military relations and working with local

¹⁴⁵ Please see Hughes, J.A. 'Child Soldiers: Are US Military Members Prepared to Deal with the Threat?', *Air & Space Power Journal*, Volume: 1, 2008, see Singer, P. W. 'Caution: Child at War', *Parameters*, Winter 2001-02, p.156-172., Singer, P.W. 'Talk is getting cheap: Getting serious about preventing child soldiers', *Cornell International Law Journal*, Volume: 32, Issue: 3, 2004, p.561-586, Borchini, C., Lanz, S. and O'Connell, E. 'Child Soldiers: Implications for US Forces', *Center for Emerging Threats and Opportunities*, CETO 005-02, Marine Warfighting Laboratory, Quantico, VA, November 2002, and 'Child Soldiers as the Opposing Force', NATO TM-HFM-159, January 2011, taken from https://www.cso.nato.int/ACTIVITY_META.asp?ACT=1416.

¹⁴⁶ 'Global Strategic Trends – Out to 2040', Strategic Trends Programme, Ministry of Defence, DCDC, 4th Edition, 2013, p.87.

populations.¹⁴⁷ However, there was little information within these manuals regarding the presence of children within the civilian landscape. The 2009 British Army Field Manual entitled *Countering Insurgency* relies on the British Army's experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan to provide advice concerning searching property and people. It notes that 'women and children can be moved into one room before being searched to keep out of sight of men.'¹⁴⁸ It draws upon cultural norms to provide specific information which would be relevant for soldiers operating in particular regions. However, the guidelines with the most relevance for encountering children can be found in the Joint Doctrine Publication (JDP) entitled *Captured Persons*. This handbook provides detailed guidance as to how children should be treated if captured or detained. Although the CRC specifies that anyone under 18 is classified as a child¹⁴⁹, the Captured Persons (CPERS) defines those aged 15, 16, and 17 as juveniles¹⁵⁰ who should be 'accommodated separately from all adult and child CPERS, except where they are part of a family group.'¹⁵¹ The guidelines also suggest that

tactical question and interrogation of juveniles is not prohibited in law; however, MoD will issue operation-specific guidance on whether this is permitted as a matter of policy. Such policy will have due regard to the juvenile's age, any special condition and vulnerability, as well as the military benefit to be derived.¹⁵²

This is the only document that makes reference to the term *juveniles*. As well as categorising juveniles, the document also states that 'for the purpose of this publication,

¹⁴⁷ For examples please see, 'Civil-Military Co-operation CIMIC', Joint Doctrine Publication 3-90, (Ministry of Defence, Wiltshire, February 2013.), 'Non-combatant Evacuation Operations', Joint Doctrine Publication 3-51, (Ministry of Defence, Wiltshire, February 2013.), 'Security and Stabilisation: The Military Contribution', Joint Doctrine Publication 3-40, (Ministry of Defence, Wiltshire, November 2009). Please note the latest editions of publications have been presented.

¹⁴⁸ British Army FM, Volume: 1, Part 10, *Countering Insurgency*, (Ministry of Defence, 2010), p.199.

¹⁴⁹ 'Article One, Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989', taken from http://www.unicef.org/crc/files/Guiding_Principles.pdf, accessed on 8th June 2015.

¹⁵⁰ 'Captured Persons (CPERS)', Joint Doctrine Publication 1-10, 3rd Edition, (Development Concepts Doctrine Centre, Ministry of Defence, January 2015), taken from https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/455589/20150820-JDP_1_10_Ed_3_Ch_1_Secured.pdf, accessed on 12th March 2015, p.2-19.

¹⁵¹ 'Captured Persons (CPERS)', JDP 1-10, (DCDC, 2015), p.2-20.

¹⁵² 'Captured Persons (CPERS)', JDP 1-10, (DCDC, 2015), p.2-20.

captured children are defined as all CPERS under the age of 15.’¹⁵³ The guidelines highlight how, once captured, children must be guarded by a minimum of two UK personnel, not undergo any tactical questioning, and can only be held if they are of imminent danger to our Armed Forces.¹⁵⁴ The distinction between children and juveniles is important. It acknowledges that the British military categorise those between 15 and 18 separately from those under 15, this is evident within their own recruitment policies. It also suggests that those between the ages of 15 and 18 have greater agency and moral awareness than those under-15,¹⁵⁵ therefore are more likely to take an active role and pose a threat. This is evident as juveniles can undergo tactical interrogation, whereas those categorised as children are not subject to such measures.

Information provided by the Freedom of Information requests acknowledged that the MoD have covered the topic of child soldiers in courses provided to their personnel. The response by the MoD gave details concerning three courses in which child soldiers are mentioned. The Centre for Defence Leadership organised two courses in Burma (Myanmar), the first ran from the 6th to the 17th January 2014 and was entitled *Managing Defence in the Wider Context*. The FOI response stated that

Cranfield University's International Lawyer covered the subject of Child Soldiers as part of the Law module. The course provided an understanding of how Armed Forces are regulated and controlled within a constitutional framework and the relevance of International Human Rights to military and security forces. Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative (PSVI) and individual criminal responsibilities were covered in the context of Rules of Engagement (ROE) and the rules on the protection of victims, position of child soldiers under IHL and the conduct of hostilities.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵³ ‘Captured Persons (CPERS)’, JDP 1-10, (DCDC, 2015).

¹⁵⁴ ‘Captured Persons (CPERS)’, JDP 1-10, (DCDC, 2015), p.2-21.

¹⁵⁵ Further analysis concerning debates about children and agency can be found in Chapter 3, *Children in Contemporary Armed Conflict*.

¹⁵⁶ *Freedom of Information Response FOI2015/07194*, received on 8th September 2015, taken from https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/460424/PDFSCANS_Document_1.pdf, p.2.

The second course also took place in Burma, between the 12th to the 23rd January, and was led by a member of the UNICEF child protection section in which issues related to the use of child soldiers in Burma was discussed.¹⁵⁷ These courses were due to run again in February 2016.¹⁵⁸ Whilst these events demonstrate that the MoD do provide courses on the topic of child soldiers, they are only relevant to the Burmese operational environment and, due to their location in Burma, would not be available to all personnel. The FOI response also revealed a course run by the Joint Service Command Staff College (JSCSC), in which the information provided suggested that

All the courses at JSCSC include elements on International Humanitarian Law (IHL), Human Rights and Ethics. Speakers from International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Non-Government Organisation (NGO) community and academia present or participate in teaching stages. Within these the subjects the issue of child soldiers and their treatment is touched upon although it is not a central theme. As the aim of the education provided here is to prepare officers for further command and staff posts where child soldiers are covered it is in relation to how they should be treated once no longer engaged in hostilities.¹⁵⁹

Again, the emphasis is focused upon the treatment of the child soldier *after* the period of hostilities, rather than providing any guidance as to interactions with the child *during* hostilities. Having framed the request to the MoD concerning the *interaction with children as hostile actors on the battlefield*, their response was

Our 'interaction' with child soldiers of course can be much wider than facing them on a battlefield. International law (and domestic laws) governs child soldiers. All nations' forces must take all feasible measures to ensure those under 15 are not recruited. This ban is also extended to armed groups or to use them to participate actively in hostilities. Such recruitment is a war crime under the Rome Statute. When UK Armed Forces provide training/mentoring abroad, and in instances where there is assessed to be any risk of Human Rights abuses, then policy requires us to include in our training Human Rights training. Examples include training of forces in Nigeria and Ghana which included presentations on Rules of Engagement, protection of civilians and civilian objects, and basic Human Rights. Many of the recent internal conflicts in West Africa have involved extensive use of child soldiers, including forcing children to fight. In the Iran Iraq war, child soldiers were used.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁷ FOI Response FOI2015/07194, p.3.

¹⁵⁸ FOI Response FOI2015/07194, p.3

¹⁵⁹ FOI Response FOI2015/07194, p.3

¹⁶⁰ FOI Response FOI2015/07194, p.2.

Rather than providing information concerning the British interaction with child soldiers, the response focuses upon the legal frameworks associated with the child soldier and the role of the British Army in providing overseas training on the topic of human rights abuses, of which the recruitment of child soldiers is included. The response also provides examples as to where child soldiers have fought, but little information about the training and guidelines produced by the MoD.

Whilst there are no current guidelines concerning the potential interaction with children which personnel receive prior to their deployment on operations, soldiers do receive Mission Specific Training (MST). This training is based on previous deployment experience in the area and intelligence reports which provide information as to the types of threats that may be encountered, awareness of cultural traditions, and known details about the enemy. Information is gathered from units during the debrief sessions when they return from a patrol or an operation, or from interviews with units when they have returned from an overseas deployment.¹⁶¹ The information is then used to provide relevant material and training for the next unit that is to be deployed into that area. Therefore, if soldiers are deployed into an area known to have high levels of child soldiers present, then this type of information *should* be given during Mission Specific Training.

Experiences derived from the conflicts in Afghanistan (post- 2001) and Iraq (post-2003) resulted in British Counter-Insurgency (COIN) doctrine being adapted, yet these conflicts also allowed for further transformation within the British Army. The soldier's role within the urban environment also received greater attention and the need to conduct operations in built-up areas amongst the civilian population became paramount. Fighting in Built up Areas (FIBUA) training had been in existence since the Second World War with the

¹⁶¹ Conversation with MoD Trainers (via skype), 18th March 2015.

purchase and development of mock villages in Salisbury Plain to allow the army to conduct training in a specific environment relatable to its current operations. These training environments have expanded and become more realistic in recent years, as Bernice Baker notes these villages have been ‘lovingly crafted as accurate facsimiles of theatres thousands of miles away, and even populated with actors inseparable from locals, with accurate sounds and smells.’¹⁶² The use of FIBUA training exercises was mentioned during the interviews conducted with former British soldiers. Soldier D explains the various stages and purpose of a FIBUA exercise

FIBUA is a military acronym, fighting in built up areas, the Americans call it MOUS, military operations in urban surrounding, ...well there was FIBUA and DIBUA, which is defence in built up areas, and when you finish the exercise BIBUA which is brushing up in built up areas,.....it is basically a deserted village and all the houses have been emptied out, the windows taken out, just used as a training centre... where people throw petrol bombs at us, where you learn how to use the shields properly.....with your military stuff, and other military people provide what is called CIVPOP¹⁶³ they are not civilians, they are military.¹⁶⁴

With the lengthy conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, the MoD continued its use of FIBUA villages and adapted training which incorporated ‘an extra dimension of realism...with actors, including amputees playing Afghan soldiers and civilians speaking Pashto. Museum technicians were even brought in to install a system to pump authentic smells like meat in the marketplace and sewers festering in the heat.’¹⁶⁵ Due to the complex nature of contemporary conflict, these types of training scenarios are crucial in preparing troops prior to deployment. As Army Chief, General Sir David Richards said in 2009 ‘these new training facilities mean that we will be giving our soldiers the very best chance to succeed in today’s complex operations and return home safely. We need to provide as realistic an environment as we can for our excellent fighting soldiers. They deserve nothing

¹⁶² Baker, B. ‘*Tanks on the Doorstep- the Evolution of the Military Training Village*’, Army Technology, 27th May 2014, taken from www.army-technology.com/features/featuretanks-on-the-doorstep-evolution-of-the-military-training-village-4274482, accessed on 14th August 2014, np.

¹⁶³ CIVPOP refers to the military acronym civilian population.

¹⁶⁴ Interview with Soldier D, Interviewed by Michelle Jones (Aberystwyth University, February 2015).

¹⁶⁵ Baker, B. ‘*Tanks on the Doorstep*’, Army Technology, 2014, np.

less.’¹⁶⁶ These villages provide an excellent visual training experience for soldiers preparing to be deployed on operations. The use of amputees to play the role of wounded soldiers helps to prepare the soldier for some of the potential scenarios they may face. Whilst the use of children in such training exercises would result in legal and ethical concerns, the concept of children can be used to prepare soldiers for the different circumstances they might encounter. Soldier D recalls his officer training at the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst in which he partook in a FIBUA exercise. The military focus was on operations within the Northern Ireland context, therefore the village and training scenario was prepared with this context in mind.

I remember this scenario training and you are patrolling along in a Land Rover and the CIVPOP, military people employed to be civilians, are stood at the side of the road with an old-fashioned pram, they wait for the Land Rover and they push it out in front of the Land Rover, and this little baby doll falls out and suddenly you have a riot on your hands. It is about dealing with the riot; it is not about dealing with the child or infant you have just run over. It is about the riot, so children were used...well the concept of children but didn't actually use children for all sort of legal reasons. And coming to think of it that is a shortfall, so yes this (research project) is important.¹⁶⁷

Another former soldier mentioned in his interview that children are not incorporated into FIBUA training scenarios because they cannot be used for legal or ethical purposes, ‘we do it for Northern Ireland, for the Balkans, Afghanistan, so we do a lot of that obviously (FIBUA training), none of those situations do we have children in any of them partly because we can't, I don't think we would be allowed to as much as we would like to.’¹⁶⁸ However, one former soldier through his own musings on using children during FIBUA training exercises suggested that

you don't have to stick a gun in a kid's hand to make them a threat, if you coach kids to look a certain way without telling them ‘pretend you are concealing an IED’, or carry that weird

¹⁶⁶ Benthon. M. ‘Afghan Village? No, it's Norfolk’, *London Evening Standard*, 1st May 2009, taken from www.standard.co.uk/news/afghan-village-no-its-norfolk-6753977.html, accessed on 3rd August 2014, np.

¹⁶⁷ Interview with Soldier D, Interviewed by Michelle Jones (Aberystwyth University, February 2015).

¹⁶⁸ Interview with Soldier G, Interviewed by Michelle Jones (Aberystwyth University, March 2015).

bag with an antennae and pretend it is a remote control car and take it from over there...that could be your scene.¹⁶⁹

Whilst the British Army, as an organisation, has adapted FIBUA training techniques to deal with modern conflict scenarios, my research suggests that issues concerning the child as a hostile actor have yet to be acknowledged or incorporated into pre-deployment training packages. Although there are ethical, moral, legal and employment issues regarding the use of children in these training scenarios, alternative actors or technologies could be found which would be beneficial in preparing soldiers to acknowledge that this actor exists and is likely to be part of the operational landscape. A new style of training exercise has been developed in order to 'help the Army understand the battlefield of the future.'¹⁷⁰ Exercise *Urban Warrior 5* uses the latest video game technology to create a simulator which allows the soldier to experience various battlefield scenarios, calculating their reactions through the use of a mock weapon which can then be analysed and the data used in later discussions. This type of training has been devised to help personnel with their fire control, as well as making judgements in a complex landscape. Soldier F described the training as

an exercise all people should go through before deployment which is basically a big massive computer game where various scenarios are played out, and you have electronic automatic weapons and they play it out, and replay it out to you and you have your responses. For example, you have your response shoot out and all kinds of people roaming around, who do you shoot? So they play it back and it marks where each round was fired and they ask you to discuss why did you shoot that one?¹⁷¹

Whether the child, as a hostile actor, is part of the computerised battlefield scenarios the soldier has to deal with, remains to this date unknown. However, some of the former soldiers mentioned this type of judgement training within their interview discussions. Soldier H

¹⁶⁹ Interview with Soldier H, Interviewed by Michelle Jones (Aberystwyth University, March 2015).

¹⁷⁰ 'Army Conducts Largest Ever Virtual Battlefield Simulation Experiment', *Ministry of Defence News*, 31st January 2013, taken from <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/army-conducts-largest-ever-virtual-battlefield-simulation-experiment>, accessed on 14th June 2015, np.

¹⁷¹ Interview with Soldier F, Interviewed by Michelle Jones (Aberystwyth University, March 2015).

recalls children being present in the simulation exercise, but only as bystanders and not as hostile threats,

Moving on from Northern Ireland and Iraq was simulated ranges, I don't know if you have come across it but inside plugged into a laser with a video screen where you shoot, it effectively counts so you can tell what you have hit and what you haven't, that's useful to train with for rules of engagement so you set the system up differently...but in that scenario I am pretty sure there were children, non-combatants but children, so if you were walking down the street, they included people milling around.¹⁷²

Whilst the moral dilemma of the child soldier is not used in this exercise, other moral dilemmas have been incorporated into the judgement training package. Soldier F relates an example in which he has been informed of by a member of staff at the Land Warfare Centre

and there is one scenario I was told by the staff running it that trips people up, it's the simplest of them all, a woman walking towards you clearly pregnant in a burka and the scenario involves shouting. She hasn't been searched and she keeps walking and it really...for some people they can't take that, they don't know what to do, they make no decision at all and they break down. It is a video game scenario in the comfort of Salisbury plain, if you can call it that....so you can imagine some dusty, horrible shit hole or wherever they will be deployed next, you will have to make that choice! It is not going to do you any good.¹⁷³

This programme is still in its early stages of development and has yet to be incorporated as part of the pre-deployment package. However, with its purpose to 'provide evidence-based advice to the British Army on the critical capabilities required in order to operate in the future urban battlefield, and the most cost-effective approaches to developing the Future Force,'¹⁷⁴ it demonstrates how the army recognises its need to evolve. Moral dilemmas or judgement training are beneficial exercises in preparing soldiers for the array of situations they are likely to encounter in complex operating environments, especially during 'wars amongst the people' where the distinction between civilian and combatant is unclear. Whilst judgement or dilemma training is not incorporated into all pre-deployment packages, a scenario based discussion has emerged within the *Developing Leaders: A British Army*¹⁷⁵

¹⁷² Interview with Soldier H, Interviewed by Michelle Jones (Aberystwyth University, March 2015).

¹⁷³ Interview with Soldier F, Interviewed by Michelle Jones (Aberystwyth University, March 2015).

¹⁷⁴ 'Army Conducts Largest Ever Virtual Battlefield Simulation Experiment', *MOD News*, 2013, np.

¹⁷⁵ 'Developing Leaders: A British Army Guide', 1st Edition, (Royal Military Academy Sandhurst, Surrey, 2014).

guide. This guide is concerned with developing the leadership skills of those officers receiving their army education at the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst. It incorporates a number of moral issues, designed to induce discussions and debates amongst personnel. Within these moral based scenarios exists a situation in which the child is a potential hostile threat. The following extract is taken from a document produced to provide potential officers within the British Army with questions they should ask their lower-ranking colleagues during training and discussion time:

7. Child Spotter.

Scenario. The insurgents you are fighting are using a 5-year-old child to point out your position. You come under effective enemy fire and as you move the child moves with you continuing to point out your position from only 30 metres away. You try to engage the firing point, but the insurgent's fire continues.

Key Considerations.

The fire you are receiving is accurate.

You have been in the population a month trying to turn the population to support you.

What is the right course of action?

What do you do?

Is there ever a time when you would engage with a child who is not bearing arms?

If one of your team was wounded would this change your view? What if you received multiple casualties or a fatality?

If you were to engage the child, who in your team would you get to fire?¹⁷⁶

Discussion of this scenario and the moral dilemma is important as it recognises that children can be hostile threats. However, it remains only a discussion exercise as the British Army has yet to publish any doctrine, training or guidelines based upon the implications of operating amongst children or potentially facing a child in a hostile situation. However, it does suggest that there is some recognition that a child could be a lethal threat and that a moral dilemma may be posed.

Within the interviews with former British soldiers, a number of the participants recalled their own training received in relation to children or child soldiers. Soldier C noted that the topic of child soldiers was only discussed during an international training exercise, in which various military forces discussed their own recruitment policies and the role of the

¹⁷⁶ 'Developing Leaders', (RMAS, 2014), p.101-102.

child, ‘child soldier issue....it wasn’t at the level you were talking about – it was more at the political level, asking ‘should they be there?’¹⁷⁷ Another former soldier recalled information received in briefings prior to overseas deployments, ‘we did get briefings as they came out, in Bosnia I think, and Iraq, and I think in Helmand as well (where I was a civilian) about kids with toy guns and that was it.’¹⁷⁸ One former soldier who was deployed to Sierra Leone as part of Operation Barras¹⁷⁹ recollected that

we deployed very quickly so um there was nothing, there was no preparation in terms of psychological, we spoke through RoE, that was before Afghanistan (happened) and everything else. So the RoE we were used to was Northern Ireland, it was very tight for engagement but we were conscious we were going into a situation where there may be child soldiers, they may be threatening our....what we were trying to achieve so we spoke through issues surrounding that.¹⁸⁰

The issue of timing was also apparent within other discussions about training prior to deployment. Some units were deployed quickly or part of a Joint Rapid Reaction Force (JRRF), therefore the training package received may not have been as comprehensive or thorough. Soldier H stated that

there was not a lot of time, everyone will say they don’t have much time, but you have a million presentations on other things so if you have a presentation, it is not the best form of training, but even a presentation where some of the themes are discussed um it would be more useful. Particularly from a Commander’s point, as you then make the decision how you vocally train your guys.¹⁸¹

Prior to deployment, training on the LOAC or RoE may take priority over other training packages due to the limited amount of time available. However, training packages and exercises can also be provided in-theatre too. During an interview with Shelley Whitman, from the Child Soldiers Initiative, she recalled an incident in which she spoke with British

¹⁷⁷ Interview with Soldier C, Interviewed by Michelle Jones (Aberystwyth University, January 2015).

¹⁷⁸ Interview with Soldier F, Interviewed by Michelle Jones (Aberystwyth University, March 2015).

¹⁷⁹ Operation Barras was a British Army operation in which the military objective was to rescue a number of British soldiers who had been kidnapped by rebel forces (including child soldiers) in Sierra Leone. The operation took place on the 10th September 2000.

¹⁸⁰ Interview with Soldier J, Interviewed by Michelle Jones (Aberystwyth University, March 2015).

¹⁸¹ Interview with Soldier H, Interviewed by Michelle Jones (Aberystwyth University, March 2015).

military personnel during an in-theatre training class she was conducting in Sierra Leone (March 2014).

So we came and delivered two days of our in-class training...the training in class on day one after starting the morning session, there was about 10 British soldiers who were observing because we were outside under a tent basically...they saw what we were teaching and they came over and asked if they could sit in the class. I stopped for a moment and said sure...so they sat in and after a couple of hours it was then lunchtime and they came up to me and they said 'okay who are you? And why have we never had your training? If we had had your training we would have reacted differently in Afghanistan' and then they started to relay experiences, right they would say 'I was in a tank and I had this situation, did I do the right thing?' and they were really seeking a validation of that...they then went back that day and obviously told other soldiers who were with them about our course and even newer guys from the British military came the next day...we infused three of our interactions with the oral exercises...we marched out with them at about 6am to go into the Bush and see if they had taken in the lessons.¹⁸²

This demonstrates a lack of guidance and training produced by the MoD or British Army for their own personnel, as well as interest on the behalf of the British soldiers who voluntarily joined the class. However, it also suggests that training can be conducted in-theatre which could be beneficial, as the training received could be implemented in the immediate environment and context. Whilst this information has not been provided by the MoD, it does highlight that the British soldiers, in this particular context, did not feel they had received appropriate training in both the Afghanistan or Sierra Leone contexts, and had taken the initiative to learn about the subject from an outside source, in this case Child Soldiers Initiative.

4.7 Conclusion

The British Army is a continually evolving force, drawing upon its own experiences and the changing international and domestic landscapes, it has had to adapt quickly and efficiently to challenges to ensure its survival as a professional war-fighting organisation. Whilst recent changes such as the amalgamation of the regimental system and increased

¹⁸² Interview with Shelley Whitman from Child Soldiers Initiative, Interviewed by Michelle Jones (Aberystwyth University, 13th March 2015).

reliance on reserve forces have altered the organisational structure of the force; the values, standards, and ethos of the British Army remain the same. It continues to be a professional fighting force operating on an international level supported by some of the latest technologies. However, the roles associated with the British Army and their soldiers have had to progress in order to meet the new challenges of contemporary conflicts and actors.

In 1972, Lieutenant Colonel John Baynes predicted that the British soldier would have to display a wider skills set to operate in modern society, he believed they would need to be part of a constabulary, have substantial military training, adventure training, provide an educational function, and to serve as a military aid to the civil community.¹⁸³ He has been proved correct. The military sociologist, James Burk, uses the concept of the ‘non-traditional’ soldier to explain the range of activities the modern Western soldier must partake in. James Burk states the ‘non-traditional’ soldier is

an armed global street worker and constable or policeman. This non-traditional element of the military, however, does not replace its traditional tasks of deterrence and self-defence...but is complementary to them...Soldiers will be required to know how to fight, how to establish local security, how to deal with local adversaries, and how to co-operate with local partners and civilian international relief organisations.¹⁸⁴

The traditional roles of the soldier and the British Army as an organisation have developed; traditional combat operations have been replaced by a multi-dimensional approach to warfare which involves a mix of traditional war fighting and stabilisation skills. These roles are no longer distinct from one another and the British Army has to prepare its soldiers to espouse a multitude of roles in the same conflict zone. Coupled with this, the potential threat from children in armed conflict scenarios can cause a moral dilemma, adding to the complex and chaotic operational environment the soldier is party to.

¹⁸³ Baynes, J.C.M. *The Soldier in Modern Society*, (Eyre Methuen Ltd, London, 1972).

¹⁸⁴ Burk, J. ‘Military Mobilisation in the Modern Western Societies’, taken from Caforio, G. ed. *Handbook of the Sociology of the Military*, (Springer, USA, 2006), p. 432.

The British Army's relationship with children appears to conform to the narrative associated with the Western concept of childhood. It recognises that children are a special category of persons in which they should be protected and should not be involved in armed conflict, despite their own recruitment policies. As an organisation it conforms to the values held within Western society that children are a special category of persons who need to be protected and nurtured, yet it is one of the few remaining state militaries to recruit under-18s. Whilst the British Army adheres to the Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict by voluntarily recruiting those at 16 and not deploying under-18s into hostilities, it has opted to not follow in the footsteps of other states who have adopted the Straight 18 position. Although the British Army abides by its legal requirements concerning children and their rights regarding armed conflict, the UK could further its protection and safekeeping principles by raising the minimum age of recruitment to 18.

The British Army has a long history of working with children; providing educational benefits and opportunities to those wishing to partake in their various cadet schemes. Whilst the cadet force and regular armed forces may be funded by the same organisational bodies, use the same training grounds, and share the same uniform, they are in fact distinct organisations. The British Army does not use the cadet force as a recruiting pool, and there is no formal obligation for those partaking in the cadets to join the regular armed forces. The focus of the cadet schemes is on citizenship, and can only provide careers advice concerning the Armed Forces *if* the cadets themselves show an interest. The cadets are similar to other popular youth movements in the UK, like the Scouting and Guiding, but receive their funding from the state's military budget rather than governmental charities or religious organisations. The British Army has an unusual system in place; individuals can be members of the cadet force until they reach the age of 18, with no obligation to serve, yet the army allows the enlistment of 16-year-olds into its regular units. However, there is evidence that the British

Army respects that the child is deemed a special category of persons and adheres to the principles associated with the Western concept of childhood. Regular fundraising events for children's charities and the use of children in images on the British Army website demonstrate a positive relationship with children. Whilst one must always be aware of the use of such images and press releases, it demonstrates that the British Army acknowledges that children are a distinct category of persons. The way in which British soldiers interact with children can have implications on both the domestic and international audiences. As the *Developing Leaders* guide suggests, 'the ethos and environment of the Army – and hence conduct – shape its external reputation.'¹⁸⁵

Although the MoD or British Army do not provide any specific guidelines and training focusing specifically on children, either as innocent bystanders or hostile threats, it does acknowledge the child as an actor within some of its publications. The *Joint Service Manual of the Laws of Armed Conflict*¹⁸⁶ stipulates the legal rules concerning the recruitment and treatment of children, again acknowledging that children deserve special protection, and IHL is discussed at various stages in the soldier's career. The *Captured Persons* guidelines¹⁸⁷ provides a detailed overview of how the child should be treated if captured, including the measures that need to be undertaken to safeguard them, including housing them separately from juveniles and adults. Whilst legal guidance focuses on the human rights abuses concerned with the recruitment of children into armed forces and how to interact with the child *after* they have been removed from hostilities, there is a lack of discussion regarding the practical implications of encountering a child *during* a military operation.

¹⁸⁵ 'Developing Leaders', (RMAS, 2014), p.9.

¹⁸⁶ 'The Joint Service Manual of the Law of Armed Conflict', JSP 383, (2004, Ministry of Defence).

¹⁸⁷ 'Captured Persons (CPERS)', JDP 1-10, (DCDC, 2015).

The child as a potential threat was acknowledged in the *Developing Leaders*¹⁸⁸ guide, and was the basis of a course held in Burma, however, both instances have a limited audience. The *Developing Leaders* guide is only disseminated to officers studying at Sandhurst, and whilst it is hoped that such material would be disseminated to ORs there is no such guarantee, and the course in Burma is only available to those present in that environment and eligible for the course. Discussions about the child as an active and hostile threat are not evident within mainstream training manuals or guidelines. However, the discussions about current training exercises such as FIBUA and *Urban Warrior 5* highlight how training includes the need for judgement and dilemma-based exercises, therefore the child as an actor could easily be inserted into such situations.

The question arises as to how is the problem of children being present in theatres of armed conflict officially addressed by the MoD and the British Army? As this chapter has shown, there is little evidence to suggest that these two organisations have produced guidelines concerning the interaction with children (either as innocent bystanders or hostile threats) in theatres of armed conflict. Where the British Army or MoD have discussed the role of children in theatres of armed conflict, it tends to be at the political or legal levels. Either discussing the use and recruitment of child soldiers by other states¹⁸⁹ (the political level) or through their own manuals which document the legal frameworks in place to deal with child soldiers (the legal level). However, there is very little evidence to suggest that the MoD or British Army acknowledge the child soldier on the strategic level. The *Global Strategic Trends programme* highlighted that child soldiers may be part of the same operational landscape as regular forces in the future¹⁹⁰, yet the document provides little

¹⁸⁸ *Developing Leaders*, (RMAS, 2014).

¹⁸⁹ As documented in their courses held in Burma (January 2014), and during the example given concerning the International training exercise.

¹⁹⁰ *Global Strategic Trends – Out to 2040*, Strategic Trends Programme, DCDC, 2013.

evidence of further research, nor does it acknowledge that British soldiers already have experience operating in the same landscape as child soldiers. The child spotter scenario produced in the *Developing Leaders* guide, acknowledges the child as a potential threat which can cause a moral dilemma but it is the only document in which such evidence exists. This document is also only disseminated to officers undergoing training at the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst, therefore discussions about the child on a strategic level are not permeating across the rank based structure of the British Army. Although the British Army and the MoD provide guidelines concerning how to interact with the child soldier *after* the hostilities have ended, there is no publicly available information concerning interactions with the child soldier *during* hostilities.

Greater research in this area and the production of such guidelines would be beneficial in preparing British troops for such interactions with hostile child actors, as well as improving their understanding of the operational environment. Changes to the way the British Army conducts operations should be acknowledged by the organisation, ensuring that training opportunities match the current threats and environments the army can expect its soldiers to face. Operations are now likely to be conducted alongside other national military forces and organisations, therefore the ability to work within a coalition and the importance of interoperability are key features of the British Army's conduct in the twenty-first century. As the operational landscape and technological capabilities continue to evolve, the British Army should ensure that it has the flexibility in its approach to move with the times and react to challenges as they arise. Mallinson describes the British Army as 'an army long in the making, which yet remains very much a work in progress.'¹⁹¹

¹⁹¹ Mallinson, A. *The Making of the British Army*, (Great Britain, 2009), p.480.

However, it is possible that the British Army or MoD does not need to provide such training and guidelines to its armed forces personnel as they may not encounter children in theatres of armed conflict or, if they do, are not susceptible to the potential moral dilemma posed by the child actor. Therefore, the following chapter, *Children Associated with Armed Conflict: The Soldier's Perspective*, will collate conflict based experiences from former and serving British Army personnel to determine whether they have encountered children in theatres of armed conflict. And if so, how the presence of the child affected the military operations conducted by the British, and the individual attitudes and practices of the British soldier. It will analyse the presence of children in theatres of armed conflict from the soldier's perspective, drawing upon their experiences to determine the reality on the battlefield from those who have experienced the issue first-hand.

Chapter Five

Children Associated with Armed Conflict: The Soldier's Perspective

5.1 Introduction

In February 2015, the *Guardian* newspaper published an article in which Members of Parliament (MPs) suggested that the 'UK is failing to meet its moral and political obligations to children caught up in conflict zones'¹. The article suggested that the UK had not developed strategies to help or provide support to children who had been affected by war. Whilst the physical and psychological needs of children caught up in armed conflict situations are evident within research produced in the humanitarian, policy and academic fields,² there has been little research or discussion regarding the soldier's experiences of children in conflict zones. Scholarship has emerged based on the effect of lengthy and frequent deployments on armed forces personnel and their families³, and the role of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder within a military environment⁴, yet the experiences and perspectives of the soldier are often missing from such research. This chapter seeks to collate the experiences of the British

¹ Townsend, M. and Jones, S. 'Children in War Zones being failed by Britain. Say MPs in Scathing Report', *The Guardian*, 21st February 2015, taken from <http://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2015/feb/21/children-war-zones-failed-britain-report>, accessed on 28th March 2015, p.1.

² For further information, please see Bracken, P.J., Giller, J.E., Ssekiwanuka, J.K. 'The Rehabilitation of Child Soldiers: Defining Needs and Appropriate Responses', *Medicine and War*, Volume: 12, Issue: 2, 1996, p.114-125., and Ovuga, E., Oyok, T.O., and Moro, E.B. 'Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder Among Former Child Soldiers Attending a Rehabilitative Service and Primary School Education in Northern Uganda', *African Health Society*, Volume: 8, No: 3, 2008, p.136-41.

³ Please see, Buckman, J. E. J., Sundin, J., Greene, T. et al. 'The Impact of Deployment Length on the Health and Well-Being of Military Personnel: A Systematic Review of the Literature', *Occupational and Environmental Medicine*, Volume: 68, No: 1, 2010, p.69-76., and Keeling, M., Wessely, S., Dandeker, C., Jones, N., and Fear, N. 'Relationship Difficulties Among UK Military Personnel: Impact of Sociodemographic Military, and Deployment-Related Factors', *Marriage and Family Review*, Volume: 51, Issue: 3, 2015, p.275-303.

⁴ Please see, Murphy, D., and Busuttill, W. 'PTSD, Stigma and Barrier to help-seeking within the UK Armed Forces', *Journal of the Royal Army Medical Corps*, Volume: 161, No: 4, 2014, p.322-326, and Goodwin, L. and Rona, R. 'PTSD in the Armed Forces: What have we learned from the recent cohort studies of Iraq/Afghanistan?', *Journal of Mental Health*, Volume: 22, No: 5, 2013, p.397-401, and Jones, M., Sundin, J., Goodwin, L., Hull, L., Fear, N., Wessely, S., and Rona, R. 'What explains post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in UK service personnel: deployment or something else?' *Psychological Medicine*, Volume: 43, 2013, p.1703-1712.

soldier in relation to a specific contextual event; encountering the child in theatres of armed conflict.

It is this chapter that makes the most significant contribution to the existing literature on the subject of professional military forces encountering children in theatres of armed conflict, and to the field of military studies. Firstly, this chapter uses the soldiers' voice to provide evidence as to the various ways children have been encountered in theatres of armed conflict. This will directly contribute to knowledge on the way children are used or operate in theatres of armed conflict. Secondly, through the use of oral and written testimonies the soldier's experience highlights the complexities involved in operating alongside children in hostile environments. The individual experiences provide face validity to the discussions about the presence of children in these situations. This thesis also sought to contribute to the field of military studies by utilising a bottom-up approach when gathering data. The majority of work within the field of military studies focuses upon the organisational perspective, however this thesis aimed to provide the soldiers with a voice in which their experiences could be used to inform knowledge on the subject of encountering children in theatres of armed conflict.

The recent conflicts in Afghanistan (post- 2001) and Iraq (post- 2003) have reawakened public consciousness concerning the role of the Armed Forces in the United Kingdom, as well as highlighting the obligation to allocate sufficient support and welfare resources for the mental and physical needs of serving and retired personnel. The Armed Forces Covenant⁵ was enshrined in law under the 2011 Armed Forces Act which established the framework to ensure a supportive relationship between the nation, the government, and the Armed Forces Community. In order to provide support and ensure such obligations are

⁵ *'The Armed Forces Covenant'*, Ministry of Defence, 2011, taken from https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/49469/the_armed_forces_covenant.pdf, accessed on 4th April 2015.

met, there needs to be a greater understanding of, and dialogue with, the Armed Forces Community. However, research focusing on the military tends to ignore the voice and perspective of the soldier, with many analyses opting to understand a particular conundrum from a top-down, organisational perspective.

This thesis approaches the topic of encountering children in conflict scenarios from both a top-down, organisational perspective (as seen in chapter four, *The British Army and Children in Armed Conflict*) and a bottom-up, individual perspective (the current chapter). This helps to provide a broader understanding of the topic, as it analyses the view of the organisation *and* the perspective of the individual soldier. For this particular topic, this approach is useful as it highlights the inconsistencies between the soldier's experience and the information provided by the organisation as to how to respond to the issue. Due to the lack of material on the topic of encountering and interacting with children in theatres of armed conflict, the collection of primary data was important for this part of the project. The aim of this chapter is to highlight the soldier's (either serving or former) perspective; in which their experiences, thoughts, and understandings, on the subject could be expressed. This will provide an empirically rich example of the various ways children have been present in armed conflict scenarios, from the perspective of the British soldier, as well as an insight into their individual attitudes and practices towards the child actor. A brief analysis of the type of data collection methods used for this chapter will follow, whilst also demonstrating the difficulties associated with conducting research about military personnel.

This chapter has been divided into two parts. The first part provides an overview of the three cases used within this thesis, Bosnia (1992-95), Sierra Leone (2000-02), and Afghanistan (2001-12). The purpose of these cases is to provide evidence of three conflict scenarios in which the British Army was involved, which also included the presence of children. A literature review search was conducted at the beginning of the project in order to

ensure that the British Army had in fact served in conflicts where children were present. Once information had been collated and the conflicts had been identified, the decision was made to focus on the cases of Bosnia (1992-95), Sierra Leone (2000-02), and Afghanistan (2001-2012). Each of these conflicts were different geographically and operationally, therefore would capture a wealth of experiences which would be beneficial to this project. The cases were used to focus the collection of data. Literature searches of former and serving British soldier's biographies were conducted in direct relation to those who served in one of the three cases.⁶ The call for participants included reference to former personnel who had served in one (or more) of the three cases. Discussion of these cases were also used during the interview process as a platform for discussion, before allowing the participant to make reference to other conflict environments they felt may bear relevance to the topic.

After providing a brief overview of the three cases, the second part of the chapter will then analyse the oral and written testimonies of serving and former personnel. Using Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis model⁷, the transcripts were analysed in search of repeated patterns of meaning across the different datasets. Codes were then assigned to pieces of similar text both within and across datasets. As the different sections were allocated codes, it resulted in themes emerging across the data collected. These themes were placed under the categorical headings as outlined in the central research question; *military operations*, *attitudes*, and *practices*. Another categorical label was also created; *experiences*, this label would include reference to the various ways, and roles, in which children were encountered in conflict zones. Therefore, the soldier's experiences will be discussed in relation to these four categorical labels, each of which includes reference to the themes that have emerged from the information provided by the participants themselves.

⁶ Whilst the literature search was conducted in relation to one of the three cases, if the soldier mentions another conflict region within his memoirs that is relevant to the topic then this will also be included in the analysis.

⁷ Braun, V. and Clarke, J. 'Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology', *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, Volume: 3, 2006, p.77-101.

Due to the limited existing literature and data available concerning soldier's interactions with children in armed conflict situations, the need for primary data collection and analyses was evident. However, research involving military personnel and their experiences is difficult to gather. Ethical procedures involving military organisations can limit a researcher's access to serving personnel. Even with ethical approval, research involving participants within military institutions is complex due to lengthy deployments, and frequent training exercises and postings. Therefore, retrieving information regarding military personnel for a social sciences project, especially for longitudinal studies, is problematic and thus a lack of research exists in the area. To gather information concerning the soldier's experiences in relation to the presence of children in armed conflict, a range of sources were used.

Biographical works, such as soldier's memoirs, provided a rich insight into their military careers, as well as experiences concerning particular campaigns and overseas deployments. However, the memoirs written by former or serving soldiers tend to be produced by those belonging to the commissioned ranks, therefore does not provide a diverse range of experiences. Awareness of the soldier's motivations for producing the text and the type of readership is important when consulting this type of source, however this all adds to the soldier's experience and the reason they want a particular story to be told. Other works, such as private letters and documents obtained from archival sources, also provided an insight into the soldier's experiences during different campaigns. However, the majority of data collected concerning the experiences and perspectives of the soldier was gathered from interviews, either conducted by myself or retrieved from archival projects.

The National Army Museum (NAM) and Imperial War Museum (IWM) both conducted projects which resulted in large numbers of oral history interviews being recorded based on serving soldier's experiences during the recent conflicts in Afghanistan (post- 2001)

and Iraq (post- 2003). Whilst these interviews did not focus on the discussion of children in armed conflict scenarios, children were mentioned in many of the interviews; either as innocent bystanders or as hostile threats. These discussions highlighted that children were a prominent feature in the soldier's memories and experiences of certain conflicts as they chose to recall these particular incidents and share their thoughts with the interviewee.

In order to gain a more detailed understanding regarding the presence of children in conflict scenarios, I conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 18 former British soldiers. These participants were given anonymity as part of the ethical procedures outlined in the first chapter, *Introduction*, and will be referred to within this chapter by the alphabetical letter assigned to them, e.g. Soldier A. All participants served within the British Army in a front-line capacity, with ranks ranging from private to brigadier. Gathering information from three different types of sources; pre-recorded interviews, auto-biographical works, and in-depth interviews conducted by myself, helped to triangulate the findings. Thematic analysis was used across all the sources, which highlighted a range of shared experiences by British soldiers. Although common themes were evident across the data collected, this project is also interested in the individual experience of the soldier and each anecdote provides its own unique contribution to knowledge created about the subject.

5.2: The Cases

5.2.1 Bosnia (1992-95)

The collapse of Yugoslavia in the early 1990s resulted in political upheaval, with the three main groups in Bosnia vying for different political outcomes influenced by nationalist sentiment. The three main communities in Bosnia consisted of Muslims, Serbs and Croats. Muslim and Croat communities sought an independent Bosnia. However, fearing a Muslim-Croat domination, the Bosnian Serbs allied themselves with Serbia in the hope of creating a

‘Greater Serbia’⁸. In May 1992, Bosnian independence was declared resulting in the Bosnian Serbs launching an offensive against the other communities, forcibly expelling these groups from their homes and plunging the country into civil war. Bosnian Serbs, backed by Serbian forces, gained control of territory quickly resulting in a programme of ethnic-cleansing against Bosnia’s non-Serbian communities.⁹ Hostilities would continue until the signing of the Dayton Accords in 1995, which divided Bosnia into the Bosnian Serb Republic and the Bosniak Croat Federation.

Western powers were reluctant to commit ground troops due to domestic public opinion and fear of intervening in the region.¹⁰ However, in June 1992, the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) had received a mandate to provide peace-keeping in the region. UNPROFOR consisted of troops from various UN member states, and had originally been established to provide assistance in the Croatian conflict (1991), before the mandate was expanded to cover the Bosnian conflict.¹¹ The UN mandate was for classic peacekeeping, with the aim to implement a ceasefire between the warring factions. Those operating as peacekeepers were required to abide by the rules of engagement under Chapter 6 of the UN Peacekeeping Charter, which stipulated that use of force could only be used in self-defence.¹² Smith acknowledged the role of UNPROFOR stating that the main aim was

to support efforts by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to deliver humanitarian relief throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina, and in particular to provide protection, at UNHCR’s request, where and when UNHCR considered such protection

⁸ Anonymous. ‘Bosnia: Why are they Killing each other? How did the Crisis Start? How will it End? A Plain Person’s Guide to the New Tragedy of the Balkans’, *The Independent*, 15th August 1992, taken from <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/bosnia-why-are-they-killing-each-other-how-did-the-crisis-start-how-will-it-all-end-a-plain-persons-1540720.html>, accessed on 21st April 2016.

⁹ Barber, B. K. ‘Contrasting Portraits of War: Youths’ Varied Experiences with Political Violence in Bosnia and Palestine’, *International Journal of Behavioural Development*, Volume: 32, Issue 4, 2008, p.298-308.

¹⁰ Dixon, P. ‘Britain’s ‘Vietnam Syndrome’? Public Opinion and British Military Intervention from Palestine to Yugoslavia’, *Review of International Studies*, Volume: 26, No: 1, January 2000, p.113.

¹¹ Smith, R. ‘*The Utility of Force: The Art of War in the Modern World*’, (Penguin, London, 2006), p.334.

¹² Smith, R. ‘*The Utility of Force*’, (London, 2006), p.335.

necessary...(and) to protect convoys of released civilian detainees if the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) so requested.¹³

As part of UNPROFOR, the British sent personnel to provide assistance known as 'Britbat', the British Battalion. The British increased their military contribution during the course of the conflict and by 1994, there were '2,450 British soldiers serving with the UN Protection Force, a contribution second only to that of the French.'¹⁴ Using their experiences from the Northern Ireland context, the British sought to provide aid in the form of humanitarian convoys, as well as attempting to provide protection to civilians in the designated demilitarized zones. Although serving under a peace-keeping mandate, UNPROFOR forces would be operating in a hostile environment, stuck between the warring, hostile factions. As Smith noted, 'Britain deployed a battle group...we knew that this unit would be operating amidst a war, and an armoured infantry unit with its fighting vehicles for their protective armour was sent.'¹⁵ Paul Dixon suggested that the 'British Army was to operate more in a counter-insurgency 'policing' role, holding the ring for an indefinite period while it was hoped a political settlement could be agreed. The support of the public opinion would have to be sustained over a longer period of time.'¹⁶

Whilst the British Army drew upon their experience from the Northern Ireland context, their experience in peace-keeping operations was limited. However, the Bosnian conflict provided an opportunity to not only gain experience, but to produce doctrine on the subject matter. Rod Thornton stated that 'once a decision had been made in August 1992 to send British troops to Bosnia, the formulation of a peace support operations doctrine began,

¹³ Smith, R. *The Utility of Force*, (London, 2006), p.334-5.

¹⁴ Duffin, C. '10 British Military Campaigns since the end of the Cold War', *The Telegraph*, 27th September, 2014, taken from <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/defence/11126016/10-British-military-campaigns-since-the-end-of-the-Cold-War.html>, accessed on 19th April 2015.

¹⁵ Smith, R. *The Utility of Force*, (London, 2006), p.335.

¹⁶ Dixon, P. 'Britain's 'Vietnam Syndrome'', *Review of International Studies*, January 2000, p.102.

WPK was the result.’¹⁷ WPK, or Wider Peacekeeping, was published in 1994¹⁸ and refers to ‘the wider aspects of peace-keeping operations carried out with the general consent of the belligerent parties but in an environment that may be highly volatile.’¹⁹ Whilst the British were operating in a hostile environment, under a United Nations mandate in which the use of force was restricted, their main aim in the conflict, according to the Minister of State for the Armed Forces, was to ‘get humanitarian food convoys through.’²⁰

However, this proved to be difficult as convoys were often met by hostile forces, who were intent on restricting the movement of UN vehicles and stealing aid. Fax correspondence between British forces and other UN officials revealed that children would often be used to disrupt the convoys, either to steal supplies or to cause a distraction. Such an incident was noted from a fax sent in June 1993 to UNPROFOR from Britbat,

Britbat warned that women and children were planning to block the road at Novi Travnik / Pucavero to unload food supplies as a distraction whilst the main convoy continued. However, when the Tuzla convoy reached the general area at approx. 2022 hours, the convoy was stopped. Some drivers were forced to leave their vehicles. At least one driver tried to run away and was caught and beaten by HVO (Hrvatsko Vijeće Obrane, Croatian Defence Force). No deaths can be confirmed but there may have been 8 drivers killed.’²¹

Another message dated August 1993 highlighted how children would attack convoys with catapults, ‘there have been further instances of civil unrest in Zenica and Kakanj, and in Busovaca, children used catapults against a convoy.’²² Such incidents resulted in the disruption of missions and the loss of aid due to the civilian population. However, they could also have a more serious impact on personnel involved in such situations. A further fax

¹⁷ Thornton, R. ‘The Role of Peace Support Operations Doctrine in the British Army’, *International Peacekeeping*, Volume: 7, No: 2, p.42.

¹⁸ ‘*Wider Peacekeeping: Operations Other Than War*’, Part 2, Army Field Manual, Volume: 5, British Army, 1994.

¹⁹ Peacekeeping, W. ‘Focus- Former Yugoslavia: Guarding the Peace’, *The RUSI Journal*, Volume: 141, Issue: 1, 1996, p.45.

²⁰ Fourth Report from the Defence Committee, Session 1992-93, United Kingdom Peacekeeping and Intervention Forces, House of Commons, 188, 369, 9th June 1993, paragraph 57.

²¹ United Nations Archive, Fax dated 11th June 1993, Series 1837, Box 132, File 2, Bosnia and Herzegovina Command, Kiseljak, Daily Media Situation Reports, 1st May – 30th June 1993, UNPROFOR.

²² United Nations Archive, Series 1838, Box 188, File 5, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Military Information Summaries, 16th August 1993 to 30th December 1993, Confidential (but since declassified), UNPROFOR.

revealed that a child using a catapult had seriously injured a British soldier, causing a broken cheekbone and lacerations to his face, resulting in the soldier being flown home to the UK in need of medical treatment.²³ Another set of fax correspondence revealed that children throwing stones at military personnel had resulted in one soldier receiving a fatal head injury, whilst another was 'hit on the head from a distance of 30 meters'²⁴ and required urgent military assistance. Not only were military personnel injured, but such acts also damaged military equipment, '...suffered a stone attack from local kids when entering Kiseljak town. As a result the vehicle windscreen was broken, the kids escaped.'²⁵ Damage to military equipment was not only an inconvenience to personnel, but it also held implications for the civilians who relied on such vehicles to receive aid and food supplies.

Children throwing stones or using catapults in Bosnia were common, with plenty of references within the UN archives concerning incidents with military personnel from all nationalities of the UNPROFOR. However, research also suggests that children were involved in a more direct role within the Bosnian conflict too. As previously mentioned, gathering accurate statistics concerning the number of child soldiers involved in hostilities is difficult, therefore the following figures are provided as a guide. The *2001 Child Soldiers Global Report* estimated that between 1992 and 1995, an estimated 3,000 to 4,000 children were recruited by armed groups in Bosnia.²⁶ Denov also suggested that 'during the ethnic civil conflict in Bosnia- Herzegovina, an estimated 3,000- 4,000 children as young as 10 were

²³ United Nations Archive, Fax dated 21st October 1993, Series 1838, Box 422, File 1, Bosnia and Herzegovina Command Situation Reports and Memoranda, 17th to 23rd October 1993, Confidential, UNPROFOR.

²⁴ United Nations Archive, Fax dated 25th October 1993, Series 1818, Box 96, File 9, Bosnia and Herzegovina Command, 12th October 1993 – 18th June 1994, Confidential.

²⁵ United Nations Archive, Daily Situational Report sent 31st December 1993, Series 1838, Box 102, File 6, Military Observers Bosnia and Herzegovina, Situation Reports, 17th December 1993 to 3rd January 1994, Confidential, UNPROFOR.

²⁶ 'Child Soldiers Global Report 2001 –Bosnia Herzegovina', (Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, London, 2001), p.264.

recruited by armed groups.’²⁷ The figure of 3,000 is again referenced in *Radio Free Europe*, an international news and broadcast service for Central and Eastern Europe.²⁸ An article in the *Balkan Insight*, stated that ‘a total of 661 soldiers between the ages of 10 and 18 were killed during the conflict, according to data collected by the Research and Documentation Centre in Sarajevo.’²⁹ Although attempts have been made to corroborate this statistic, the Research and Defence Centre no longer publishes material on their website.

Whilst 3,000 to 4,000 seems to be the commonly cited estimate, there has been no evidence within my research to suggest that children were obliged to partake in hostilities. Instead, research suggests that children who did partake in the Bosnian conflict volunteered for service, or as seen in the third chapter, *Children in Contemporary Armed Conflict*, volunteered due to limited alternative options. Mirjana Rakela’s report in *Radio Free Europe*, suggests that ‘former boy soldiers nonetheless insist they had a right to defend their home, their school, and their city regardless of their age.’³⁰ Others joined armed groups to protect themselves or their families, ‘the war in Bosnia was not only fought on the frontlines, but also in towns and villages, where many ordinary people joined armed units in attempts to protect their families and homes- some of them too young to enlist in the regular army in peacetime.’³¹ Nenad, a child soldier, acknowledged how he felt he could not leave the armed group because of the acts he had committed, ‘I was fighting all around the country. I wanted to stop, but there was no way out after some of the things I did and witnessed. You know all these stories about war crimes- I know them first hand.’³²

²⁷ Denov, M. ‘*Child Soldiers: Sierra Leone’s Revolutionary United Front*’, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2010), p.28.

²⁸ Rakela, M. ‘Child Soldiers of the Balkans’, *Radio Free Europe*, 23rd October 2014, taken from www.rferl.org/content/Child_Soldiers_Of_The_Balkans/1349516.html, accessed on 21st February 2016, np.

²⁹ Ahmetasevic, N. ‘Bosnia’s Child Soldiers Abandoned by the State’, *Balkan Insight*, 21st May 2014, taken from www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/bosnia-s-child-soldiers-abandoned-by-the-state, accessed on 23rd October 2014, np.

³⁰ Rakela, M. ‘Child Soldiers of the Balkans’, *Radio Free Europe*, 2014, np.

³¹ Ahmetasevic, N. ‘Bosnia’s Child Soldiers Abandoned by the State’, *Balkan Insight*, 2014, np.

³² Ahmetasevic, N. ‘Bosnia’s Child Soldiers Abandoned by the State’, *Balkan Insight*, 2014, np.

Whilst no evidence was found which suggested that children were forcibly recruited to partake in hostilities during the Bosnian conflict, a review of the literature indicates that children were present in the Bosnian conflict, both as civilians and as hostile actors. Research conducted at the United Nations Archive revealed a number of incidents in which British personnel were harmed as a direct consequence of hostile acts undertaken by children. Therefore, the decision was made to include the Bosnian conflict as a case due to evidence that children were present both as bystanders and as hostile actors, and that the British military had experience interacting with them. As the British were operating under a peace-keeping mandate, this offers a different contextual conflict environment in which to understand their experiences of interacting with, and amongst children.

5.2.2 Sierra Leone 2000-2002

Sierra Leone, a country situated on the Western coast of Africa, is a former British colony that has undergone periods of civil unrest since its independence in 1961. Political corruption was rife amongst the Sierra Leonean government resulting in the emergence of militia groups who sought to gain political control. One of these groups, the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) established in Liberia by Foday Sankoh, launched a series of attacks in March 1991 in an attempt to overthrow the corrupt Sierra Leonean President Joseph Momoh and his government. Such attacks by the RUF continued and, in 1994 they launched a guerrilla campaign against Sierra Leonean government forces. The RUF captured land belonging to the mining communities, therefore were able to sell Sierra Leone's greatest export, the diamond, in order to purchase weapons and fund the war effort.³³

In 1996 a new government was elected under President Kabbah, however, a change at the political level did little to eradicate corruption. Uprisings continued with different

³³ Anonymous, 'Still Open for Diamond Business', *BBC News*, 26th May 2000, taken from <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/764877.stm>, accessed on 13th May 2016, np.

militias and armed groups seeking power, and the country plunged into full scale civil war. When the RUF attempted to take Freetown, the capital of Sierra Leone, in January 1999, President Kabbah realised he was losing control of the situation and sought negotiations with the RUF. These negotiations resulted in the 1999 Lomé Peace agreement, which aimed to bring an end to hostilities and established a demobilisation and disarmament programme. However, many of the soldier-rebels, otherwise known as solbels³⁴, refused to give up their arms and moved into the urban areas to pillage food and continue the hostilities.

The failure to secure peace and the growing levels of violence resulted in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) passing resolution 1270 which mandated a peacekeeping force of approximately 6,000 troops in 1999.³⁵ The United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) was tasked with assisting with elections, helping the disarmament process, and providing aid and support to the local communities. However, the original mandate with an agreement of 6000 personnel had to be increased to 11,000 in February 2000 in order to deal with growing insecurity in the region. However, as Fowler noted ‘despite these large numbers of troops in country the RUF still held the initiative, taking hostages, besieging UN bases and shooting down a UN helicopter.’³⁶

Not only did peacekeeping forces have to contend with rebel groups, but there were also high levels of child soldiers involved in the conflict. Rebel groups such as the West Side Boys (WSB) contained units formed entirely from children, known as the Small Boys Unit (SBU). Many of the armed groups recruited children in order to increase their manpower strength or to use them to conduct atrocities against civilians. Children could join up

³⁴Fowler, W. ‘*Certain Death in Sierra Leone: The SAS and Operation Barras 2000*’, (Osprey Publishing, Oxford, 2010), p.6.

³⁵ United Nations Security Council Resolution 1270, 20th October 1999, S/ Res 1270, United Nations, taken from <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N99/315/02/PDF/N9931502.pdf?OpenElement>, accessed on 22nd June 2016.

³⁶ Fowler, W. ‘*Certain Death in Sierra Leone*’, (Oxford, 2010), p.7.

voluntarily, however, the majority of children were forcibly recruited and kidnapped into such groups. Shepler conducted an in-depth study on Sierra Leone and found that,

rebel abductees, both children and adults, sometimes had ‘RUF’ (Revolutionary United Front) or ‘AFRC’ (Armed Forces Revolutionary Council) carved onto their chests with razor blades and then had ashes rubbed in the wound to form a scar...it made people afraid to escape captivity, fearing identification and retribution if anyone found the markings on them.³⁷

However, research by Zack-Williams suggested that children also chose to participate in the conflict, due to ‘desire to seek revenge for lost parents and destruction of their environment has been a major reason for children enlisting in the armed forces.’³⁸

Children being recruited into armed groups in Sierra Leone had deep implications for the nation. Many of the children forcibly recruited into such groups were force-fed narcotics or alcohol by their leaders in order to ensure the child complied with orders. The 2008 *Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers Report* noted that,

all the armed factions pursued a policy of forcibly administering drugs to children to loosen their inhibitions and to spur them to violence. In the years after the conflict there was a high number of young people addicted to drugs, with attendant psychiatric and other health problems.³⁹

Having loosened their inhibitions, the child soldier could be persuaded to carry out violent acts against civilians, the systematic levels of substance abuse increased the volatile nature of the child soldier in the Sierra Leonean context. In the post-conflict environment, NGOs and health officials had to provide rehabilitation support for those withdrawing from consistent drug and alcohol abuse.⁴⁰

³⁷Shepler, S. ‘*Child Soldiers in Sierra Leone*’, Paper for the Peace Research Institute Oslo Workshop on Techniques of Violence in Civil War, Oslo, 20th -21st August 2004, p.22.

³⁸ Zack-Williams, A.B. ‘Child Soldiers in the Civil War in Sierra Leone’, *Review of African Political Economy*, Volume: 28, No: 87, March 2001, p.78.

³⁹ ‘2008- *Child Soldiers Global Report*’, (Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, London, 2008), p. 299.

⁴⁰ An example of rehabilitation support provided to former child soldiers with alcohol and drug issues can be found on the Christian Child Fund’s website, in which they provide support and help to those overcoming addiction. Taken from <https://www.childfund.org/about-us/who-we-are/>, accessed on 22nd May 2016.

The Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Sierra Leone

highlighted that children in the region were both victims and perpetrators, ‘children suffered abduction, forced recruitment, sexual slavery and rape, amputation, mutilation, displacement and torture. They were also forced to become perpetrators and carry out aberrations violating the rights of other civilians.’⁴¹ Acts committed by child soldiers against the civilian population, made it difficult for these children to be rehabilitated and reintegrated back into their local communities. The role of children in the Sierra Leonean conflict was markedly different to the role of children in the Bosnian conflict. Forced recruitment was prevalent in Sierra Leone, and ‘having experienced long periods of ‘socialisation into violence’, abducted children have been expected to undertake duties covering the whole range of military activities.’⁴²

Due to the level of post-conflict engagement by NGO and humanitarian organisations, there has been a greater interest in collecting data on the child soldier. Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) programmes were established to provide post-conflict support in the area. Such groups were also tasked with collecting data from the region, and although no accurate statistics exist regarding the extent of the child soldier problem in Sierra Leone, they can provide an insight into the issue. *The Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission* stated that

there were no accurate statistics for the number of children associated with the fighting forces during the conflict. Estimates by different organizations including UNICEF, UNAMSIL, and local agencies ranged from 5,000 to 10,000 depending on the criteria used. The national body responsible for the DDR program, the National Committee for Demobilisation, Disarmament and Reintegration (NCDDR) confirmed to the Commission that more than 6,774 children entered the DDR program. Of these, 3,710 had been with the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), 2,026 with the pro-government Civil Defence Forces (CDF), 471 with the Sierra

⁴¹ ‘Children and the armed conflict in Sierra Leone’, Chapter 4 of the *Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Sierra Leone*, Volume. 3b, October 2004, p.234.

⁴² Zack-Williams, A.B. ‘Child Soldiers in the Civil War in Sierra Leone’, *Review of African Political Economy*, 2001, p.80.

Leone Army and 427 with the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC); 144 were with other factions or non-affiliated.⁴³

Despite the presence of UNAMSIL in Sierra Leone, rebel groups continued to launch offensives against government forces and commit violent acts towards the civilian population. The RUF continued to grow in size and strength, and even launched attacks against UN forces, 'RUF attacks grew in boldness and frequency, culminating in the taking of up to 500 UN hostages by May 2000.'⁴⁴ The continued hostilities and violence in the region resulted in the British becoming involved militarily in May 2000. The UK launched Operation Palliser to oversee the evacuation of British nationals from the region. The British were then tasked with providing security around Freetown, and assisting the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces (RSLAF) with their training. The United Nations also acknowledged the following tasks the British were responsible for; 'working with ECOWAS [Economic Community of West African States] on political resolution of the conflict, promoted international support for sanctions against Liberia and facilitated action by other countries against international arms traffickers.'⁴⁵ Although tasked with assisting security efforts and providing training, the military were aware of the hostile environment they were being deployed into. In 2000 the British Foreign Secretary, Robin Cook, noted that

If our troops are attacked, they will fight back, I don't want the rebels to be under any misunderstanding about that. They (the rebels) would be very wise not to attempt anything that posed any form of threat to our forces. When I say they will not be combat troops, I don't want any misunderstanding by the rebels that these people cannot hit back and cannot hit back hard if they are attacked, and that should be fully understood by the rebels.⁴⁶

⁴³ 'Children and the armed conflict in Sierra Leone', *Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Sierra Leone*, 2004, p.325.

⁴⁴ 'Lessons Learned from United Nations Peacekeeping Experiences in Sierra Leone', Peacekeeping Best Practices Unit, Department of Peacekeeping Operations, September 2003, p.5/83.

⁴⁵ 'Lessons Learned from United Nations Peacekeeping Experiences in Sierra Leone', DPKO, 2003, p.6/83.

⁴⁶ MacAskill, E. and Norton-Taylor, R. 'UN sees British Forces as only hope', *The Guardian*, 12th May 2000, taken from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2000/may/12/sierraleone.unitednations1>, accessed on 12th May 2015, np.

The Royal Anglian Regiment, one of the first British units deployed into the area, were tasked with training the Sierra Leonean troops, including filing medical reports and conducting fitness examinations. On the 22nd July 2000, the Royal Irish Regiment took over from the Royal Anglian Regiment, adding vehicle and foot patrols to their responsibilities in order to provide security and reassurance to the local population.⁴⁷ Whilst conducting such duties, the Royal Irish were often surrounded by child soldiers who were also operating in the region either running errands or patrolling checkpoints.⁴⁸ However, an incident in August 2000 proved to be infamous for the Royal Irish, due to their capture by the WSB and SBU which changed the nature of British involvement in Sierra Leone.

On the 25th August 2000, a Royal Irish patrol in the Masiaka- Forodugu region were taken hostage by members of the West Side Boys. 11 British military personnel were kidnapped and held hostage at a camp run by the West Side Boys and the Small Boys Unit. Brigadier Pearson was tasked with producing a report as to how such an incident was allowed to happen, yet ‘the extracts from his report released by the MoD do not, however, make clear how a well-armed British patrol could be so easily overpowered by a far less organised, if numerically superior gang of armed criminals.’⁴⁹ The actual details of the kidnapping are unclear, however, it has been suggested that the unit consisted of underage soldiers who were under the influence of narcotics. Discussions about the incident centred upon the notion that the West Side Boys contained children, and it was this fact that allowed the Royal Irish patrol to be captured. Tyson stated that the incident was the ‘first Western military engagement with child warriors’, in which ‘the squad commander had reportedly refused to open fire on

⁴⁷ Fowler, W. ‘*Certain Death in Sierra Leone*’, (Oxford, 2010), p.9.

⁴⁸ Fowler, W. ‘*Certain Death in Sierra Leone*’, (Oxford, 2010), p.36.

⁴⁹ Smith, M. ‘Major to escape court martial over kidnap of jungle patrol’, *The Telegraph*, 15th September 2000, taken from <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/africaandindianocean/sierraleone/1355567/Major-to-escape-court-martial-over-kidnap-of-jungle-patrol.html>, accessed on 22nd May 2016, np.

children armed with AK-47s.’⁵⁰ Paul Kan also suggested that ‘the patrol was captured and taken hostage when the patrol leader refused to fire on the enemy force which was comprised of drugged boys, of whom the oldest was fifteen and the youngest seven.’⁵¹

Whether or not children were part of the hostage-taking group, child soldiers were present at the camp in which the British soldiers were held captive. Emmanuel Fabba, a Sierra Leonean hostage freed alongside the British soldiers, recalled the situation at the camp,

the Britons were constantly surrounded by child fighters as young as 10 from the gang’s Small Boys Unit. ‘There were more children than adults,’ said Mr Fabba. ‘Gangsta rap music blared from radios and ganja soup – made with marijuana – was part of the daily diet of drugs and drink.’⁵²

On the 10th September 2000, the British conducted a hostage rescue mission led by D Squadron of the 22 Special Air Service (SAS) and A Company (A Coy) of the 1st Battalion The Parachute Regiment (1 Para). The mission known as Operation Barras was a success and ‘delivered the most convincing symbol of British resolve to the rebels. The speed, the surprise, and tempo of the raid shocked the RUF. The RUF knew that the British could reach them in any of their strongholds.’⁵³ The rescue mission involved British personnel entering the camp, engaging with both child soldiers and rebel forces. Russell Glenn noted that the execution of the operation demonstrated a show of force and strength to the RUF, as the British ‘launched Operation Barras early on the morning of September 10. The former hostages were boarding a Royal Air Force Chinook helicopter within 20 minutes of their liberators initiating the attack.’⁵⁴

⁵⁰ Tyson, A.S. ‘Tough Calls in Child Soldier Encounters’, *The Christian Science Monitor*, 27th June 2002, taken from <http://www.csmonitor.com/2002/0627/p03s01-usmi.html>, np.

⁵¹ Kan, P.R. ‘Conflict in the Veins: Drug use by Violent Non-State Actors’, taken from Bunker, R.J. ed. *Blood Sacrifices: Violent Non-State Actors and Dark Magico-Religious Activities*, (Terrorism Research Centre, Indiana, 2016), p.32.

⁵² Sherwell, P. and Blair, D. ‘Kidnapped British Troops were made to beg’, *The Telegraph*, 17th September 2000, taken from <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/1355808/Kidnapped-British-troops-were-made-to-beg.html>, accessed on 13th March 2015.

⁵³ Roberson, W. ‘*British Military Intervention into Sierra Leone*’, (Biblioscholar, New Zealand, 2012), p.80.

⁵⁴ Glenn, R.W. ‘*Rethinking Western Approaches to Counterinsurgency: Lessons from Post-Colonial Conflict*’, (Routledge, Oxon, 2015), p.120-121.

The conflict in Sierra Leone ended in January 2002, when the ‘United Nations confirmed the disarmament of 45,000 fighters was complete. More than 17,000 foreign troops were engaged in this process and it represents the biggest United Nations peacekeeping success in Africa for many years.’⁵⁵ The country would rely on the assistance of the UN and humanitarian organisations to provide support to the recently demobilised child soldiers. However, for the purpose of this thesis, the case of Sierra Leone provides an interesting insight into British military experiences concerning the interaction of children in theatres of armed conflict. The British were deployed to a conflict region that had a heavy civilian presence, as well as the notorious use of child soldiers. Infamous incidents such as the Royal Irish hostage situation demonstrated that British military personnel were not exempt from interactions with child soldiers.

5.2.3 Afghanistan 2001-2012

The final case concerns the recent conflict in Afghanistan. Although the British military were officially involved in the conflict from 2001 to 2014, for the purpose of this thesis the timeframe of research extends from 2001 to 2012. This timeframe was implemented because when the research project began in 2012, the Afghan conflict was still on-going. Although there were discussions about the withdrawal of British personnel, there was no clear strategy in place, therefore it was decided that an endpoint was needed for the purpose of research collection which was decided at the start of the research journey, 2012.

After the terrorist attacks on September 11th 2001, the US sought to bring those responsible to justice and requested that countries harbouring members of the Al-Qaeda network handed them over to US authorities. It was believed that the main protagonist behind the terror attacks, Osama Bin Laden, was hiding in Afghan territory. In November 2001, a

⁵⁵ Brett, R. and Specht, I. ‘*Young Soldiers: Why they choose to fight*’, (Lynne Rienner Publishers, USA, 2004), p.174.

US-led coalition ousted the Taliban government after they refused to surrender Bin Laden.⁵⁶ British ground troops were deployed alongside US Special Forces and the Northern Alliance, in which they provided guidance for air power strikes as part of the Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) campaign. The International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) was tasked with removing Taliban influence from Kabul, and allowing a new Afghan government to be formed.⁵⁷

In 2002, following the removal of the Taliban government, the United Nations Security Council passed resolution 1401⁵⁸ which saw the creation of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA). This UN mission was mandated to provide peace and development opportunities in the Afghan region. By 2003, the Taliban had regrouped and were launching guerrilla style attacks against the civilian population and military personnel. In the same year, ISAF missions were placed under the control of NATO and their area of control expanded across Afghanistan. By 2006, ISAF were responsible for providing security to all the regions in Afghanistan. However, Taliban resistance continued to grow and, with limited peace and security in the area, ISAF found themselves involved in a counter-insurgency campaign that would last until 2014.

The British military were involved in the Afghan conflict as part of a ‘partnership between the 49 nations – over a quarter of the world’s countries – which constituted the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF).’⁵⁹ British military involvement was known under the code name ‘Operation Herrick’ and, although the conflict has ended, continue to

⁵⁶ Brett, R. and Specht, I. ‘*Young Soldiers*’, (USA, 2004), p. 164.

⁵⁷ The International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) and their responsibilities was established and discussed under the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1386, S/Res/1386, adopted 20th December 2001, taken from http://www.nato.int/isaf/topics/mandate/unscr/resolution_1386.pdf, accessed on 22nd May 2016.

⁵⁸ United Nations Security Council Resolution 1401, S/Res/1401, adopted 28th March 2002, available to be read online at <https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/28%20March%202002.pdf>, accessed on 22nd May 2016.

⁵⁹ ‘*The UK’s Work in Afghanistan*’, Ministry of Defence, Policy Paper Published 14th January 2014, available online at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uks-work-in-afghanistan/the-uks-work-in-afghanistan>, accessed on 22nd May 2015, np.

offer training expertise and military advice in the area today. The purpose of the British Army's involvement in the region was described on their website as below,

The Taliban gave safe haven to Al Qaeda in Afghanistan, which allowed terrorists to plan and carry out attacks around the world. We joined many other nations in a NATO/ ISAF led military intervention to bring Al Qaeda's leaders to justice, remove the Taliban from control in Afghanistan and prevent the country again becoming a safe haven for international terrorists.⁶⁰

Alongside conducting operations in Afghanistan, the British military were also deployed in Iraq as part of Operation Telic, which sought to remove the Iraqi leadership from power and to provide security to the region. Conducting two large counter-insurgency operations simultaneously led to discussions about the British military suffering from overstretch, both physically and mentally.⁶¹ Military equipment had to be deployed to two different regions, and personnel facing frequent deployments between the two different conflict zones. British military personnel were also faced with the challenging conflict environment in which their adversary adopted guerrilla tactics in order to seek a tactical advantage.⁶² Alongside conducting a counter-insurgency campaign, the British had to provide security to the local population, as well as developing reconstruction projects. Such tasks were important as they were part of the hearts and minds campaign, which was a vital aspect of the overall military strategy.

Amidst the complex conflict environment, British personnel also had to work alongside children. Children were part of the natural landscape due to the conflict taking place amongst the civilian population. Children were present within the towns and villages in

⁶⁰ Anonymous. 'The British Army in Afghanistan', The British Army Website, taken from <http://www.army.mod.uk/operations-deployments/22713.aspx>, accessed on 22nd June 2016.

⁶¹ Rayment, S. 'Overstretch pushes British troops to the Brink', *The Telegraph*, 10th January 2009, taken from <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/defence/4214029/Overstretch-pushes-British-troops-to-the-brink.html>, accessed on 23rd May 2016.

⁶² For further information, please see, Farrell, T. 'Improving in War: Military Adaptation and the British in Helmand Province, Afghanistan, 2006-2009', *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Volume: 33, No: 4, 2010, p.567-594., Johnson, T. and Mason, C. 'Understanding the Taliban and Insurgency in Afghanistan', *Orbis*, Volume: 51, Issue: 1, Winter 2007, p.71-89.

which the British conducted patrols. However, children were also employed as part of the enemy force. Research by Human Rights Watch acknowledges the recruitment of children by Taliban forces,

The Taliban recruit and train children in age-specific stages. Boys begin indoctrination as young as six years old, and continue to study religious subjects under Taliban teachers for up to seven years. According to relatives of boys recruited by the Taliban, by the time they are 13, Taliban-educated children have learned military skills including use of firearms, and the production and deployment of IEDs (Improvised Explosive Devices). Taliban teachers then introduce those trained child soldiers to specific Taliban groups in that district.⁶³

However, research concerning the amount of child soldiers recruited and used in such organisations is difficult to gather, and only estimations can be formed. Due to continuing hostilities in the region it is difficult to gather any current figures. In 2005, the programme tasked with disarming and demobilising underage Afghan soldiers stated that 7,444 children had passed through their system between April 2003 and June 2006.⁶⁴ This figure was corroborated in 2007 by the Humanitarian News and Analysis Agency, ‘over 7,500 child soldiers went through Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) programmes, between April 2003 and June 2006 under Afghanistan’s post-Taliban peace building arrangements.’⁶⁵ However, children were not just recruited by Taliban forces. The Secretary General submitted a report in 2016 to the UNSC that revealed the issues concerning underage recruitment in Afghanistan,

The number of verified cases of recruitment and use of children more than doubled compared with 2014. A total of 116 cases (115 boys, 1 girl) were documented during the reporting period, of which 48 were verified. Thirteen verified recruitment cases were attributed to the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces: five to the Afghan Local Police; five to the Afghan National Police; and three to the Afghan National Army. The majority of verified cases were attributed to the Taliban (20) and other armed groups (15). The Taliban continued to recruit children for combat and suicide attacks. There is continuing concern about

⁶³ Anonymous, ‘Afghanistan: Taliban Child Soldier Recruitment Surges’, Human Rights Watch, 17th February, 2016, taken from <https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/02/17/afghanistan-taliban-child-soldier-recruitment-surges>, accessed on 23rd June 2016.

⁶⁴ Chrobok, V. ‘Demobilizing and Reintegrating Afghanistan’s Young Soldiers. A Review and Assessment of Program Planning and Implementation’, Bonn International Centre for Conversion (BICC), Paper 42, 2005.

⁶⁵ Anonymous., ‘Afghanistan: Child Soldiers Operating on Several Fronts’, Humanitarian News and Analysis (IRIN), 19th December 2007, taken from <http://www.irinnews.org/feature/2007/12/19/child-soldiers-operating-several-fronts>, accessed on 12th March 2013.

allegations of cross-border recruitment of children and of use of religious schools in Afghanistan and Pakistan for child recruitment and military training by the Taliban and other armed groups.⁶⁶

As the report notes, the Afghan National Army (ANA) and Afghan National Police (ANP) have also recruited children. Both organisations are part of the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF), in which NATO is responsible for their ‘institutional training, education, and professional development activities.’⁶⁷ The British Army provided Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) and Operational Mentoring and Liaison Teams (OMLTs) to provide training and support to the ANA and ANP. This was to ensure these organisations could provide security to the local population when ISAF withdrew in 2014. The recruitment of children by these organisations contravenes international law. However, the documenting period for the above statistics took place between 2014 and 2016 therefore there is no evidence to suggest that British personnel would have operated or liaised with children in this capacity.

Nevertheless, British soldiers could have experienced children as part of the enemy force. A report by SOS Children, an NGO working with children involved in armed conflict, acknowledged that ‘children were being forced to plant roadside bombs near British Army bases in Afghanistan, Taliban fighters are forcing children to lay improvised explosive devices because they know British troops will not shoot them.’⁶⁸ An article by the *BBC* stated that ‘children have long been deployed for insurgent activities such as blowing up IEDs’ and providing ‘surveillance and information about the whereabouts and location of Afghan and

⁶⁶ Report of the Secretary-General to the Security Council (A/70/836-S/2016/360) issued on 20 April 2016. Para 21. United Nations, taken from <https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/countries/afghanistan/>, accessed on 13th May 2016.

⁶⁷ ‘*Afghan National Security Forces*’, The British Army, taken from <http://www.army.mod.uk/operations-deployments/22813.aspx>, accessed on 23rd May 2016.

⁶⁸ Jarvis, H. ‘*Taliban make children plant Afghanistan bombs*’, SOS Children, 8th February 2010, taken from www.soschildrensvillages.org.uk/about-our-charity/archive/2010/02/taliban-make-children-plant-afghanistan-bombs, accessed on 1st June 2013, np.

NATO security forces and government officials.’⁶⁹ Dawood Azami notes that, ‘the disturbing regional twist is the increasing number of child suicide bombers.’⁷⁰ The Taliban have also been noted for using children as human shields. In 2010, Lance Corporal Murfitt was injured by a Taliban fighter as he chose not to engage due to his adversary using a child as a shield. The report by the MoD stated that Murfitt was ‘faced with a dilemma: he could protect himself and engage the insurgent but, if he did that, he could not guarantee that the child would be unhurt.’⁷¹ The decision to delay resulted in Murfitt being wounded by enemy fire. In 2013 Channel 4 aired a documentary entitled *Taliban Child Fighters*⁷², in which a journalist had access to 200 children, housed in a special Afghan prison, who had been convicted of fighting for the Taliban. Their crimes included laying IEDs, creating ambush scenarios, and the preparation of suicide missions against ISAF personnel.

The conflicts in Bosnia, Sierra Leone, and Afghanistan, demonstrated how British military personnel have experience operating in environments where children are present. All three conflict scenarios occurred amongst the civilian population, therefore children would have been present as bystanders. However, these conflicts also demonstrated how children could play an active role in the hostilities. Children were enlisted into armed groups in all three of the cases presented, however, Bosnia was the only conflict in which there is no evidence to suggest that children were forcibly recruited. There is also evidence to suggest that the British soldier encountered and interacted with children in all three of these cases. In Bosnia, children stoned convoys resulting in the looting of aid, disruption to travel, and damage to vehicles and personnel themselves. In Sierra Leone, British soldiers encountered

⁶⁹ Azami, D. ‘How the Taliban groom child suicide bombers’, *BBC News*, 15th December 2014, taken from <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-27250144>, accessed on 23rd June 2016, np.

⁷⁰ Azami, D. ‘How the Taliban groom child suicide bombers’, *BBC News*, 2014, np.

⁷¹ ‘Soldier’s Nerves of Steel Save Afghan Child’s Life’, *Ministry of Defence*, 21st December 2010, taken from www.gov.uk/government/news/soldiers-nerve-of-steel-save-afghan-childs-life, accessed on 2nd February 2016, np.

⁷² ‘*Dispatches: Taliban Child Fighters*’, Documentary, Quraishi Films for Channel 4, Broadcast on 23rd July 2013.

child soldiers with AK-47s at checkpoints, and the Royal Irish were involved in a hostage situation which included underage soldiers. In Afghanistan, children were used to plant IEDs outside British bases, as well as being used by the enemy force as human shields and suicide bombers.

These cases demonstrate that the British military have been involved in a number of conflicts in which children were present, and that British soldiers have experience of operating in a region where children can be both innocent bystanders and hostile threats. This thesis draws upon the discussions concerned with the ‘new sociology of childhood’ that recognise the agency of children⁷³, and how there are a multiplicity of childhoods both *within* and *between* cultures.⁷⁴ By recognising the agency of children and engaging with a sociological methodology, it is possible to understand that children are a non-traditional security issue⁷⁵ and the ‘consequences of representing children as non-agents or victims come into play...with the possibility of Western military forces encountering belligerent children on the battlefield.’⁷⁶ Therefore, the following section draws upon the soldiers’ experiences to determine how children are viewed on the battlefield from the perspective of the British soldier. The following section will provide an overview of the role of the British soldier in modern conflicts. Followed by an analysis as to how the presence of children in theatres of armed conflict affect British military operations, and their individual attitudes and practices of British soldiers.

⁷³ For further information, please see, James, A. and Prout, A. ‘*Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood*’, (London, 2015)., Prout, A. ‘Taking a Step Away from Modernity’, *Global Studies of Childhood*, 2011, p.4-14., and Jacob, C. ‘Children and Armed Conflict’, *Critical Studies on Security*, 2015, p. 14-28.

⁷⁴ For further information, please see, Wells, K. ‘*Childhood in a Global Perspective*’, (Cambridge, 2009), and James, A. Jenks, C. and Prout, A. ‘*Theorizing Childhood*’, (Cambridge, 1998).

⁷⁵ For further information, please see, Beier, J.M. ‘Children, Childhoods, and Security Studies’, *Critical Studies on Security*, 2015., Jacob, C. ‘Children and Armed Conflict’, *Critical Studies on Security*, 2015., and Brocklehurst, H. ‘*Who’s Afraid of Children?*’, (England, 2006).

⁷⁶ Jacob, C. ‘Children and Armed Conflict, and the Field of Security Studies’, *Critical Studies on Security*, Volume: 3, Issue: 1, 2015, p. 17.

5.3: The Experiences

5.3.1 *The British Soldier*

The modern British soldier is part of an all-volunteer, professional military force, in which he (or she) may be called upon to conduct military duties within the United Kingdom or abroad. The British Army requires its soldiers to; carry out peace-keeping duties, including strategic peace-keeping roles; to combat piracy; and to deliver humanitarian aid and assistance to war-torn or disaster stricken regions in the world. Although British soldiers are predominately trained in a war-fighting capacity; their skills set is much broader, with the ability to conduct a range of tasks needed for the modern battlefield. The recent conflicts in Afghanistan (2001-12) and Iraq (2003-11) saw deployed British soldiers needing to switch between war-fighting and peace-keeping roles on regular basis. This requires personnel to have a greater understanding of the rules of engagement and the conflict environment.

This myriad of roles creates further complexities and operational stress for the modern British soldier. The soldier must be ready to act and engage with the enemy for their own protection, and for the protection of their comrades and civilians. However, the soldier also has a role delivering security, emergency aid, and relief to local populations, as well as working alongside aid agencies. Awareness of the bigger picture is no longer purely a requirement for senior officers; all soldiers operating within the conflict environment must be aware of their own conduct, and the conduct of those around them. This includes developing relations with local populations with the aim of winning the hearts-and-minds campaign. Soldiering requires that ‘soldiers of all ranks will have increasing responsibility, influence and significance in battle and other operations.’⁷⁷ The array of responsibilities and roles

⁷⁷ ‘*Soldiering: The Military Covenant*’, Army Doctrine Publication, Volume 5, February 2000, p.2-4.

associated with the professionalism of the British soldier is acknowledged within British

Army Doctrine:

Soldiers operate throughout a complex spectrum which embraces conflict prevention operations, conflict itself, and post conflict activities, all of them with joint, multi-national and inter-agency dimensions, and under the scrutiny of government, society and the media at home and abroad.⁷⁸

The British soldier is also expected to work with different national militaries, agencies and governments in order to achieve their goals. This diversifies the skills set and experiences of the modern British soldier who has to communicate and work alongside different organisations, again detracting from their traditional war-fighting role. A 2010 report published by Kings College London (KCL) regarding the health of the UK Armed Forces acknowledged the changing role of soldiers stating that they ‘have become engaged in a range of ‘complex cultural encounters’ with other national armed forces, NGOs, media organisations, contractors, other foreign and host government departments, as well as the local populations.’⁷⁹

Differing cultural traditions and expectations add to the complexities of operating in the field, it requires a greater awareness on the soldier’s behalf to acknowledge the landscape in which they are operating in, and the needs of the population they are working alongside. Soldiers are expected to be fully trained in their war-fighting capabilities, but to also be competent in dealing with local populations, riot control, supporting local police activities, providing basic medical assistance, and being party to the welfare and humanitarian needs of civilians. Although the role of the British soldier may have become more diverse, operational stress and experiences in difficult situations are likely to occur regardless of the type of operation the soldier is deployed on. Whether deployed in a peace-keeping or war-fighting environment, the soldier is likely to face situations where human suffering is evident.

⁷⁸ ‘*Soldiering: The Military Covenant*’, ADP, 2000, p.1-1.

⁷⁹ ‘*A Fifteen Year Report: What has been achieved by fifteen years of research into the health of the UK Armed Forces?*’ King’s Centre for Military Health Research, Kings College London, September 2010, p.38.

Researchers at the King's Centre for Military Health Research (KCMHR) have argued that it is 'incorrect to view peacekeeping as simply a 'watered down' war, since undertaking such duties can have a substantial impact on military personnel.'⁸⁰ Although peace-keeping missions were often deemed as a 'safer' option compared to operating in a traditional war-fighting capacity, the report suggested this view was misguided and that such operations require a different mind-set and present different challenges. KCMHR found that

because soldiers are trained and prepared for traditional war-fighting, the unfamiliar role of the peace-keeper – caught between two sides, never sure who is the enemy, unclear of his or her role and often burdened with complex rules of engagements – is more stressful for the modern soldier.⁸¹

These challenges are not unique to peace-keeping missions; they are also evident within counter-insurgency campaigns and can provide new challenges and stresses for the soldier. Each deployment presents its own unique challenges and experiences for the soldier to contend with, and as researchers we need to be aware of the complexities involved within each scenario.

Modern technology has also played a role in shaping the modern British soldier and the public's expectations about their experiences. Advancements in technology and the lethality of such equipment have promised that warfare could become somewhat more humane, with the enemy being targeted directly. Hand to hand combat or close range killing is believed to be a thing of the past, with modern weapons systems being fired at a distance with high levels of precision designed to minimize collateral damage. This provides a distorted view of the threats and contact with the enemy which British soldiers face. Whilst modern technology has decreased the need for hand to hand combat and the visual effect of an 'enemy kill' (due to long range weaponry), it has not decreased the trauma associated with

⁸⁰ 'A Fifteen Year Report: What has been achieved by fifteen years of research into the health of the UK Armed Forces?' KCMHR, 2010, p.39.

⁸¹ 'A Fifteen Year Report: What has been achieved by fifteen years of research into the health of the UK Armed Forces?' KCMHR, 2010, p.38.

battle. As noted in David Grossman's work *On Killing*⁸², the act of killing another human being is difficult and many soldiers struggle with this idea during their careers. Geoffrey Jensen and Andrew Wiest claimed in their work that 'for modern mankind, with the exception of a few sociopaths, killing and combat are remarkably difficult.'⁸³ However trauma extends to more than just the act of killing another human being,

modern warriors may meet their enemy only rarely in hand-to-hand combat...but the rather detached nature of the modern battle does not insulate today's soldier from death and killing. Soldiers in present and future wars will still have to face the threat of being killed, the horror of watching a friend die, and the possibility of killing another human being.⁸⁴

Pressures associated with operating in armed conflict situations do not dissolve because of the advancement of technology; rather it can make the modern soldier more vulnerable to the realities of conflict and suffering. Technological advancements suggest that the soldier will be disconnected from the reality of war, yet contemporary conflicts have shown that human interaction and suffering are still evident and that the modern soldier is still part of that environment.

When analysing the experiences of the modern British soldier it is important to understand the role played in modern conflict scenarios and the pressures they face in these situations. British soldiers operate under the umbrella term 'modern warriors'; in which their range of roles include combatant, peace-keeper, protector, and a deliverer of humanitarian aid. Since the end of the 1990s, the British soldier has had to adapt to these different roles, whilst working in a multitude of environments, each providing their own challenges and pressures. The romanticised image of the heroic British soldier shows fierce warrior spirit coupled with a level of humanity.⁸⁵ Whilst abuses have taken place in various conflicts, the

⁸² Grossman, D. *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society*, (Back Bay Books, USA, 1996).

⁸³ Jensen, G. and Wiest, A. *Myriad Faces of Modern Armed Conflict: War in the Age of Technology*, (New York University Press, New York, 2001), p.295-6.

⁸⁴ Jensen, G. and Wiest, A. *Myriad Faces of Modern Armed Conflict*, (New York, 2001), p.296.

⁸⁵ McCartney, H. 'Hero, Victim or Villain? The Public Image of the British Soldier and Its Implications for Defence Policy', *Defence and Security Analysis*, Volume: 27, Issue: 1, p. 43-54.

British soldier remains a highly trained, professional individual, who abides by international law and conducts himself in a professional manner.

Having acknowledged the varying roles of the British soldier in modern conflict scenarios, the following section will draw upon data collected to discuss how the presence of children in theatres of armed conflict affect British military operations, and the attitudes and practices of the individual soldier. Whilst the three cases were used to limit the biographical works search and cited within the call for participants, British soldiers (former and serving) also discussed their experiences in relation to the following conflicts; Northern Ireland (1969-present)⁸⁶, the Gulf War (1991), Bosnia (1992-95), Kosovo (1998-99), Sierra Leone (2000-02), Iraq (2003-11), and Afghanistan (2001-12). For the purpose of this section, the participant providing their experience will be referred to as a soldier, regardless of their status (serving or former) and their rank position (unless expressly mentioned). This is to avoid confusion in the text, as all of the experiences gathered occurred whilst the protagonist was a serving soldier. Firstly, the discussion will focus on the various ways the British soldier encountered the child in theatres of armed conflict.

5.3.2 Children's Presence in Theatres of Armed Conflict

Although the chosen cases provided evidence that British military personnel had operated in theatres of armed conflict where children were present, it was important to gain a comprehensive understanding as to the various ways children have been encountered. During the analysis of the data collected, it became evident that the soldiers had experienced the presence of children in a multitude of roles within different conflict environments. Some of the roles played by children were similar despite being witnessed in different conflict zones, whereas other roles were specific to certain conflict regions. Within the discussions about the

⁸⁶ Although the Northern Ireland conflict began in 1969, the majority of former soldiers interviewed discussed their experiences within this environment during the 1990s and 2000s.

presence of the child in theatres of armed conflict, children were mentioned either as bystanders who were part of the operational landscape, or as hostile actors who actively participated in the conflict. This section will discuss the various ways British soldiers encountered children in theatres of armed conflict.

5.3.2.1 Children as Active Participants

Children participating in violence and actively engaging, or trying to engage the British soldier, was a reoccurring theme within all of the experiences provided by soldiers, regardless of the conflict location. Although the act of stone-throwing was mentioned in various conflicts, this will be looked at as a separate act of violence with a different set of implications and consequences for the British soldier. For the purpose of this section, the acts committed by the child related to the hostile use of a military weapon or an act which physically harmed a soldier.

In an autobiography, Major Chris Hunter detailed his experience of being injured during a patrol when a grenade was thrown by a child,

a lad in his early teens comes running out of a shop and lobs a grenade at our vehicle. I could shoot him easily but he's already done what he is going to do, and I realise I definitely can't bring myself to kill a child. There's a shuddering explosion next to the vehicle and we are knocked sideways by the blast. Then silence.⁸⁷

The resignation that the act has already been completed and there was little to stop its effect is evident, but the explanation 'I realise I definitely can't bring myself to kill a child' highlights how the soldier in question recognised the actor as a child first, rather than a perpetrator, and the effect this had on his thought process and response. Another British

⁸⁷ Hunter, C. *'Eight Lives Down'*, (Corgi Books, London, 2008), p.78.

soldier in Iraq, recalled an incident in which he was relieving a fellow comrade from stag duty⁸⁸ when they were approached by a child with a weapon,

this was really the first incident we had of like of any threat was actually like a kid, I think he was about 14 actually pulled an AK47 out from behind his back and actually pointed it at Si and cocked it and by that time me and Si had our weapons pointed at him, we didn't know if it was loaded or not, so none of us fired and we was told not to fire until fired upon...told him to get down on the floor and that lot...took the weapon off him...made it safe.⁸⁹

An extract from one soldier's memoirs concerning his time in Bosnia, reveals how children played an active role in the conflict. Although the British soldier is not the victim, the passage provides evidence as to the role played by children in a particular conflict context,

we'd stopped in a line of vehicles at a junction. The youths were lounging on the corner striking the pose. I was beginning to familiarise myself with this: it consisted of a surly stare, gun held at macho jaunty angle, a cigarette clamped between the teeth and a red and white bandana to top off the look...here, they got their kicks of an afternoon by wandering up to the front line and picking off a Muslim with a high-powered snipers rifle.⁹⁰

The soldier uses the term 'youths' in this particular passage, yet refers to children or young teens throughout his memoirs. The differentiation between children of different ages will be discussed later in this chapter when acknowledging the attitudes of the soldier towards the child actor. British soldiers also mentioned seeing children operating as soldiers in various conflict environments. Soldier D served in Sierra Leone and regularly saw child soldiers milling about, 'there were children, who were barely taller than the rifle if you stood the rifle on the ground, as we said an AK is still an AK.'⁹¹ Although the child soldier did not engage with Soldier D, it was evident that the child could still play an active role, and conduct a lethal act. Through the data collected it became evident that British soldiers saw

⁸⁸ Stag duty refers to guard duty, the act of being on guard at the base's entrance and observing any potential threats and movements in and out of the base.

⁸⁹ Interview with Adam Leverton, 307 Battery 100 Regiment Royal Artillery, conducted by Peter M Hart, *IWM*, 2005, File 27253, Reel 10.

⁹⁰ Spence, C. *All Necessary Measures*, (Penguin, London, 1998), p.44.

⁹¹ Interview with Soldier D, Interviewed by Michelle Jones (Aberystwyth University, February 2015).

children carrying weapons and actively participating in the hostilities across different conflict zones.

5.3.2.2 Children in Crowd Situations

Soldiers acknowledged how children would approach them in large crowds when out on patrols or distributing aid packages. Some soldiers recounted children crowding around them as a positive experience, whereas others feared such situations. The child had the ability to gain closer access to soldiers without being deemed suspicious, and therefore had a greater opportunity to carry out an attack or pose a threat compared to their adult counterparts. This was evident in the description of a British patrol being surrounded by children in Afghanistan and the fears that arose from such situations,

I've always done a bit of map reading and finding bearings and suddenly a swarm of kids would come round you and it sorts of impairs your vision, and also I did hear before we went out there that a Marine did get swarmed and then one of the kids cut his throat and ran off...so we got told to watch out for that as well.⁹²

Another soldier recalled a similar incident in Northern Ireland in which he was swarmed by children, although there was no evidence of a violent act about to be committed, it was deemed to be a frightening experience,

it saddened me to be cursed and sworn at by a five-year-old simply because I wore a British Army uniform....it frightened me to be cut off and surrounded by a swarm of young kids when I returned alone and on foot from attending a bomb explosion.⁹³

Children swarming military personnel could also attract negative attention. It can draw attention to the fact that personnel are present within a certain area. Soldier F recollected advice given to him prior to commencing patrols in Afghanistan, 'we were urged not to give sweets to children and not to engage with them because the potential for...well to

⁹² Interview with Ross Green, British Private 1st Battalion Royal Anglian Regiment, conducted by Richard McDonough, *IWM*, 2009-02-17, File 32503, Reel 2.

⁹³ Interview with Soldier M, Interviewed by Michelle Jones (Aberystwyth University, February 2015).

bring out pretty damaging people.’⁹⁴ The soldier discussed how children crowding around the patrol could distract their attention, but in conflicts like Afghanistan, it created an atmosphere in which suicide bombers could exploit situations to their advantage and harm large numbers of civilians.

One soldier spoke about his experiences in Afghanistan, recalling how crowds of children heightened his level of awareness and suspicion,

it only takes one person, you have to watch them like a hawk, they’ve only got to nick something off you or pull the trigger, all sorts. They are generally really inquisitive kids there, especially the boys; swarms will be following you when on patrol.⁹⁵

However, not all experiences of children gathering in crowds was negative. The recollection of children waving and following patrols was a common theme in many of the accounts across all the conflicts mentioned. Experiences of children asking for sweets, chocolate and other items were commonly cited in all theatres. In Iraq and Afghanistan, the soldiers noted how the presence of male children was more apparent and they were excited by the soldiers, wanting to look at their equipment, and taking an interest in all things ‘army’.⁹⁶ Colonel Stuart Tootal shared his experience of the 3rd Parachute Regiment’s arrival in Afghanistan stating that ‘small, angelic-looking children went barefoot on the stony ground as they gathered around us. Excited by our presence, they asked us for sweets and took an intrigued interest in looking through our rifle sights.’⁹⁷

5.3.2.3 Children and Civil Disorder

Soldiers also discussed children playing a role in acts which can be classified as civil disorder. This category encompasses children who attempt to disorientate, distract and

⁹⁴ Interview with Soldier F, Interviewed by Michelle Jones (Aberystwyth University, March 2015).

⁹⁵ Interview with Jamil Muley, British Private served with 1st Battalion Royal Anglian Regiment, Interviewed by Richard McDonough, *IWM*, 2009-02-17, File 32504, Reel 3.

⁹⁶ Interview with Jamil Muley, British Private served with 1st Battalion Royal Anglian Regiment, Interviewed by Richard McDonough, *IWM*, 2009-02-17, File 32504, Reel 3.

⁹⁷ Tootal, S. ‘*Danger Close: Commanding 3 Para in Afghanistan*’, (John Murray Publishers, UK, 2009), p.43.

provoke British soldiers by causing a disturbance. Although not part of an armed group, some of the soldiers mentioned encountering children in riot situations who were present alongside adult members of the civilian population. In Northern Ireland, children were involved in riot situations, with adults placing children at the front of the crowd.⁹⁸ Children were also present in riot situations in Bosnia, Major Vaughan Kent-Payne recalled such an incident ‘as we slowed down they held babies and small toddlers out in front of them....I was disgusted at the way they held the children in front of them.’⁹⁹

The role of children throwing stones, glass bottles or petrol bombs was a recurring theme for many soldiers discussing their conflict experiences in Northern Ireland, Bosnia, Iraq, and Afghanistan. Those recalling their experiences from the Bosnian conflict mentioned regularly encountering children who threw stones when attempting to deliver humanitarian aid and food packages. Despite the limited fear of attack from any of the warring factions, soldiers such as Mike Stanley admitted to feeling apprehensive about travelling in areas where stone throwing was a common feature, ‘I wasn’t looking forward to being pelted with stones again.’¹⁰⁰

Stone throwing was a common issue for troops, and there was a sense of frustration that there was nothing they could do to respond to this particular act. Patrick Bishop, who was embedded with the 3rd Parachute Regiment, provided an example based on his experience in Afghanistan, ‘a large group of youths gathered outside the stadium and threw stones at one of the Sangers mounted on the walls, refusing to disperse even when the soldiers fired warning flares in their direction.’¹⁰¹ Another soldier, who served in

⁹⁸ Interview with Soldier E, Interviewed by Michelle Jones (Aberystwyth University, February 2015).

⁹⁹ Kent-Payne, V, Major. *Bosnia Warriors: Living on the Frontline*, (Robert Hale Ltd, Great Britain, 1998), p.139-40.

¹⁰⁰ Stankovis, M. *Trusted Mole: A Soldier's Journey into Bosnia's Heart of Darkness*, (Harper Collins Publishers, London, 2000), p.149.

¹⁰¹ Bishop, P. *Ground Truth: 3 Para Return to Afghanistan*, (Harper Press, London, 2009), p.133.

Afghanistan, felt annoyed by the children throwing stones and approaching him as it distracted him from his own work,

well the kids they love throwing stones so they were throwing stones all the time, and then they were coming up to you, always asking for stuff, sweets, chocolate, and all that sort of stuff. We didn't mind it at first but then after a while we was there to do a job and like the kids were just coming up to you constantly, and just getting in the way and that so we had to get the ANA.¹⁰²

It seemed apparent that local children knew the British soldiers would not, or could not, react to stone throwing and the only alternative was to call upon local forces to disperse the children and send them home. However, this only seemed apparent in Afghanistan and Iraq, where elders commanded respect within society. Soldiers who mentioned stone-throwing or petrol bombing within their interviews,¹⁰³ expressed the view that children conducted such acts in order to enrage the soldiers and to obtain a reaction from them.

Although it is difficult to determine whether such acts were conducted under the authority of adults, the soldier's own perceptions as to the child's motivations and decision to not react are also interesting. This was particularly true for those who spoke about stone or bottle throwing in Northern Ireland, 'sometimes mischievous lads would throw stones at the soldiers- as in so many places, out of boredom and to see if they could get a reaction.'¹⁰⁴

Major Chris Hunter noted that

in the Republican areas there are lots of animosity, literally we would drive through in our vehicles on a patrol, or literally just pass through from A to B, and you would have little, sort of 7 to 8 year old, kids just running out with big piles of stones or bottles that was already sort of piled up and they would literally just be chucking them at you from the side of the road.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰² Interview with Chris Wood, Sapper with 26 Regiment Royal Engineers, Interviewed by Richard McDonough, *IWM*, 2012, File 33828, Reel 1.

¹⁰³ Stone-throwing and petrol bombing were mentioned in the following interviews; Interview with Soldier E, Interviewed by Michelle Jones (Aberystwyth University, February 2015), Interview with Soldier H, Interviewed by Michelle Jones (Aberystwyth University, March 2015), Interview with Soldier I, Interviewed by Michelle Jones (Aberystwyth University, March 2015).

¹⁰⁴ Collins, T. *Rules of Engagement: A Life in Conflict*, (Headline Review, UK, 2006), p. 350.

¹⁰⁵ Interview with Maj. Chris Hunter, Royal Logistics Corp, Interviewed by Amy Cameron, 1st May 2009, *NAM*, 2012-11-2.

The tactic of throwing bottles and stones developed during the Bosnian conflict to include children throwing bottles of urine. Research at the United Nations Archives highlighted the issue in relation to non-British members of UNPROFOR. However, an example was found concerning the British experience, Major Vaughan Kent-Payne referenced this particular tactic in his memoirs,

Private Savage was nursing one arm and covered in foul-smelling liquid. Some kid had thrown a bottle of urine at the Warrior. It hit the top of the crew compartment and shattered, spraying the stuff over poor Savage. He was only slightly cut but was, understandably disgusted. We whipped him straight back for a tetanus jab.¹⁰⁶

The purpose of this act was for the glass to shatter and the contents seep to into the wound, causing potential health issues and the need to provide medical attention to the soldier who had been hit. This would then disrupt the supply of aid, delay convoys, and hinder military operations and missions. Soldiers also recalled examples of children being verbally abusive during patrols through urban areas. Soldier C discussed his experience of children 'being cheeky to you or crying out obscenities to you.'¹⁰⁷ Another soldier recalled how children would target one soldier in the patrol in an attempt to gain a reaction,

they would pick on the younger guys, the inexperienced ones, they stand out like a small thumb....they you know pick on them, they get in their way, they crowd them, grab their magazine, kick them, the guy will get all flustered, and they just try to catch them on film because then it is a big PR (public relations) coup.¹⁰⁸

Although the child was not an active participant or member of an armed group, they were still present within the operational landscape as a civilian, but a civilian who sought to cause disruption and disorder.

¹⁰⁶ Kent-Payne, V, Major. *Bosnia Warriors*, (Great Britain, 1998), p.261.

¹⁰⁷ Interview with Soldier C, Interviewed by Michelle Jones (Aberystwyth University, January 2015).

¹⁰⁸ Interview with Soldier D, Interviewed by Michelle Jones (Aberystwyth University, February 2015).

5.3.2.4 Children at Checkpoints

Another recurring theme throughout the data collected, was the presence of children at checkpoints. This particular role was prevalent in Sierra Leone, where the issues concerning child soldiers were exacerbated by the high levels of narcotic and alcohol abuse evident amongst all factions. The fear of seeing a child armed with a weapon who was responsible and in control of allowing access to an area was suggested by some of the soldiers to be highly intimidating, with many people succumbing to handing over money or other bribes to pass through the checkpoints. The following provides an insight into the presence of children at checkpoints in Sierra Leone

It became evident we were in rebel territory when we passed through the first checkpoint: a wooden pole lowered and raised by means of a length of rope. To the side of the road stood the operator; a boy of ten or eleven, bandy legged and barefoot, wearing a pair of raggedy shorts and nothing else, save a large sub-machine gun strapped to his back.¹⁰⁹

The use of children at checkpoints seemed to be a common occurrence, especially with younger children who were deemed not quite ready for combat, a British Army major recalled how ‘every day, for example, two five year olds walked past our house, with rifles longer than they were, on their way to man a checkpoint.’¹¹⁰ The British soldiers who encountered children at checkpoints admitted to feeling vulnerable and frightened as many of the children were high on narcotics and displaying symptoms of paranoia. The children treated their job as a game and were overly aggressive in their position of power. The unpredictability, lack of adult supervision, and understanding of the LOAC made these child soldiers a very volatile actor to deal with. Soldier D recalls the presence of children at checkpoints,

¹⁰⁹ Fowler, W. ‘*Operation Barras*’, (London, 2004), p.16.

¹¹⁰ Ashby, P. Major. ‘*Unscathed: Escape from Sierra Leone*’, (Macmillan, London, 2002), p.119.

they were on the checkpoints, a lot of it was bravado, a lot of teenage machismo, a little bit of puberty, a lot of testosterone, and I was shit scared every time I went anywhere near them because you never know what they are going to do.¹¹¹

Soldier I also recalled an incident at a checkpoint in Sierra Leone during his interview,

we were driving through a mine site and had to go through checkpoints, and these checkpoints were run by people to get money, so people who went through were fleeced, a lot of these people on the checkpoints were kids, they were child soldiers really...at one checkpoint and this young kid, I don't know what age, 14 perhaps, playing around with his AK-47, showing off and managed to have a negative discharge and he shot this little girl, about 8, straight through the head...of course there was utter chaos...and he was killed...so you had two children killed in a way for no reason.¹¹²

Whilst the child was not a direct threat to Soldier I, the experience highlighted the volatile and dangerous environment in which these children were present. There was a sense of regret during the telling of this story, as the soldier recalled how the incident resulted in the death of two children, just because children were in a situation where they were allowed to have weapons. Murder, hostages being taken, and pilfering of humanitarian aid were also commonplace at checkpoints in Sierra Leone.

Major Phil Ashby openly discussed his fear associated with a checkpoint situation in Sierra Leone, 'with just five miles to go, we were stopped again. The checkpoint commander here was called Major Psycho, aged all of fifteen...he was nothing more – and nothing less – than a dangerous nutter.'¹¹³ Not only were there feelings of unease and fear towards the child, but the situation developed and the fear of being taken hostage became a reality, 'we were being 'asked' by a psychopath with a gun to 'stay' as his 'guests', and it was hard to turn him down. To all intents and purposes we were now hostages.'¹¹⁴ Soldier J acknowledged the threat of hostage situations in Africa, as he recounted the incident of the Royal Irish in Sierra Leone,

¹¹¹ Interview with Soldier D, Interviewed by Michelle Jones (Aberystwyth University, February 2015).

¹¹² Interview with Soldier I, Interviewed by Michelle Jones (Aberystwyth University, March 2015).

¹¹³ Ashby, P. Major. *'Unscathed'*, (London, 2002), p.117.

¹¹⁴ Ashby, P. Major. *'Unscathed'*, (London, 2002), p.117.

in Sierra Leone that is exactly what happened in terms of the Royal Irish being captured, it was exactly that scenario, they shouldn't have been on that track, but they were, then surrounded by a load of kids and then they were ambushed.¹¹⁵

5.3.2.5 Children as Suicide Bombers

The presence of children as suicide bombers also became apparent when discussing experiences with soldiers who had served in Afghanistan or Iraq. Those who had experienced the child in this role admitted it was difficult to determine whether the child was a willing participant or were being used against their wishes as a 'walking bomb', but a great sense of sympathy towards the child emerged in all of the discussions on this subject. Some soldiers mentioned the threat and fear of encountering a child suicide bomber, especially after the deaths of three Royal Marines in Afghanistan by a teenage suicide bomber in December 2008,¹¹⁶ but they had not experienced this type of actor themselves. Discussions in this instance focused upon the need to know how to react in this situation.

Other soldiers shared their experience of dealing with this particular type of actor; sometimes the child would be brought to the base by parents asking them to detonate the vest safely. This was experienced by soldier F when his patrol in Afghanistan was approached by a 15 year old boy who was due to detonate his vest full of explosives but had changed his mind, the soldier recalled how it was 'fortunate he didn't kill us or kill himself.'¹¹⁷ Soldier B also recalled how children were present as suicide bombers in the more recent conflicts.¹¹⁸ The knowledge that children can be used in such a way can create heightened levels of fear and anxiety for the soldier, who is already operating in a stressful conflict situation. There

¹¹⁵ Interview with Soldier J, Interviewed by Michelle Jones (Aberystwyth University, March 2015).

¹¹⁶ 'Royal Marines killed by teen suicide bomber shows UK needs allies in Afghanistan battle', *The Telegraph*, 13th December 2008, taken from <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/comment/telegraph-view/3743622/Royal-Marines-killed-by-teen-suicide-bomber-shows-UK-needs-allies-in-Afghanistan-battle.html>, accessed on 23rd March 2015.

¹¹⁷ Interview with Soldier F, Interviewed by Michelle Jones, (Aberystwyth University, March 2015).

¹¹⁸ Interview with Soldier B, Interviewed by Michelle Jones (Aberystwyth University, January 2015).

was a fear that the tactic was becoming more commonplace. Soldier D focused on the use of children as suicide bombers during his interview, and how their use is not only an issue for British personnel, but the French too because of the regions they operate in,

Boko Haram are doing it at the moment by sending them into crowded places and blowing them up – commanding one of them, they don't even have to press it themselves, they just walk them into a crowded bazaar...if Boko Haram are doing it in Nigeria it won't be long for it to be done in Mali and the French have to deal with it.¹¹⁹

5.3.2.6 Children as Human Shields

The use or sighting of children as human shields was also discussed by soldiers. In this situation the enemy uses civilians, usually women, children or the elderly, as cover to hide themselves and eliminate the possibility of an attack. This is an old but very effective tactic, and was mentioned by soldiers talking about their experiences in Northern Ireland, Bosnia, Iraq, and Afghanistan. The adversary believes that by hiding behind civilians, especially children, then British soldiers would not be able to return fire. This was evident in the extract below,

Hasler and Thompson (two British soldiers) were under fire from a machine-gun next about hundred yards to port. The side-gunner tried to return fire, but stopped in horror when he realised that there were women and children in his sights. The gunmen had pushed them out in front of their positions for cover- a Taliban tactic the crewmen had heard of but never seen used before.¹²⁰

The use of human shields provides a no-win situation for the British soldier; as they either have to retreat and choose not to engage the enemy, or they engage the enemy and risk killing civilians. The killing of innocents can lead to negative media attention and loss of international support. Major Chris Hunter recalled an example of children being used as a guise to launch an attack, and the impact that had on relations with the local population;

only two days ago a British patrol was hit on the Shatt al-Arab as it passed under a bridge lined with waving kids. As it slowed, an insurgent moved the kids to one side and dropped a

¹¹⁹ Interview with Soldier D, Interviewed by Michelle Jones (Aberystwyth University, February 2015).

¹²⁰ Fergusson, J. *'A Million Bullets: The Real Story of the British Army in Afghanistan'*, (Bantam Press, London, 2008), p.269-70.

grenade on to the deck. Two young sappers were hit by the blast. In my heart I wanted to reach out to the Iraqis, but now is not the time. We drop our guard, we die.¹²¹

This shows the effect the use of children as human shields has on both the soldier and the operation. Not only can this action result in fatalities or physical harm, but it alters the perception of the local population thus hampering relations between British soldiers and the local community.

5.3.2.7 Children in Support Roles

The British soldiers also mentioned the presence of children who worked for armed groups, acting as couriers or messengers. The use of children to carry weapons, equipment or ammunition through checkpoints was mentioned frequently. One soldier recalled his experiences in Iraq with women being used to pass items through checkpoints. Therefore, on his deployment to Afghanistan, he ensured that there was a female soldier present to search females. However, he admitted he was at a loss as to how to deal with children couriating items through checkpoints.¹²² The deliberate 'use of children couriating things around to avoid searches'¹²³ was problematic. The soldier noted that if an adult searched the child, regardless of their sex, the local population would be deeply unsatisfied and turn against the British soldiers. Frustration was acknowledged by the soldier as he knew what the children were doing, but was powerless to stop them.

Another soldier recalled an incident in which a young girl with a pram was stopped due to suspicions she was acting as a courier,

we saw a girl pushing a pram, we recognised her and she didn't have a baby...why did she have a pram? We sent the patrol out to intercept, instantly a shootout and she was arrested, and we discovered a bomb in the pram. Was there a baby in the pram? Yes! She was delivering a bomb for someone else using the baby as cover.¹²⁴

¹²¹ Hunter, C. *'Eight Lives Down'*, (Corgi Books, London, 2008), p.114-5.

¹²² Interview with Soldier H, Interviewed by Michelle Jones, (Aberystwyth University, March 2015).

¹²³ Interview with Soldier H, Interviewed by Michelle Jones (Aberystwyth University, March 2015).

¹²⁴ Interview with Soldier D, Interviewed by Michelle Jones (Aberystwyth University, February 2015).

Children were also present in other roles which served to support the enemy force.

Major Chris Hunter acknowledged the specific use of children in Iraq to lay down command wires or to dig in IEDs,

I don't believe what I'm seeing. The bastards are using children to dig in the wire to minimise their chances of arrest or capture. This needs to be reported immediately. If coalition forces see somebody digging in a command wire, they shoot them on the spot, or, worse still call in an air-strike. Most enemy sightings are made from several hundred metres away and the last thing a soldier would think if he see's somebody planting a bomb is that it might be a child.¹²⁵

The acknowledgement that the enemy force is using children to complete this type of task affects the British Army's response to the situation. It can no longer use traditional reactionary methods because of the risk associated with harming the child or the incident being used by the enemy as propaganda.

5.3.2.8 Children as 'Dickers'

Nearly all of the interviews conducted with former personnel referred to the presence of children as 'dickers' in theatres of armed conflict. The 'dicker' is a term first used in the Northern Ireland campaign and refers to a person who tracks the enemy's movements whilst passing on information to their own force regarding the enemy's location and other relevant intelligence. The use of children as 'dickers' was prevalent in Northern Ireland, Afghanistan, and Iraq and was present as a recurring theme throughout many of the extracts and interviews. Children were able to get closer to a base's entrance without being deemed suspicious, therefore were able to watch troop movements and notify enemy forces as to the timings, and quantity of forces entering and leaving the area.

Soldier F noted that, the enemy 'use them for eyes and ears, but not eyes and ears that are necessarily going to attract suspicion.'¹²⁶ Soldier L recalled the presence of children in

¹²⁵ Hunter, C. *Eight Lives Down*, (London, 2008), p.285.

¹²⁶ Interview with Soldier F, Interviewed by Michelle Jones (Aberystwyth University, March 2015).

Northern Ireland and Afghanistan as ‘dickers’, ‘the same in Afghanistan, children were often used as intelligence gatherers, information gatherers.’¹²⁷ Soldier D also referred to children being present on street corners in Northern Ireland, ‘children were called ‘dickers’ when I say ‘dickers’ I mean spies, so you are walking along the roads in military formation and the kids are hanging around on street corners and they are like spies on the wire.’¹²⁸ Soldier G discussed his experiences in Afghanistan, ‘yeah they would use children or anybody to dig in IEDs, to become suicide bombers, or to follow patrols and provide information about where we were going so that we could be attacked.’¹²⁹ Children were also present in Sierra Leone in a similar role, Soldier L shared his experience, ‘scouts signalling ahead and then before an assault you could actually see them at the forefront.’¹³⁰ Although soldiers mentioned seeing children due to them acting as ‘dickers’, therefore coming quite close to their bases, they also recognised that the child was not an active threat. Whilst they recognised that the child would not cause them harm, many of the soldiers discussed feeling frustrated or agitated knowing that they were being watched.

5.3.2.9 Children as ‘Children’

The majority of conflicts in which the British have been involved in, in the post-Cold War period, have taken place amongst the civilian population otherwise known as ‘war amongst the people’. Therefore, children can be present in theatres of armed conflict as they are part of the civilian community; innocent bystanders to the chaos around them. Many of the soldiers recalled seeing children as part of the conflict environment, either children needing medical attention or just being present when they conducted patrols. Soldier H recalled seeing children in the villages in Afghanistan, in this instance he stated that the

¹²⁷ Interview with Soldier L, Interviewed by Michelle Jones (Aberystwyth University, April 2015).

¹²⁸ Interview with Soldier D, Interviewed by Michelle Jones (Aberystwyth University, February 2015).

¹²⁹ Interview with Soldier G, Interviewed by Michelle Jones (Aberystwyth University, March 2015).

¹³⁰ Interview with Soldier L, Interviewed by Michelle Jones (Aberystwyth University, April 2015).

‘children I encountered weren’t doing anything else other than trying to be children in a complicated environment.’¹³¹

The interaction with children, who they deemed to be less of a threat, was generally spoken about positively. Soldiers recalled specific children they became quite friendly with and the type of tasks conducted with them. For example: ‘we played football with them, played football and volleyball with them over the fence between them, all sorts of stuff we shouldn’t have been doing, it was just something to pass the time.’¹³² One of the soldiers interviewed was deployed to Kosovo to help with reconstruction efforts, ‘by the time I got there it was a stable society and we were building playgrounds for them, they were going to school, they were doing stuff.’¹³³ A range of motivations were mentioned by the soldiers when discussing reasons for interacting with local children; boredom by the soldiers¹³⁴, missing their own families¹³⁵, sympathy for the child¹³⁶, and to be seen as the ‘good guys’ which they hoped would garner support from the local population¹³⁷.

A few soldiers mentioned how local children would approach them and volunteer information. One soldier recalled his experience in Afghanistan in which local children provided intelligence to their patrol, ‘we did get told by a couple of the kids there were soldiers in the next village.’¹³⁸ Another noted that,

¹³¹ Interview with Soldier H, Interviewed by Michelle Jones (Aberystwyth University, March 2015).

¹³² Interview with Adam Leverton, 307 Battery 100 Regiment Royal Artillery, conducted by Peter M Hart, *IWM*, 2005, File 27253, Reel 9.

¹³³ Interview with Soldier D, Interviewed by Michelle Jones (Aberystwyth University, February 2015).

¹³⁴ Interview with Adam Leverton, 307 Battery 100 Regiment Royal Artillery, conducted by Peter M Hart, *IWM*, 2005, File 27253, Reel 9.

¹³⁵ Interview with Terence Rymer, B Squadron, Kings Royal Hussars, conducted by Richard McDonough, *IWM*, 2012, File 33806, Reel 1.

¹³⁶ Interview with Simon Mercer, British Private, 1st Battalion Royal Anglian Regiment, conducted by Richard McDonough, *IWM*, 2009, File 31397, Reel 2.

¹³⁷ Interview with Oliver Hare, British Private, 1st Battalion Royal Anglian Regiment, conducted by Richard McDonough, *IWM*, 2009, File 32508, Reel 2.

¹³⁸ Interview with Andrew Mullins, British Gunner 307 Battery 100 Regiment Royal Artillery, conducted by Peter M Hart, *IWM*, 2005, File 27729, Reel 5.

one fourteen-year-old boy came forward to volunteer information and Smith was soon told why. The Taliban had killed his mother because they thought she had helped the ANP, providing information on one of their own...so the boy was more than happy to tell us what he knew and was saying 'I'll keep my eyes open, I'll tell you if I find (out) anything more if you come back.'¹³⁹

Due to the chaos of war and the lack of educational facilities available, children were often present in the local area during the day. They also understand the landscape better than British soldiers, therefore they could provide information which may be of benefit. Major Ashby found the presence of children milling around useful in Sierra Leone;

I also explained to the newly arrived British troops about the groups of kids that would inevitably crowd round their positions. Although some of these children might have been RUF spies, if you were nice to them they became an excellent early warning system, as they knew exactly who everyone was.¹⁴⁰

The experiences provided by personnel showed that children were eager to please, and seemed to take it upon themselves to provide information or 'help', 'two young boys come running up to us with a pair of key-fobs – the RCIED¹⁴¹ transmitters used in the two attacks that have just taken place, confirming that these are keyless car entry system IEDs.'¹⁴² Whilst soldiers shared their experiences with regard to children being talkative and giving information, either purposely or unwittingly, there are implications for children being interacted with in this way. Children can be used by enemy forces to provide misinformation and thus place troops in danger. However, such interactions can also place the child in danger, especially in places like Afghanistan where the Taliban are infamous for carrying out revenge attacks on anyone that collaborated with ISAF.

This section has highlighted that British military personnel have operated in theatres of armed conflict where children have also been present. The extracts and experiences provided by British soldiers have highlighted a multitude of ways in which they have seen or

¹³⁹ Bishop, P. *'Ground Truth'*, (London, 2009), p.107.

¹⁴⁰ Ashby, P. Major. *'Unscathed'*, (London, 2002), p.233.

¹⁴¹ Radio controlled improvised explosive device.

¹⁴² Hunter, C. *'Eight Lives Down'*, (London, 2008), p.310-11.

interacted with children. Children can be a part of the operational landscape due to the nature of the conflict situation, with many modern conflicts termed as ‘war amongst the people’. British soldiers may encounter the child during patrols through local towns or villages, or during delivery of humanitarian aid to the local population. Children can also be present in theatres of armed conflict due to their role as an active participant. This section has highlighted how British soldiers have encountered and have experience with children who have operated as soldiers, suicide bombers, spies, and as couriers. Each provides a different challenge to the soldier who encounters and has to interact with them. Children can partake in activities which can cause disruption or limit the activities of military personnel. The following section will acknowledge how the child’s presence in theatres of armed conflict can have an effect on military operations.

5.3.3 The Child and Military Operations

Having acknowledged the various ways children can be present in theatres of armed conflict, this section discusses how the child’s presence can have implications for military operations. It will draw upon the experiences of British soldiers to understand how the presence of children altered the way in which military operations were conducted in the region. Military operations are conducted in order to achieve the strategic objectives of a military campaign.¹⁴³ For the purpose of this thesis, military operation refers to the actions of a military group who have been given a mission or task to complete in which there is a strategic purpose for their actions. This section is different to section 5.3.5, which examines the soldier’s individual practices towards the child, as it seeks to understand if, and how, the practice of achieving a military objective is altered when children were present in the operational theatre. The following section does not provide a comprehensive overview of the

¹⁴³ ‘Operations’, Army Doctrine Publications, (Ministry of Defence, Shrivenham, 2010), p.3-18.

various ways in which children are likely to impact military operations, rather it draws upon the understandings of British soldiers to determine how operations were affected from their own experience in the context of a particular conflict theatre.

5.3.3.1 Engaging the Enemy

When discussing the implications for military operations, some of the soldiers interviewed recalled instances in which children were used as human shields by enemy forces. Soldier G drew on a particular experience to show how the presence of children resulted in a change of strategy, he stated that,

in a couple of the fire fights we knew they were using women and children as shields...some of my soldiers went into a compound behind Taliban lines and the guys heard the women and children between the two (compounds)...so that would restrict what we were doing...we would have definitely thrown some of ours (grenades) their way and that would have sorted them out but the section commander, a corporal, was aware there was women and children on the other side of the wall where Taliban were, so we didn't do it, so what that means is, bluntly you can't kill the enemy, whereas they can still be slinging stuff our way. So it ultimately could lead to the death of one of our people, it didn't in this case, but it could do, because you are less likely to fire upon innocents because you don't want to kill people that aren't the enemy.¹⁴⁴

This particular incident highlighted how the presence of children resulted in the British soldiers choosing not to engage with the enemy force. This provides the enemy with a tactical advantage, as they can attack freely without fear of retribution. Such incidents can hamper the morale of the British troops, who are unable to conduct their duties or mission due to the tactics employed by the enemy. As Soldier G noted, this places their own personnel in danger as they choose not to engage with the enemy or return fire. Damien Lewis, a war correspondent embedded with the Army Air Corps in Afghanistan, also noted the British military's reluctance to engage with the enemy when children were present,

the game of cat and mouse continued. Four more time mortars were fired from a clearly visible grid, but when the aircrew checked it out only women and children could be seen. There was no way that the weapons-locating radar could be repeatedly getting the grids

¹⁴⁴ Interview with Soldier G, Interviewed by Michelle Jones (Aberystwyth University, March 2015).

wrong. As for the women and children, they were apparently willingly playing their part as cover, knowing that British forces wouldn't fire upon them.¹⁴⁵

The use of women and children as human shields was common in discussions about the Afghan conflict. Soldier F acknowledged the reluctance involved with these particular actors, 'the reluctance to engage a child may well be a little bit greater than the reluctance to engage a woman.'¹⁴⁶

Whilst the LOAC and IHL acknowledge that a child loses their non-combatant status when they take up arms or participate in the conflict, the actual interaction as to how to deal with a child in this situation is complex. In the context of a military operation, the soldier has to achieve the strategic and military objectives in order to achieve success. Achieving such objectives should not be altered because a child is present as part of the enemy force, however, discussions with the participants revealed a divergence of opinions and attitudes as to how to respond to such a situation. This section transcends the categories of military operations, attitudes, and practices, as it provides a personal insight into the attitude towards the hostile child actor, which also affects individual practices that can hamper a military operation.

Discussions about interacting or engaging with the child who was an active, or potential threat, revealed a myriad of responses. Whilst some soldiers discussed concerns about engaging the child, others recognised that the child could be a potential lethal threat, not just to themselves, but to their comrades and civilians. Soldier C stated that

if the child is a threat...well then you deal with it as any other combatant or person involved in hostile acts against you. A child can be just as effective as an adult although they may not be, children you come across them and they are not really effective or they are trying hard to kill you but they are not very good at it.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁵ Lewis, D. *Apache Dawn: Always Outnumbered, Never Outgunned*, (Sphere Publishers, Great Britain, 2008), p.234.

¹⁴⁶ Interview with Soldier F, Interviewed by Michelle Jones (Aberystwyth University, March 2015).

¹⁴⁷ Interview with Soldier C, Interviewed by Michelle Jones (Aberystwyth University, January 2015).

Soldier B provided a similar response, focusing on the benefit of military training to counter-act the dilemma posed by the presence of a child,

he (the soldier) will override any sort of instinctive feeling or protectiveness towards a child or woman if he thinks that the child or woman is posing some sort of threat, um in those circumstances the logic of both his experience and his training means there is no difference.¹⁴⁸

Soldier C highlighted how the mission and achieving its aims remained the most important factor when confronted by a child, 'if they (the child) are fighting against you and they are opposing your military mission then you have to deal with them.'¹⁴⁹ Some of the responses shared by soldiers revealed that they knew they had to respond to the threat, but recognised that it was not an easy choice to make. Soldier D stated that,

well if someone is shooting at you then I was in my right according to RoE to respond. Would I have responded differently to a child? I don't think so, a bullet is a bullet, I guess I'd say different in 10, 15 years later.¹⁵⁰

Soldier F believed there would be a different psychological implication involved for engaging a child, 'fighters on the battlefield can potentially be 13 or 14 years old and you engage someone like that and you kill them then the psychological results are far greater.'¹⁵¹ Another soldier referred to the decision-making process when choosing to engage a child actor,

conscience wise you got kids of your own that you think of, you have to condition yourselves to such a degree, you have to be professional about it, you have to make the judgement, you hope that your judgement is right.¹⁵²

The discussions focused heavily on the decision-making process and the judgement needed by the soldier prior to engaging the child. Such hesitation could lead to delays which could have a harmful or lethal implication for the soldier, his comrades, and surrounding civilians. Soldier L discussed the dilemma regarding decision making when discussing

¹⁴⁸ Interview with Soldier B, Interviewed by Michelle Jones (Aberystwyth University, January 2015).

¹⁴⁹ Interview with Soldier C, Interviewed by Michelle Jones (Aberystwyth University, January 2015).

¹⁵⁰ Interview with Soldier D, Interviewed by Michelle Jones (Aberystwyth University, February 2015).

¹⁵¹ Interview with Soldier F, Interviewed by Michelle Jones (Aberystwyth University, March 2015).

¹⁵² Interview with Soldier E, Interviewed by Michelle Jones (Aberystwyth University, February 2015).

instances involving the child suicide bomber, ‘if somebody had to shoot the child who was just about to blow themselves up then...it is the right decision if you want to stay alive but it is a horrendous decision to make.’¹⁵³ Such decisions could also have an impact on group cohesion within a unit. Soldier M, whilst acknowledging the impact on the soldier’s well-being, also highlighted how such a decision could hamper relations with fellow comrades, ‘to ‘neutralise a child’ and it will be done at the very considerable risk of alienating your fighting comrades who are also decent human beings and leaving you with an indelible scar under the rubric of Operational Stress.’¹⁵⁴ This could have implications on the military operation, as cohesiveness and morale diminish amongst the unit.

5.3.3.2 Patrols

During discussions about conducting patrols, some of the experiences offered by soldiers provided evidence as to how their patrol patterns changed in the local area if they knew children would be present. Patrols could be used by military forces for a number of reasons; to provide reconnaissance, to entice the enemy, to ensure the area is secure for larger formations to pass through, and to liaise or provide reassurance to the local population. Depending on the conflict environment, soldiers stated that the presence of children would impact the way in which they conducted patrols in the area. Some of the soldiers suggested that the presence of children was positive and created an atmosphere of safety amongst the patrol. Soldier G described being out on a foot patrol when a group of children approached them,

we want to keep those children with us because, and the rationale behind that is not...well the enemy is less likely to trigger an IED or ambush the patrol if there were loads of kids around, or that is the assumption it is not necessarily true, but that is the assumption.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵³ Interview with Soldier L, Interviewed by Michelle Jones (Aberystwyth University, April 2015).

¹⁵⁴ Interview with Soldier M, Interviewed by Michelle Jones (Aberystwyth University, February 2015).

¹⁵⁵ Interview with Soldier G, Interviewed by Michelle Jones (Aberystwyth University, March 2015).

However, Soldier J suggested that, if the region was known to be hostile and intelligence reports suggested that children were likely to be present then, ‘we would try to avoid areas where there was obviously going to be lots of kids.’¹⁵⁶ Should a fire fight break out with enemy forces, then the patrol would be unlikely to endanger any children who might also be present in the area. Consequently, changing the patrol patterns could reinforce the notion that British troops were hesitant to operate where children were present, which could result in the enemy forces using children to their advantage.

The use of children as ‘dickers’ was a popular theme running across the data from different soldiers and their experiences in contrasting conflict situations. When discussing the child involved in this particular role, the soldiers expressed frustration due to knowing they were being followed or that the child was passing on information to the enemy force. Although it was evident that the soldier was frustrated at the situation, when asked how they responded, many of the soldiers suggested there was nothing they could do. Soldier K stated that ‘...dickers were very effective, and uh our response of that was nothing.’¹⁵⁷ Despite suspicions that the child was passing on information to the enemy force, the British soldiers interviewed did not counter the child’s actions nor provide alternative measures to restrict the passing of such information. The decision to not engage with children acting as ‘dickers’ could cause implications for a military operation, as the enemy can track the movement of British patrols with little consequence.

5.3.3.3 Black Propaganda

Children do not have to play a direct role or even be used by enemy forces to have a negative impact on British military operations. Their presence, either hypothetical or actual,

¹⁵⁶ Interview with Soldier J, Interviewed by Michelle Jones (Aberystwyth University, March 2015).

¹⁵⁷ Interview with Soldier K, Interviewed by Michelle Jones (Aberystwyth University, April 2015).

can have implications and cause a hindrance based on the notion of black propaganda. By stating that children were in a particular area or inflating the figures concerning numbers of children present, an enemy force can ruin the credibility or reputation of their foe. The use of human shields can play a key role in the production of black propaganda aimed at the British military. Soldiers seemed to be aware how propaganda could be used against them. During an interview, Soldier G noted how the enemy could use ‘invented propaganda to label the British Army or whatever army as child killers and anti-people.’¹⁵⁸

During campaigns where the hearts and minds of the local population is an important element for achieving success, such incidents can have a detrimental effect on military operations. Another interviewee, Soldier B, acknowledged that ‘you have to even be careful about photographs appearing in the press that may or may not have been positioned, posed, manipulated.’¹⁵⁹ He noted that the modern global communications and media network could distribute images so quickly, and that such images could have an effect on the local and international populations,

we are a global village and that communications are so good that photographs can appear on the internet or the newspaper overnight so all of this sort of thing means inevitably that the whole community, most particularly children because children appeal to our emotions you know whether you are talking about a famine or war, a dying child or wounded child or a dead child is a very upsetting picture to see.¹⁶⁰

James Newton’s extract also illustrated how the enemy could use incidents to their advantage,

if I, or one of the other boys, ended up mistakenly obliterating a taxi full of women and children, we would have to live with the horror of having killed innocent people for the rest of our lives. It would also be a PR disaster for the ‘liberating’ US and British troops, as pictures of the carnage would surely be transmitted all round the world as evidence of our alleged barbarism. The Iraqis were just waiting for us to slip up, because they knew as well as we did that they had more chances of winning the war on television than on the battlefield.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁸ Interview with Soldier G, Interviewed by Michelle Jones (Aberystwyth University, March 2015).

¹⁵⁹ Interview with Soldier B, Interviewed by Michelle Jones (Aberystwyth University, January 2015).

¹⁶⁰ Interview with Soldier B, Interviewed by Michelle Jones (Aberystwyth University, January 2015).

¹⁶¹ Newton, J. ‘*Armed Action*’, (Headline Review, UK, 2007), p.220.

The loss of support from local, domestic or international populations can have implications for military operations or campaigns. The support of the local population is crucial in a counter-insurgency campaign, as they can provide intelligence on the enemy, as well as denying them supplies and shelter. Soldier B recognised the implications of harming a child for the overall campaign, stating that ‘if the child had been wounded, let alone killed, then that would have been a major minus for the security forces and the government in terms of you know the political, the objective of achieving political progress.’¹⁶²

The enemy’s tactics to place a child in harm’s way for the purpose of propaganda was acknowledged by a few of the soldiers interviewed. They were aware that their actions and the actions of their fellow troops could be used against them to destroy relationships with local and British domestic populations. Soldier C explained that ‘children can be used for propaganda but it means your enemy is not respecting the child, that is where the crime is committed.’¹⁶³ The experience of the child being used in such way demonstrated further disdain towards the enemy. One soldier discussed his experience in Iraq, in which military equipment had been placed inside a children’s playground, ‘it really was a position for cheating whoever had done that.’¹⁶⁴

5.3.3.4 Hindrance to Operations

As noted from the experiences concerning children throwing stones and bottles, such actions can have an effect on missions and operations. The Bosnian case provided evidence in which personnel were hurt and military equipment damaged, this resulted in convoys having to return to base in order to seek medical assistance or repairs. This impacted the

¹⁶² Interview with Soldier B, Interviewed by Michelle Jones (Aberystwyth University, January 2015).

¹⁶³ Interview with Soldier C, Interviewed by Michelle Jones, (Aberystwyth University, January 2015).

¹⁶⁴ Interview with Matthew Cook, NCO Royal Gloucester, Berkshire and Wiltshire Light Infantry, Interview conducted by Lyn Smith, *IWM*, 2007, File 30143, Reel 9.

objective of delivering aid and food packages to the local population. Again, this can hamper support from the local population as they are not receiving the items they need.

However, children being part of the operational landscape could also cause a hindrance to military operations. The presence of a child caused a hindrance in the infamous SAS mission during the 1991 Gulf War, in which a boy shepherd spotted the SAS unit behind enemy lines, and alerted Iraqi forces to their presence which resulted in the unit's capture.

The author Andy McNab¹⁶⁵ described that moment in his book *Bravo Two Zero*,

our eyes met and held. I'd never seen such a look of astonishment in a child's eyes. Now what? He was rooted to the spot. The options raced through my mind. Do we top him? Too much noise. Anyway, what was the point? I wouldn't want that on my conscience for the rest of my life. Shit, I could have been an Iraqi behind the lines in Britain and that could have been Katie up there. The boy started to run. My eyes followed him and I made my move...but we could only go so far, without exposing ourselves to the S60 sites and the child had too much of a head start. He was gone, fucking gone, hollering like a lunatic.¹⁶⁶

Whilst the author has been criticised for exaggerating the number of Iraqi troops the SAS unit faced, the passage provides a personal insight into this particular event and can be corroborated by the sources produced by other SAS members in the team.¹⁶⁷

The experiences produced by British soldiers provide an insight into the various ways the presence of children can have implications for the conduct of military operations. The presence of children can cause military units to alter their conduct or choose not to engage with the enemy which changes their role and objectives as part of the initial military operation. It may not alter the grand strategy of a military campaign, but it could have an immediate effect on the operational level.

¹⁶⁵ Andy McNab is a pseudonym used to publish material on the subject.

¹⁶⁶ McNab, A. *Bravo Two Zero: The True Story of an SAS Patrol behind the lines in Iraq*, (Bantam Press, London, 1993), p.93.

¹⁶⁷ Please see, Coburn, M. *Soldier Five: The Real Truth about the Bravo Two Zero Mission*, (Mainstream Publishing, London, 2004), and Ryan, C. *The One that Got Away*, (Arrow Book, UK, 2011). Both of these authors use pseudonyms to hide their true identities.

5.3.4 Attitudes Towards the Child

The various attitudes of British soldiers towards children in conflict zones, both as a hostile threat and an innocent bystander, were apparent in all the published accounts and interviews. Prior to analysing how the presence of children in theatres of armed conflict affects the attitudes of British soldiers, it is important to acknowledge what is meant by ‘attitude’ in relation to this thesis. As Norbert Schwarz and Gerd Bohner noted, ‘we cannot observe attitudes directly but infer them from individuals’ self-reports and behaviour.’¹⁶⁸ Therefore during the analysis of the data, the ABC structure of attitudes was used to categorise the oral and written testimonies. The ABC model¹⁶⁹ suggests that attitudes based on experiences can be categorised into three distinct areas; the affective component (A), which focuses on feelings towards a subject; the behavioural component (B), which acknowledges the way a person acts or behaves towards a subject; and the cognitive component (C), which examines the person’s belief or knowledge about a subject. The extracted data was categorised as A, B, or C, to ensure inferences about the soldier’s statements were consistent with the model, and thus relevant to the study of attitudes. Soldiers tended to single out the child as a distinct category when discussing the enemy or local civilian populations, therefore it was possible to extract information from their experiences concerning their attitude towards a particular actor.

5.3.4.1 Sympathy

The notion of sympathy was dominant throughout many of the published accounts and interviews. Sympathy belongs to the affective component (A) as it relies on inferences

¹⁶⁸ Schwarz, N. and Bohner, G. ‘The Construction of Attitudes’, taken from Tesser, A. and Schwarz, N. ed. *Intrapersonal Processes*, (Blackwell Publishers, Oxford, 2001), p. 440.

¹⁶⁹ Rosenberg, M.J. and Hovland, C.I., ‘Cognitive, Affective and Behavioural Components of Attitudes’, taken from Rosenberg, M. J. and Hovland, C.I. ed. *Attitude Organization and Change: An Analysis of Consistency Among Attitudes Components*, (Yale University Press, New Haven, 1960).

drawn from the soldier's attitude towards the subject (the child). The levels of sympathy varied towards the child depending on the role they played and the soldier's particular experience with them. There was a higher level of sympathy expressed towards the child who was deemed an innocent bystander to the conflict. Major Vaughan Kent-Payne acknowledged the feeling of sympathy towards the children in Bosnia by sharing this particular experience;

several kids surrounded the land rover. I had a half-eaten packet of polo mints in my pocket and beckoned to a little blond urchin to take it. In an instant, he was upon me and snatched it with the practised eye of the Artful Dodger. He sprinted off, pursued by a baying mob of children, the kids looked just like any other Europeans and it was no wonder that the images of their suffering had so touched the public conscience.¹⁷⁰

Another soldier mentioned how, in Afghanistan, he would 'sit back and talk to them. The rations I get, because I don't eat much, would give them to some of the children who didn't eat much.'¹⁷¹ One soldier provided this explanation as to why he thought children were given more sympathy than adult civilians, stating that

fundamentally almost all soldiers are... they are very kindly based, and I put it that way, many of course have brothers and sisters of their own, some of them younger than them, they are you know – they have a humanity about them which transcends the fact they have been trained to do the Queen's business so to speak and so whatever their training – the results of their training are in terms of their aggression and their determination to close with and kill the enemy to put it brutally, but this humanity remains and of course it's also as (name withheld) will talk to you later about it's also this humanity embedded in the whole spirit of the laws of war.¹⁷²

5.3.4.2 Frustration

The presence of children who were suffering and the inability to provide an immediate positive change was evident in a few interviews. Again, this belongs to the affective component (A) as inferences could be drawn from the extracts which displayed a sense of frustration towards the situation. Frustration towards the situation was evident on two levels; the way the conflict was being conducted, and the way their actions were limited.

¹⁷⁰ Kent-Payne, V, Major. *'Bosnia Warriors'*, (Great Britain, 1998), p.43.

¹⁷¹ Interview with Andrew Mullins, British Gunner 307 Battery 100 Regiment Royal Artillery, conducted by Peter M Hart, *IWM*, 2005, File 27729, Reel 5.

¹⁷² Interview with Soldier B, Interviewed by Michelle Jones (Aberystwyth University, January 2015).

Some soldiers spoke about their experiences and frustration at not being able to control events, especially in relation to the Bosnian conflict. One soldier who served in Bosnia provided the following insight,

I wish we could have done more under the United Nations and stopped more people from getting killed...more quickly and I think that was the one thing I learnt from Bosnia that I would never ever allow myself to be in a position where I would follow orders blindly and watch someone get killed.¹⁷³

Other soldiers demonstrated levels of frustration at not being able to provide help during their interactions with the local children. The following extract was provided by an eighteen-year-old private serving in Iraq,

and we was (sic) told we was (sic) not allowed to give them (children) plasters because if we gave one a plaster they'd all be like that 'Give me one! I want one!' it just causes more attention than you don't need and it was really hard because you couldn't really help none of them, which I'm a kind of person that likes to help people but yeah, so that got to me.¹⁷⁴

Another soldier stated that 'it's almost a begging situation where you have children chasing vehicles full of troops asking for bottles of water, or for money, for chocolate or that kind of stuff and it's hard not to give in.'¹⁷⁵

5.3.4.3 Compassion

Others felt compassion towards the child, despite knowing they were a perpetrator in the conflict and had the ability to be a lethal threat. Again, this section falls under the affective component (A), as the attitude is towards the child. Major Phil Ashby shared his experience in Sierra Leone stating that 'only 20 metres away is a rehabilitation centre for former child soldiers. These children bear terrible physical scars – apart from war wounds, most have been branded like cattle by their commanders. Their emotional scars can only be guessed at.'¹⁷⁶ Compassion for both the child's physical and emotional well-being were evident. Another British soldier expressed dismay over the wasted lives of the young who

¹⁷³ Interview with Major Chris Hunter, Royal Logistics Corp, Interviewed by Amy Cameron, *NAM*, 2012-11-2.

¹⁷⁴ Interview with Andrew Edwards, British Signaller 307 Battery 100 Regiment Royal Artillery, Interviewed by Peter M Hart, *IWM*, 2005, File 27254, Reel 6.

¹⁷⁵ Interview with Simon Mercer, 1st Battalion Royal Anglian Regiment, Interviewed by Richard McDonough, *IWM*, 2009, File 31397, Reel 2.

¹⁷⁶ Ashby, P. Major. *'Unscathed'*, (London, 2002), p.91.

took on the role of suicide bomber, 'it was the young, with all their lives before them, who were impatient to get to paradise.'¹⁷⁷ The notion that a child could willingly act as a suicide bomber appeared to baffle this soldier, and a sense of sympathy was felt in his discussion of these particular actors despite the very lethal and dangerous threat they posed.

5.3.4.4 Disdain towards the Enemy

A negative attitude towards the enemy and local population was also apparent in a number of the sources. This section acknowledges the cognitive component (C) as it involves drawing inferences from the soldier's experiences about the enemy, and the reason why they chose to use the enemy. Major Vaughan Kent-Payne detailed how he was part of a convoy delivering aid in Bosnia when they were stopped:

five hundred metres down the track a group of civilians ran into the road, totally blocking it. They were mostly women and many had children with them. As we slowed down, they held babies and small children out in front of them...I was disgusted at the way they held the children in front of them.¹⁷⁸

It was believed that children were placed in the road to stop the vehicles and to limit their movements as the local population demanded the aid and food packages. This was also a recurring theme in the case of Northern Ireland; soldiers shared their experiences of children being used in the front lines of a riot pack or key Irish Republican Army (IRA) targets being transported around estates surrounded by a large group of children.¹⁷⁹ Again, the reference to children being used by the enemy was made by those who encountered such practices.

Two soldiers, from different regiments and operating in different regions in Bosnia, admitted to feeling anger towards the youths. These youths were between the ages of 16 and 18, and conducted violent acts against enemy factions but believed themselves to be

¹⁷⁷ Bishop, P. *'Ground Truth'*, (London, 2009), p.172.

¹⁷⁸ Kent-Payne, V. *'Bosnia Warriors'*, (Great Britain, 1998), p.139-40.

¹⁷⁹ Interview with Soldier B, Interviewed by Michelle Jones (Aberystwyth University, January 2015), and Interview with Soldier D, Interviewed by Michelle Jones (Aberystwyth University, February 2015).

untouchable, ‘the town centre was full of swaggering youths, carrying the ubiquitous AK-47, who glowered at us as we passed.’¹⁸⁰ Whilst the other admitted that he ‘was overcome with a desire to grab the little bastards by the scruff, give them a kick up the pants and tell them to get back to mama.’¹⁸¹ This attitude is directed towards the subject (the older children who partook in hostilities) therefore belongs to the affective component (A), compared to the other extracts which are focused on the cognitive component as they discuss the way the enemy used children in their practices to alter the conduct of the British soldiers.

5.3.4.5 Disdain towards Allies

Another theme emerged within the interviews regarding indigenous or coalition forces’ use of children. These inferences were drawn in relation to the cognitive component (C), as the discussions focused on the British soldier’s attitudes towards their allies based on knowledge about their practices and conduct. This narrative was specific to the Afghan conflict where ANA or ANP forces used young males (circa ages 10-14) for sexual purposes known as ‘catamites’. British soldiers spoke about the use of ‘catamites’ by soldiers who they had to work alongside which led to friction between the two groups, ruined group cohesion, and caused British soldiers to lose respect for their Afghan allies. Soldier F provides an explanation of this particular actor and the way their presence altered attitudes,

...absolutely endemic, every military or police base we went to there were these young boys aged 11-15, definitely before puberty, who often had eye shadow, false eyelashes, make up, foundation and all that stuff who were being used for sexual purposes. They would just be hanging around, you know and in no small number, they were almost everywhere. Often they get wired up on opium or hash.....use of boys for sexual purposes became a real point of contention in a really vicious sort of pressure point for British soldiers who took exception to people who would use kids like that on their side¹⁸²

In one interview, a soldier¹⁸³ described how these young boys would be allowed freedom of the base, and could often be found rifling through British soldier’s belongings.

¹⁸⁰ Kent-Payne, V. ‘*Bosnia Warriors*’, (Great Britain, 1998), p.28.

¹⁸¹ Spence, C. ‘*All Necessary Measures*’, (London, 1998), p.44.

¹⁸² Interview with Soldier F, Interviewed by Michelle Jones (Aberystwyth University, March 2015).

¹⁸³ Interview with Soldier H, Interviewed by Michelle Jones (Aberystwyth University, March 2015).

Despite posing a potential security threat and disrespect for the soldier's property, these young boys were rarely reprimanded as they had special protection from their masters, who were often leaders within the ANA or ANP. Despite concerns about breaching intelligence protocols, harming relations with the local populations, and moral issues, little was done to remove these boys.¹⁸⁴

One soldier discussed how catamites could be armed, which created a sense of unease amongst his fellow British comrades as they felt the young boys could be a threat or work for the enemy, especially as there were no background checks completed. He explained how he

noticed a young boy wandering among the ANP's number wandering around the corner of the compound that Muhammadzai's gang called home. He carried a gun and more webbing like the others, but he was too young to be a proper policeman. He was quite effeminate – looking and had no beard. I couldn't work out who he was. He turned out to be Muhammadzai's teenage catamite.¹⁸⁵

Another soldier spoke about the use of catamites by the ANA and ANP, and the fear that these young boys could be gathering intelligence for the enemy which resulted in high levels of mistrust between the British soldiers and the groups they were supposed to work alongside.¹⁸⁶ Whilst the experiences given are specific to the Afghan conflict, the way in which allied forces use children is important. With modern operations often involving a coalition of forces from different countries with different cultural traditions, the use of children and attitudes towards them may not be universally approached. This can produce friction between the different forces, and alter their conduct and cohesion during operations.

5.3.4.6 Fear

Some soldiers expressed fear towards the child who was a hostile threat, with more reason to be fearful of the child as a violent actor than an adult due to differing levels of

¹⁸⁴ Interview with Soldier F, Interviewed by Michelle Jones, (Aberystwyth University, January 2015).

¹⁸⁵ Ferguson, J. *'A Million Bullets'*, (London, 2008), p.99.

¹⁸⁶ Interview with Soldier H, Interviewed by Michelle Jones (Aberystwyth University, March 2015).

cognitive understanding. This attitude towards the child falls under the behavioural component (B) as it can influence behaviour towards the child. Major Ashby was vocal in his acknowledgement that the child can be an actor worthy of fear, claiming that in Sierra Leone ‘it was hard to hold a rational conversation with a child combatant’¹⁸⁷ and ‘after a while, it became hard to view rebel child soldiers as anything but savage little hooligans with no sense of right or wrong or value for life (other people’s or their own).’¹⁸⁸ Ashby also noted the dilemma that child soldiers caused stating that

interacting with child soldiers was problematic, both morally and practically. On the one hand, you realised they were children and that their wrong-doings were not really their fault. On the other hand, their very ignorance of normal morality made them particularly dangerous and rebel commanders were quick to exploit this.¹⁸⁹

Children were deemed to have a lack of morality and understanding of the LOAC which meant they could be quite a volatile threat, especially if narcotics and alcohol were involved, one soldier noted that ‘if there’s one thing that scares me shitless, it’s an army without discipline. Fuelled by slivovitz and dope those kids wouldn’t have thought twice about spraying our Land Rover with bullets.’¹⁹⁰ Those that spoke about the fear of the child as a volatile actor displayed no signs of shame for admitting their fear, and acknowledged the difficult dilemma this particular actor posed, ‘you remind yourself they’ve not known anything else and that they’re only kids, but a temper tantrum when you’ve got a grenade launcher is not quite the same as a temper tantrum without a grenade launcher.’¹⁹¹

5.3.4.7 The Identity of the Child

Within the interviews it became apparent that soldiers held different attitudes towards the children present in theatres of armed conflict depending upon the identity of the child.

¹⁸⁷ Ashby, P. Maj. ‘*Unscathed*’, (London, 2002), p.120.

¹⁸⁸ Ashby, P. Maj. ‘*Unscathed*’, (London, 2002), p.120.

¹⁸⁹ Ashby, P. Maj. ‘*Unscathed*’, (London, 2002), p.119-20.

¹⁹⁰ Spence, C. ‘*All Necessary Measures*’, (London, 1998), p.44.

¹⁹¹ Ashby, P. Maj. ‘*Unscathed*’, (London, 2002), p.124.

Again, this section focuses on the behavioural component (B) as the attitudes formed affect the practices of the British soldier towards the child. One soldier made a differentiation between children he saw in Northern Ireland compared to other regions he served in, ‘the kids in Northern Ireland were often like kids in the rest of the UK.’¹⁹² The soldier explained how the children had the same cultural identity and wore similar clothes to those he saw in his home country, which made it difficult to appreciate that he was in fact deployed overseas.

Other soldiers highlighted a difference between the ages of the children present. Younger children tended to be given greater sympathy by the soldiers. The differentiation in age was also apparent when discussing the child as a hostile actor. Although international law states that no under-18s should be deployed overseas or used in a hostile environment, children of all ages continue to partake in hostilities around the world. Soldier G explained that he would feel a greater sense of loss having to engage with a younger child than an older child,

it depends on how old the child is...if you have a 5 year old girl in a little floral skirt coming over and blowing herself up then that is pretty shocking – if you have got a 14 year old youth coming at you with an AK then that is less so.¹⁹³

Whilst the individual soldier chose the word ‘youth’ in his discussion, this represents an interesting insight into the way the child is categorised by certain military personnel. The CPERs handbook, as discussed in chapter four, made a distinction between those under-15 who were classed as children and those between the ages of 15 and 17 who were classified as ‘youths’.¹⁹⁴ This distinction was also evident within soldiers’ discussions of children in theatres of armed conflict. Those who discussed the child as a hostile actor gave less compassion to older children. Distinctions were made based on the notion that older children

¹⁹² Interview with Soldier H, Interviewed by Michelle Jones (Aberystwyth University, March 2015).

¹⁹³ Interview with Soldier G, Interviewed by Michelle Jones (Aberystwyth University, March 2015).

¹⁹⁴ ‘*Captured Persons (CPERS)*’, Joint Doctrine Publication 1-10, 3rd Edition, (Development Concepts Doctrine Centre, Ministry of Defence, January 2015), taken from https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/455589/20150820-JDP_1_10_Ed_3_Ch_1_Secured.pdf, accessed on 12th March 2015.

were more adult in their appearance therefore, deemed to have more agency and responsibility for their actions. Soldier I discussed his experience in Africa stating that, ‘now to my mind because the use of children in the fighting capacity, that by children I mean 15-16-17, I don’t mean 10-11...well they (older children) are not seen as children, they are adults.’¹⁹⁵ He stated that

an 18-year-old, or 17.5-year-old, or 16.5-year-old would be an adult...they from a distance look like an adult, they might be carrying a weapon, the soldier would have known to shoot them basically. But they could tell a 10 year old or a 12 year old.¹⁹⁶

A distinction was also made by one soldier who stated that female children were also more likely to attract greater sympathy from soldiers, ‘we were all male soldiers generally speaking... I think they will be more shocked by a sort of girl being used.’¹⁹⁷

5.3.4.8 The Role of Fathers

The following theme emerged within the analysis that cuts across sections of the ABC model. The attitude towards children by soldiers who were also fathers became apparent during the analysis of the data. Within the field of military culture and military sociology, there is a limited amount of research and data collected on the role of soldiers as fathers. Many of the reasons for the lack of academic discussion about soldier-fathers is similar to the lack of research on soldiers and their experiences, they are rarely studied as ‘they are difficult to recruit and retain as research participants, and military duties during deployment can be intense.’¹⁹⁸ The research study *Fathers on the Front Line*¹⁹⁹, discussed the challenges for soldiers who were fathers on their return from overseas deployments and their re-entry into family life. Whilst this research focused heavily on the military family as a unit for analysis,

¹⁹⁵ Interview with Soldier I, Interviewed by Michelle Jones (Aberystwyth University, March 2015).

¹⁹⁶ Interview with Soldier I, Interviewed by Michelle Jones (Aberystwyth University, March 2015).

¹⁹⁷ Interview with Soldier G, Interviewed by Michelle Jones (Aberystwyth University, March 2015).

¹⁹⁸ MacDermid, S., Schwarz, R., Faber, A., Adkins, J., Mishkind, M., and Weiss, H. ‘Military Fathers on the Front Lines’, taken from ‘*Situated Fathering: A Focus on Physical and Social Spaces*’, ed. by Marsiglio, W., Roy, K., and Fox, G. (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Maryland, 2005), p.210.

¹⁹⁹ MacDermid, Et al. ‘Military Fathers on the Front Lines’, (Maryland, 2005).

the study did include some interesting conclusions that bore relevance to the overall experience of fathers as soldiers. The study found that fathers who were soldiers maintained their ‘public roles as soldiers and their private roles as husbands and fathers’²⁰⁰ but were more likely to maintain hierarchical and traditional roles at home. The preservation of traditional roles may suggest why soldiers who are fathers felt a greater feeling of protection and empathy towards the child.

The child is deemed a special category of persons under International Law, therefore the British soldier is aware they need to provide special protection to this actor. However, the experiences provided by the soldiers demonstrated a greater sense of protection and awareness of the presence of children by those who were fathers. Some of the soldiers made the connection between their position as a father and their feelings towards the child in the conflict zone. One soldier recalled his experience in Bosnia, having encountered injured children,

that night, I lay awake on my bed for a long time. I have two kids of my own, so, it was only inevitable, I guess, that I ended up seeing their faces substituted for those of the Bosnian children in the amputee ward.²⁰¹

Another soldier who served in Bosnia noted, ‘I was deeply shocked at seeing the bodies of the children. My own two were six and three and I knew that somewhere there was probably a father, just like me, grieving for his family.’²⁰² Soldier L recognised the link between being a father and encountering children on operations, ‘I guess especially if you have little children, you are thinking of your own children or little brothers or something like that.’²⁰³

²⁰⁰ MacDermid, Et al. ‘Military Fathers on the Front Lines’, (Maryland, 2005), p.215.

²⁰¹ Spence, C. ‘*All Necessary Measures*’, (London, 1998), p.86.

²⁰² Kent-Payne, V. ‘*Bosnia Warriors*’, (Great Britain, 1998), p.77.

²⁰³ Interview with Soldier L, Interviewed by Michelle Jones (Aberystwyth University, April 2015).

Another finding from the *Fathers on the Frontline* study suggested that ‘for most participants, their father and soldier roles tended to meld’²⁰⁴ yet the culture within the military suggested that the role of father and the role of soldier should be kept separate. The study found that

military culture, especially fathers’ commanders conveyed mixed messages to fathers about their family’s importance. Some commanders were supportive, interpreting family problems as potential threats to the performance of military duties, others admonished soldiers to keep family issues out of the workplace.²⁰⁵

However, it became apparent that some of the soldiers connected their role as a father to their conflict experience, thus disproving the idea that the two roles can be separated.

When discussing an instance in which the Taliban shot children as revenge for their parent’s collaboration with ISAF, one soldier stated,

I’ve got kids myself and at the time it didn’t really affect me, you just take it in, and do what you are supposed to do, help them out, get them casevaced straight away which we did its only afterwards you think ‘shit!’ It was horrendous you know!²⁰⁶

Another soldier explained the situation for children living in Iraq during the Gulf War, a child will die of cholera in a day. Seeing these kids just fading away before your eyes was quite difficult to live with. It was shocking, actually. At the time my two daughters were seven and five, so you can imagine how it made me feel.²⁰⁷

One soldier understood how his experiences with children in a hostile environment had impacted his own thought processes. He acknowledged that ‘there was another, less positive reason for not returning home straight away: we need to cool down emotionally and psychologically...every kid I saw still looked like a rebel and I didn’t want this to happen at home.’²⁰⁸

²⁰⁴ MacDermid, Et al. ‘Military Fathers on the Front Lines’, (Maryland, 2005), p.224.

²⁰⁵ MacDermid, Et al. ‘Military Fathers on the Front Lines’, (Maryland, 2005), p.226.

²⁰⁶ Interview with Terence Michael Rymer, Medic B Squadron Kings Royal Hussars, Interviewed by Richard McDonough, *IWM*, November 2012, File 33806, Reel 3.

²⁰⁷ Roberts, K. Lt Col. Quoted in Danziger, D. ‘*We are soldiers: Our Heroes. Their stories. Real Life on the front line*’, (Sphere, Great Britain, 2010), p.60.

²⁰⁸ Ashby, P. Maj. ‘*Unscathed*’, (London, 2002), p.239.

Soldier H, who served as a Commanding Officer, suggested that the fathers in his group tended to have more time for the children they met, suggesting ‘those that are fathers are more likely to see the importance of family.’²⁰⁹ He also suggested that, from his experience, those who were non-fathers were more likely to be suspicious of children:

yeah they were probably more aware – the more junior, maybe a big generalisation, but the more junior they are then they are likely to be less educated and probably harder, tougher upbringing, they are probably more the cynic, sceptic than I would be....they would probably be more suspicious than I was, thinking back to people I knew who were fathers...fathers were more like me.²¹⁰

Soldier J produced a similar narrative when relaying his experiences, he noted that ‘older soldiers had children themselves so there wasn’t exactly enthusiasm to potentially fire upon child soldiers.’²¹¹ Soldier E discussed the decision-making process concerning engaging with a child, whilst also making reference to his own position as a father,

conscience wise you got kids of your own that you think of, you have to condition yourselves to such a degree, you have to be professional about it, you have to make the judgement, you hope that your judgement is right.²¹²

The role of the father as a soldier emerged organically throughout the analysis, it became evident across all the data collected that soldiers were making the link between their experience of fatherhood and the presence of children in the conflict situation. From these findings, it suggested that training and discipline do not over-ride the soldier’s acknowledgement that he is also a father, therefore the two roles are constantly present despite serving in a conflict zone.

5.3.4.9 Annoyance

In some of the interviews and published accounts, British soldiers admitted to feeling annoyed by the presence of children in the field. The cognitive component (C) was apparent,

²⁰⁹ Interview with Soldier H, Interviewed by Michelle Jones, (Aberystwyth University, January 2015).

²¹⁰ Interview with Soldier H, Interviewed by Michelle Jones, (Aberystwyth University, January 2015).

²¹¹ Interview with Soldier J, Interviewed by Michelle Jones (Aberystwyth University, March 2015).

²¹² Interview with Soldier E, Interviewed by Michelle Jones (Aberystwyth University, February 2015).

as the soldier's discussed their beliefs towards the child and how their experience created knowledge associated with the child. There was an underlying belief that the child was acting in a certain way in order to carry out an act. Children were deemed to hinder their ability to carry out their jobs and the soldiers spoke about feeling restricted in their movements and actions due to children being present. Soldier H explained how he didn't understand the children's interest in them, 'they want to touch your sunglasses, touch your rifle...it's all a bit weird.'²¹³ Another soldier spoke about being fearful of children being too close,

it got a bit annoying at times. It was nice to see them and they are happy to see you but then you got to start worrying if they are going to take a grenade out of your pouch and run off with it, you got to start worrying about your kit really.²¹⁴

One soldier suggested that children could not be trusted,

we'd still get the kids going 'Hello Mr' and 'Well done down with Saddam' and all that ...but no I wouldn't trust them as soon as you would pass they would have catapults out and be firing stones at you.²¹⁵

Soldier E also focused on the issue of mistrust, 'children can be cunning, naturally cunning they can look you in the eye and swear that black is white with an innocent little smile on their face, certainly you would believe them.'²¹⁶

5.3.4.10 The Child as a Threat

Some of the interviews acknowledged how the soldiers would react differently to children if they had previously experienced the child in a threatening circumstance. Again, this attitude is relevant to all the components of the ABC model. Knowing that the child is a threat alters the emotional attitude towards the child (A), this also impacts the way the soldier is likely to interact with or act towards the child (B), and can also inform knowledge and beliefs about the child (C). Whilst a particular child may not be an active participant,

²¹³ Interview with Soldier H, Interviewed by Michelle Jones, (Aberystwyth University, January 2015).

²¹⁴ Interview with Ross Green, British Private 1st Battalion Royal Anglian Regiment, conducted by Richard McDonough, *IWM*, 2009-02-17, File 32503, Reel 2.

²¹⁵ Interview with Matthew Cook, NCO London Regt, Interviewed by Lyn Smith, *IWM*, 2007, File 30143, Reel 11.

²¹⁶ Interview with Soldier E, Interviewed by Michelle Jones (Aberystwyth University, February 2015).

knowledge that some children in the region are can create heightened levels of suspicion towards all children. Rather than encouraging interaction and engaging with the child, the soldiers would ignore the child and create a distance between them, which would hopefully limit the child if they were in fact a threat. Soldier C explained the implications of experiencing a child as a threat on any future interactions with children, ‘they (soldiers) treat kids as kids, but the minute the kids start killing or you have a couple of your soldiers killed by children then your perception is going to change completely.’²¹⁷ Soldier B stated something similar in his interview,

their attitudes will harden gradually or quite quickly actually towards them, particularly for example if some of their comrades had been killed by a child soldier or suicide bomber and that kind of thing. So you know in these very bitter situations the soldiers themselves quite quickly become quite bitter and very resentful towards these children and their attitudes towards them would change and within that change, that is where their training and discipline becomes even more important.²¹⁸

Soldier E highlighted how members of his team were shocked when they realised children were capable of committing violent acts,

in spite of being paratroopers they actually quite like kids, they can have a laugh and a joke with them, they discovered very soon they couldn’t...particularly it was, I think that was part of the shock actually, when they realised that kids could get up to no good in a very dangerous way.²¹⁹

The change in perception regarding the role of the child was also noted by Soldier C who stated that ‘child soldiers fighting against you aren’t really children, they are soldiers fighting against you.’²²⁰ The attitudes towards the child varied depending on the experience the individual soldier had with other children in the region. Having encountered a child as a hostile threat once, some of the soldiers noted that they would treat all children as potential threats rather than risk their own security. This can have an implication for military

²¹⁷ Interview with Soldier C, Interviewed by Michelle Jones (Aberystwyth University, January 2015).

²¹⁸ Interview with Soldier B, Interviewed by Michelle Jones, (Aberystwyth University, January 2015).

²¹⁹ Interview with Soldier E, Interviewed by Michelle Jones (Aberystwyth University, February 2015).

²²⁰ Interview with Soldier C, Interviewed by Michelle Jones, (Aberystwyth University, January 2015).

operations too, as soldiers choose not to interact with the local populations which can impact the hearts and minds campaign.

5.3.4.11 The Non-combatant Child

Some of the soldiers expressed a difference in attitude towards the child who was a non-combatant compared to the child who had the potential to be a threat. Based on the cognitive component, it became apparent that the soldier's belief and knowledge about the actor informed their practices in the field. Children who were non-combatants were treated differently to those who held the potential to harm the soldiers. Soldier C used the example of children as collateral damage to explain this dichotomy,

you will have some people who won't care at all and others that will...it is the children that get caught up in the battle that are more of a problem, not the children fighting you, the children who are collateral damage and those getting hurt are more likely to stress the soldier.²²¹

Soldier F provided an experience with a similar narrative, he recalled an incident in which a Royal Marine he was working with fired a mortar which accidentally wounded a young girl. He noted that the Marine would have had a different reaction if the wounded brought to them were enemy fighters, rather than a civilian child, 'it's different if Taliban are coming in...would have been another thing compared to this little girl coming in, who had neither been a combatant or had any risk of being a combatant, but just getting in the way.'²²² This incident resulted in the young girl losing her leg, and the Royal Marine, who fired the mortar, 'cracked up and went home.'²²³

²²¹ Interview with Soldier C, Interviewed by Michelle Jones, (Aberystwyth University, January 2015).

²²² Interview with Soldier F, Interviewed by Michelle Jones (Aberystwyth University, March 2015).

²²³ Interview with Soldier F, Interviewed by Michelle Jones (Aberystwyth University, March 2015).

5.3.4.12 Positive Feelings

Attitudes towards the children were not always negative, some of the soldiers also highlighted very positive feelings towards the child. This section focuses on the affective component (A) of the model as it relies on inferences being drawn from the data about the soldier's emotional attitudes towards the child. Soldier H recalled how children greeting them positively was a happy moment in the midst of a difficult environment,

at a school, you see 50 kids running down towards you, they are all screaming, all really excited...it is such a positive experience in amongst, I wouldn't say negative stuff, but hard stuff. I suppose it's a bit of a reminder of home.²²⁴

Children waving and smiling back at soldiers was also noted in a positive way during some of the interviews. Soldier C noted that the benefit of an enthusiastic welcome, 'when you do exercises I always say that a sign of a happy country is when you wave at children and they wave back at you.'²²⁵ Soldier L also focused on the welcome received by the local population, especially children, stating that it was a good sign they greeted them positively as it reinforced the image associated with the British Armed Forces. He noted that when soldiers entered a region, the local civilian population would often hide from the soldiers. However, from his own experiences, he recalled how the British soldiers were always greeted by the locals, even if it wasn't a positive greeting, they didn't hide or flee. He stated that,

well I think the nice thing is that children aren't running away from soldiers in uniform which they would do with some of their own soldiers so I think it is not necessarily that we have a special relationship with children, but that we are well-trained – well-disciplined in progressing our campaign, our COIN campaigns, so we try to treat people like citizens and engage how we deal with situations²²⁶

²²⁴ Interview with Soldier H, Interviewed by Michelle Jones (Aberystwyth University, March 2015).

²²⁵ Interview with Soldier C, Interviewed by Michelle Jones (Aberystwyth University, January 2015).

²²⁶ Interview with Soldier L, Interviewed by Michelle Jones (Aberystwyth University, April 2015).

Towards the end of his interview, Soldier H noted that despite encountering children in various roles in the Afghan conflict his 'own memory of children was positive...it's little Afghan kids, boys and girls, dirty but just wanting stuff.'²²⁷

5.3.4.13 Mixed Feelings

Even if the child could be a potential threat, a soldier could still deem the child to be an 'innocent' and feel compassion towards him or her. Major Chris Hunter explained the mixed feelings towards children in Iraq,

a dozen or so young children come running towards our parked vehicles, waving and smiling at us... We're both aware of the rules: no interaction with children. We're supposed to ignore them as insurgents have used kids to draw coalition troops into ambushes but of course they're just as much the victims as we are. They're innocent kids for Christ's sake. You'd have to be completely heartless to be able to stare straight ahead, stony-faced, and not feel any compassion towards them.²²⁸

Regardless of the possibility of the children presenting a threat, the feeling that these children were innocent was embedded in both his and his comrades' thought processes.

Soldier H also acknowledged the range of feelings within his own patrol group,

it would be my non-commissioned team which would have been more likely to advise me that we need to go, we need to get out of here, whereas I am more likely to engage (in conversation)...so they were more suspicious than I was.²²⁹

Despite acknowledging that children can play a role in the hostilities, Soldier B stated that, 'they (the children) are all victims of armed conflict by definition because they are children and um you know instead of being educated in the right they are being educated in the wrong.'²³⁰ Instead of blaming the child for their actions, Soldier B held those responsible for the child accountable.

²²⁷ Interview with Soldier H, Interviewed by Michelle Jones (Aberystwyth University, March 2015).

²²⁸ Hunter, C. *'Eight Lives Down'*, (London, 2008), p.360-1.

²²⁹ Interview with Soldier H, Interviewed by Michelle Jones (Aberystwyth University, March 2015).

²³⁰ Interview with Soldier B, Interviewed by Michelle Jones (Aberystwyth University, January 2015).

Soldier's attitudes towards the presence of children in theatres of armed conflict can vary depending on the conflict situation and the role of the child. This section has sought to highlight that a range of attitudes exist, which provides an insight into the complexities involved with encountering children in conflict zones. Having acknowledged the diverse range of attitudes the soldier holds towards the child, the following section will examine how the presence of children can alter the soldier's conduct and individual practices in theatres of armed conflicts.

5.3.5 The Soldiers' Practices

This section acknowledges how the presence of children can alter the individual soldier's practices in the field. It will focus upon the way in which the soldier changed his conduct or practices when he knew, or thought, a child might be present within the operational landscape. Through the written and oral experiences provided by former and serving personnel certain themes emerged which will be discussed further in this section.

5.3.5.1 Relaxed Attitudes

The presence of children in certain environments such as villages or market places tended to suggest to British soldiers that the area was quite safe. The movement of women, children and the elderly from an area traditionally suggested that an attack by enemy forces was imminent and troops could be in danger. Bishop noted that in Afghanistan, 'by 6 a.m. women and children could be seen trekking out of the area, a sure sign that trouble was looming.'²³¹ Another soldier who served in Afghanistan stated that, 'if I was in an environment like that with children, old people, even women to an extent...I'd feel safer, well not safer but feel there is a barrier because of the local population to them doing

²³¹ Bishop, P. '*Ground Truth*', (London, 2009), p.257.

anything.’²³² Soldier A also suggested that ‘soldiers actually know they are safer when the kids are around. The risk of being shot has come down.’²³³ If feeling safe when on patrol, soldiers would change from combat helmets to soft caps (usually berets) in order to appear more approachable to the civilian population and to strengthen community relations. This practice was adopted in Northern Ireland where soldiers were ordered to replace ‘helmets with berets...to present a more peaceable image.’²³⁴ Although some of the soldiers noted that they felt safer in areas where children were present, therefore relaxed their attitudes and approach, other soldiers had had experience of children acting in a hostile manner therefore did not alter their practices.

5.3.5.2 Community Relations

Two soldiers mentioned particular practices employed by their units to bolster community relations when they discovered large groups of children were present in an area in which they were operating in. One soldier explained how they would hold parties for local children in different towns in Bosnia, cooking food and creating games to provide relief for the local children. They wanted to help the fractured communities, normalise relations, and increase their own relationship with the local populations. He wrote ‘we brought a small ray of sunshine into hundreds of little lives and, hopefully, the children and their mothers went away with a good image of those nice men in their white tanks.’²³⁵ Patrick Bishop spoke about an initiative to deliver footballs to local schools. He noted that

within a few days of the Paras’ arrival life began to return to the school...they also distributed footballs and found, as British soldiers did everywhere they went, that the game was a ‘universal’ language. We went in and through an interpreter talked about football and had all the kids cheering.²³⁶

²³² Interview with Soldier H, Interviewed by Michelle Jones, (Aberystwyth University, January 2015).

²³³ Interview with Soldier A, Interviewed by Michelle Jones (Aberystwyth University, January 2015).

²³⁴ Ranelagh, J. ‘*A Short History of Ireland*’, (Third Edition, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2012), p.338.

²³⁵ Kent-Payne, V. ‘*Bosnia Warriors*’, (Great Britain, 1998), p.297.

²³⁶ Bishop, P. ‘*Ground Truth*’, (London, 2009), p.45.

With large groups of children present, certain soldiers decided to take a more proactive approach to interacting with the local communities. This is particularly important in regions where the hearts and minds of a local population can impact military operations. It can also be good for the well-being of soldiers; it allows them to remove themselves from the war-fighting mind-set and can provide comfort to those who may have families at home.

5.3.5.3 Encountering the Child

Soldiers also provided examples from their own experiences regarding how they dealt with an incident differently because a child was involved. They spoke about the challenges of encountering a child in a hostile situation, and provided personal anecdotes and interpretations based on military guidelines and the situation as it unfolded. These narratives provided an insight into the situations in which the individual soldier felt they were most vulnerable to. Despite having rules of engagement and military practices to deal with such situations, it is evident from the discussions that the soldier still acknowledged the presence of the child during the incident. Soldier B provided the following example,

a real challenge for soldiers is a woman and a couple of children are coming towards them with a pram or something with some shopping or whatever and they think are these innocent people coming back from their shopping or are they intent on causing harm....in the age of the suicide bomber and the technology that goes with it they don't always know so you have to be extremely careful.²³⁷

The soldier was aware that a seemingly innocent situation can be misjudged and actually be hostile, therefore awareness and perceptions concerning the operational environment had to be altered. Civilians who had previously been seen as innocents and outside of the combatant paradigm, could now be treated with suspicion by military personnel.

Altering your traditional military practices to deal with new threats is important when operating in such volatile environments, especially where the enemy is keen and able to use

²³⁷ Interview with Soldier B, Interviewed by Michelle Jones, (Aberystwyth University, January 2015).

any errors as black propaganda. Being unable to distinguish between civilians and combatants is difficult and can add further pressure for the soldier trying to conduct his duties within the RoE and legal frameworks. One soldier explained the pressure of ‘getting it right’ in a complex conflict environment,

we had very strict rules of engagement in fact that’s quite a lot of our training, in fact one of the weirdest ones to explain to civilians is if someone’s coming after you with a hand grenade, and they are about to throw a hand grenade, you can shoot them while it’s in their hand but as soon as its left their hand, they’re not the threat. It’s the hand grenade that is a threat, so if you shot them after they have thrown the hand grenade you can be done for manslaughter which all seems mad....it’s a lot to take on board in hindsight and you have that fear of getting it right if you shot someone wrong and they were throwing a tomato or a rock and it wasn’t a hand grenade, then that can be quite scary.²³⁸

The pressure that type of environment produces can be seen in the following extract, in which a British soldier shares his experience of being part of a convoy in Basra, Iraq, when an incident involving a child occurs. The consequences resulted in his comrade being reprimanded for his actions,

On a convoy in Basra...rifles out the window on the way up and I saw a boy, I don’t know how old, maybe 12, just playing really...but he ran towards us from about 50 meters away and threw something, and it was a firecracker actually, and the firecracker went off in the direction, well it was a couple of firecrackers actually, the next thing I heard in my PRR which is a radio you have, a personal radio device attached to you was ‘contact right’ which means we were being attacked from the right so everybody in that convoy...swung to the right...I looked for the target we was engaging and I realised exactly what the problem was, the soldier who had called contact right had heard these cracks that sounded very much like gunfire coming from the right and had assumed an attack. So I said, ‘stand down, stand down it’s a child’ – now in the heat of the moment probably nothing would have happened but it would have taken a second less judgement to kill that child...we spoke about it afterwards and the soldier who called ‘contact right’ was reprimanded.²³⁹

The same soldier also shared his experience of travelling at night with a convoy in Afghanistan. As the convoy approached a checkpoint they were confronted with a young boy waving a Kalashnikov, due to the boy’s erratic behaviour it was believed that he was high on opium. The soldier stated that they could either drive at him and potentially kill him, or risk

²³⁸ Interview with Matthew Cook, NCO Royal Gloucester, Berkshire and Wiltshire Light Infantry, Interview conducted by Lyn Smith, *IWM*, 2007, File 30143, Reel 9.

²³⁹ Interview with Soldier F, Interviewed by Michelle Jones, (Aberystwyth University, January 2015).

being harmed, but he explained how his private military contractor (PMC) driver had experienced the situation before, and chose to turn off the lights and drive slowly around him rather than killing the boy.²⁴⁰ The decision by the driver to alter his practice eased the situation and thus avoided any potential hostile engagement. Each of these anecdotes demonstrate the thought processes a soldier must contend with when operating in a conflict environment in which children are present. It might require altering your practices, or allowing a few seconds extra time to judge the situation, but it was evident throughout discussions with the soldiers that they acknowledged the child's presence and how it required a different set of judgements. The soldier's reaction is individual to the situation but offers an understanding of the pressures, judgements, and emotions felt in such circumstances.

5.3.5.4 Relations with Local Children

Relationships with local children were also discussed, with one soldier expressing how he needed to alter his practices and attitude towards a child due to complications arising from their relationship,

as the tour was developing, I recognised I was becoming too close to these children. I knew the way the boy was looking at me that I was becoming a surrogate father to him, and I had to break away because if I am biased towards any one family, then I am not being impartial. And I was there as a soldier, not a childminder.²⁴¹

He understood the role he played as a soldier, and how a close relationship with the children could be detrimental to his duty and the job he needed to do. As it became apparent that enemy forces could take advantage of situations where British troops stopped to communicate with children, it was advised by senior officials that soldiers should not attract attention or encourage their presence with small gifts or sweets. However, Colonel Tim Collins who served in Iraq admitted to allowing this practice to continue,

²⁴⁰ Interview with Soldier F, Interviewed by Michelle Jones, (Aberystwyth University, January 2015).

²⁴¹ Lawrence, I. Maj. Quoted in Danziger, D. *We are soldiers: Our Heroes. Their stories. Real Life on the front line*, (Sphere, Great Britain, 2010), p.235.

I hoped that my soldiers absorbed and understood why we had to refrain from constantly giving out treats and they seemed to be compliant, or so I thought – but the amount of chocolate wrappers and boiled-sweet wrappers told a different story. Irish soldiers are sentimental beasts at heart. So long as it was done with due respect and discreetly, I would turn a blind eye.²⁴²

He seemed aware that interaction with children provided a morale boost for many who missed their own families at home. Personal interaction with the local children seemed to be a judgement call, in which the individual soldier was responsible for, based on the nature of the conflict environment and situational awareness. The level of interaction, and the way they interacted with the child was specific and unique to the soldier. Some soldiers allowed children to come close, whilst others changed their conduct or practices to avoid children approaching them. One soldier serving in Afghanistan recalled ensuring a member of the ANA was present when they went out on patrol, ‘they just tell the kids to stay away because they were obviously scared of the ANA.’²⁴³ Adopting this practice was designed to stop children approaching them and asking for items. Another soldier continued to stop and interact with children when conducting patrols, but admitted that he was more alert and watchful for a potential hostile situation to arise in case the children were part of a trap by the enemy. He noted that,

Afghan, yeah kids would definitely come up to your patrol and if you stopped for any length of time they would get more confident and eventually come close and we were always judging our security about how long we could stay in one place.²⁴⁴

Another soldier described how he would be more friendly towards children, in the hope that it would ease relations with the local population,

if the children are looked after, the parents will feel some empathy towards the Brits and, of course, anyway in the longer term the children become adults so they will think well we were actually treated quite well by them.²⁴⁵

²⁴² Collins, T. *Rules of Engagement*, (UK, 2006), p. 258.

²⁴³ Interview with Chris Wood, Sapper with 26 Regiment Royal Engineers, Interviewed by Richard McDonough, *IWM*, 2012, File 33828, Reel 1.

²⁴⁴ Interview with Soldier H, Interviewed by Michelle Jones (Aberystwyth University, March 2015).

²⁴⁵ Interview with Soldier I, Interviewed by Michelle Jones (Aberystwyth University, March 2015).

Soldier H was also aware of his attitude and practices towards the child when setting up exclusion zones for the distribution of food and aid. When delivering such items, the soldiers would usually fence off a certain area and allow small groups access to alleviate issues concerning crowd control. However, Soldier H acknowledged that they didn't adopt the same principle when handing out footballs to the local children because, 'we can't really do that with kids, because then actually you become that cold hard thing you don't want to be.'²⁴⁶

Whilst most of the soldiers relayed positive experiences when interacting with children in the conflict environment, one soldier acknowledged how he changed his practices and attitude depending on the group of children present. Soldier H stated that, 'if I saw 15-16-17 year old boys, I wouldn't be quite so excited or friendly.'²⁴⁷ He admitted feeling greater levels of suspicion towards that age group, therefore did not encourage older children to come closer or to engage with him, or his patrol.

5.3.5.5 Checkpoints and Patrols

Soldier D discussed his experiences in Sierra Leone where he had to pass through checkpoints regularly. These checkpoints were manned by child soldiers who were often high or drunk due to their intake of narcotics and alcopops. This made the situation quite frightening for the soldier, as the child was quite volatile yet in a position of power and in control of a lethal weapon. The soldier discussed how he changed his practices when approaching the checkpoint in order to minimise any potential hostile incidents. On approaching the checkpoint, the soldier would ensure that

glasses were off, speak calmly, speak quietly, be calm, weapon out of the way, I'm British, head dress not blue, make sure they recognise you, recognise the car, put flags on the car...

²⁴⁶ Interview with Soldier H, Interviewed by Michelle Jones (Aberystwyth University, March 2015).

²⁴⁷ Interview with Soldier H, Interviewed by Michelle Jones (Aberystwyth University, March 2015).

had that been an adult I would have driven up and said 'hi mate let us through', but because it is not an adult...I became more cautious not less.²⁴⁸

Soldier H acknowledged that children would be 'less likely to be searched'²⁴⁹, therefore would be used by enemy forces to courier items through checkpoints. Once his group realised that children were being used in such a way, they adapted their practices to include searching boys, 'so in occasions you might search boys, but not girls.'²⁵⁰ However, as shown, girls could not be searched by male soldiers, therefore the enemy still had the opportunity to use girls to their advantage.

Soldier H also acknowledged how he would change his practices, and ask his personnel to do the same, when conducting patrols through areas with large groups of civilians. He stated that when they would

drive through a village, adults bustling about in a market town and there was lots of weapons on your vehicle and I think if there are a lot of kids around, you deliberately don't hold or point any weapons...real conscious effort to stick the weapons in the air which does make your more vulnerable of course.²⁵¹

This section has demonstrated how individual soldiers took action to alter their conduct and practices when children were present in the conflict area. They all acknowledged that the actor present was a child, and altered their conduct to react to the situation. Practices towards children altered depending on the age or sex of the child. Other soldiers demonstrated how the use of children in hostile situations resulted in them adapting their practices to counter the potential threat. This included searching children at checkpoints or changing their practices when conducting patrols. Some soldiers demonstrated how the presence of children made them feel more relaxed, therefore they altered their practices to

²⁴⁸ Interview with Soldier D, Interviewed by Michelle Jones (Aberystwyth University, February 2015).

²⁴⁹ Interview with Soldier H, Interviewed by Michelle Jones (Aberystwyth University, March 2015).

²⁵⁰ Interview with Soldier H, Interviewed by Michelle Jones (Aberystwyth University, March 2015).

²⁵¹ Interview with Soldier H, Interviewed by Michelle Jones (Aberystwyth University, March 2015).

appear less threatening towards the child including hosting events to improve relations with the local community.

5.4 Conclusion

This chapter sought to draw upon the experiences of British soldiers to determine whether they had operated in theatres of armed conflict where children may also be present, either as innocent bystanders or as hostile actors. The cases chosen provided evidence that British military personnel have operated in conflict zones where children have been part of the operational landscape, and also demonstrated that British soldiers have interacted with children playing a hostile role in such regions. Having acknowledged in the literature search that British military personnel have operated in the same environments as children, the aim of this chapter was to examine how the presence of the child affected British military operations, and the attitudes and practices of individual British soldiers.

Engaging with the experiences of former and serving British soldiers provided a wealth of material on the subject. The experiences of the soldiers provided an overview of the various ways children were present in theatres of armed conflict. Whilst NGOs provide information concerning the way in which children can partake in hostilities, the experiences of the soldier provided a context-specific insight into the role of children in conflict zones. By drawing upon these experiences it provided a deeper understanding as to the ways children could be used against military forces, either purposely or inadvertently. Children as active participants were evident in all of the conflict scenarios mentioned; however, the way in which the child partook in the conflict was different.

Within the Bosnian context, children were actively involved in the disruption of convoys used to deliver humanitarian packages to the civilian population. The use of catapults and slings was commonplace, and older children were seen to be carrying weapons. Stone throwing and petrol bombs were also evident within the Northern Ireland context.

However, in Sierra Leone, children were more visible in the role of soldiers. Here children would carry AK-47s or machetes, and given roles such as checkpoints guards. Added to the complex nature of the Sierra Leonean conflict environment, children were often found to be drugged or under the influence of alcohol, therefore the situation presented a different set of challenges to the British soldier. During the discussions with British soldiers who served in Sierra Leone, there was a greater awareness of the volatile nature of the child, with the majority of soldiers expressing levels of fear at the unpredictable environment they were operating in. Although children in Iraq and Afghanistan could also be seen carrying weapons, the majority of personnel who served in the region discussed the role of children as suicide bombers, and the shock that this tactic was being used.

Various themes emerged from the data collected which acknowledged how the presence of children in theatres of armed conflict affected individual soldier's attitudes. Using the ABC model, it became apparent that attitudes towards the child could be structured in different ways. Some of the themes that emerged showed how the soldiers expressed emotional feelings towards the child (affective component). This included feeling sympathy towards the child, or feelings of frustration that little could be done to help them. Other themes emerged which demonstrated how the presence of children resulted in soldiers altering their behaviour and attitude towards the child (behavioural component). This was evident in the discussions with soldiers who stated they were fearful of the child combatant, or how the soldier altered his attitude towards the child depending on the child's identity. Soldiers mentioned how they would offer greater sympathy and interaction to younger children, but discourage older children approaching them. Throughout the discussions it was apparent that the British soldier recognised that a child could be morally or physically innocent, or neither. Judgements were made regarding how to interact with the child depending upon whether the soldier deemed them to be a threat or non-threat.

However, throughout all the discussions it was evident that the soldier recognised that the actor was in fact a child, and reference was made to their status as a child despite the act or role they were conducting. The cognitive component was also evident in some of the themes that emerged. It showed how the soldier holds a belief or particular knowledge about the actor. This was evidenced in discussions about the enemy's use of children, as the soldiers believed the presence of children was deliberate by the enemy force to counter any engagements with the British soldiers. However, some of the attitudes held by soldiers transcends all three components showing how the presence of children not only provides an emotional response, but also affects their knowledge of, and behaviour in the conflict environment.

Changes in behaviour and altering practices in the conflict environment were also evident. The narratives showed that some of the soldiers acknowledged the presence of the child in their immediate environment, therefore altered their individual practices or changed tactics to avoid endangering the child. This has implications for military operations, as the enemy acknowledges how the presence of the child can alter the use of lethal force. This is evidenced in the use of children as human shields. The decision not to engage can alter the conduct of a military operation, as well as placing the lives of British personnel in danger.

Whilst all of the former soldiers interviewed acknowledged that they had the right within International Law to engage with the child who was acting as a combatant, it became apparent that this was not a decision to be taken lightly. Some noted that extra time would be needed to make that judgement, others acknowledged that hesitation could be likely due to conflicting thoughts about the role of the child. However, some soldiers acknowledged that their training and expertise would over-ride such a dilemma. Therefore, the ethical moral dilemma as outlined in the thesis is very dependent upon the individual nature of the soldier and the situation they are presented with. Although it does highlight that, despite military

training, the presence of the child can cause both psychological and tactical implications for the soldier.

The link between the role of the father and the soldier was also evident within the data collected. On seeing the child in the conflict environment, the soldier's anecdotes suggested that their conscience reverted back to feelings about their own children. Therefore, whilst military training is expected to over-ride the potential for ethical or moral dilemmas in theatres of armed conflict, the experience of the soldier suggests that conflict is a very subjective experience with a range of judgements and individual decisions needing to be made. Some soldiers acknowledged the child as a combatant, whereas others recognised the combatant as a child. Their reactions to such an actor are based on their own individual understandings of the conflict, the culture, and the environment they operate in; therefore it is impossible to suggest that military training is sufficiently adequate to prepare personnel for such a dilemma.

Regardless of the rank, regiment, or theatre in which the British soldiers were part of, the written and oral testimonies highlighted a number of shared experiences. This proved that British soldiers have encountered children, either as innocent bystanders or hostile perpetrators, in conflict zones and that the experiences are not always context or conflict specific. Although the analysis of the experiences discovered a number of shared experiences and themes emerging from the data, each anecdote also highlights the very personal and unique emotions, and decisions, the soldier has to contend with when presented with the child actor. Each experience is individual to the soldier in question, but provides a wealth of knowledge and understanding of this particular phenomenon. Whilst themes can be drawn from these experiences, it is important to be aware that the experiences are personal to the soldier and the circumstances they found themselves in, depending upon the type of conflict and events. The testimonies produced highlight that British soldiers do encounter children

when deployed on operations, and that children are encountered in a range of circumstances which can generate different challenges for the military operation or the individual soldier.

Soldiers also acknowledged the child as a specific sub-category when sharing their experiences; they did not speak only about civilians or the enemy forces but spoke about the child within these two groups. This suggests that despite military training and guidelines framing people as ‘combatants’ or ‘non-combatants’; the child remains an individual and distinct category within these groups. This chapter has highlighted that the British military do have experience of children in theatres of armed conflict, and that soldiers have a range of experiences relating to the child actor in hostile situations. Discussions with the soldiers highlighted how the presence of children can alter military operations, as well as adapting their practices when children are present in the environment.

There needs to be greater awareness and analysis concerning the experiences, understandings, and actions of soldiers, not just those in the higher chain of command. The British Army Doctrine regarding modern soldiering suggested that, the average soldier has more responsibility and pressure within his role, yet the voice of the soldier is often overlooked. There also needs to be further awareness that soldiers are human beings too, with ordinary feelings and responses; they are not sub-human warriors devoid of emotion and vulnerability as popular culture seems to suggest. This does not suggest that they are victims, nor are they psychologically vulnerable in some way, but that ‘the majority of British veterans may be without publicly recognised psychological or emotional impairments, but it does not mean they are without experiences.’²⁵²

²⁵² McGary, R. and Walklate, S. ‘The Soldier as Victim: Peering through the Looking Glass’, *British Journal of Criminology*, Volume: 51, 2011, p.912.

Chapter Six

Conclusion

6.1 Conclusion

The aim of this project was to undertake an exploratory piece of qualitative research which would contribute to the existing literature on the subject of professional military forces encountering children in hostile environments. This piece of research would enhance discussions on the topic by focusing on the experiences and perspectives of the individual British soldier to determine how the presence of children could affect their individual attitudes and practices, as well as any implications for military operations. By providing the soldier with a voice in which he could discuss his own experiences and perspectives, this would help to create knowledge on the topic from an actor that has first-hand experience of this particular issue. Having conducted a literature search it became evident that there were three distinct knowledge gaps in the field; a lack of discussion about the topic from a British perspective, an absence of experiences from the soldiers themselves, and a heavy focus on the psychological implications for military personnel. Therefore, this project aimed to confront these anomalies by producing a piece of research that examined the presence of children in theatres of armed conflict by drawing upon the experiences of military personnel who had served in the British Army. Whilst the psychological implications associated with encountering a hostile child actor are important, this thesis chose to focus on the implications for British military operations, as well as providing an insight into *how* the child's presence can affect the British soldier's attitudes and practices.

This chapter will draw together the main discussions formed within the body of this thesis to acknowledge *how* the presence of children in theatres of armed conflict affect British military operations, and the attitudes and practices of individual British soldiers. The chapter

also contains a section entitled *Recommendations for Practitioners*. This section draws upon analysis from the data collected from former and serving British soldiers and the existing literature, to provide an example of various initiatives that could be implemented by the British Army to prepare and inform their personnel on the subject of children and armed conflict. This chapter will also examine the limitations of this research project, as well as discussing potential avenues for further research. Whilst this research project has explored the phenomena of the topic, and sought to interrogate the subject in relation to a specific set of questions, the possibilities for further lines of inquiry and research have also emerged.

This thesis relies on the experiences of British military personnel who saw active service between 1992 and 2012 to provide an insight into a particular phenomenon; the presence of the child in theatres of armed conflict. Although interested in exploring whether British soldiers had encountered the child as a hostile threat, it did not limit the study to children who actively *participated* in armed conflict therefore, also included the presence of children who were *exposed* to the conflict environment. The decision was made to explore the topic using two different approaches; it would seek to understand the issue from a top-down perspective, drawing upon the training and guidelines produced by the British Army as an organisation to determine how they approach the issue, and the information they provide to their personnel. A bottom-up approach was also used which drew upon discussions with former and serving British Army personnel to provide an insight into their experiences with children in theatres of armed conflict. This provided a wealth of empirically rich data from actors who had encountered the issue first-hand. The experiences from serving and former British soldiers also provided an overview of the various ways children can be used and the roles the child can play in theatres of armed conflict. By adopting these two approaches to examine the topic, it became evident that there were inconsistencies between the organisational view and individual, soldier's perspective. The British soldier had a wealth of

experience concerning interacting with children in theatres of armed conflict, yet the literature produced by the MoD or British Army rarely made reference to the child actor present in such an environment.

The sub-questions within this thesis set out to explore *whether British soldiers encounter children during their operational duties or tours of deployment* and, if so, *how were children encountered?* The children in armed conflict literature base provides a wealth of evidence to suggest that children can be present in conflict zones, either exposed *to* or participating *in* the hostilities¹. Yet the information provided by the MoD and the British Army makes little reference to children being a potential actor on the battlefield, or even a challenge to operations. Although academic literature exists which highlights the potential moral dilemmas facing military personnel when they encounter children in hostile environments, there is little evidence that research has been conducted with, or the experiences have been sought from the soldiers themselves. Therefore, the primary objective of this thesis was to explore whether British soldiers *had* experience of operating in environments where children were also present, and if so, *how* their experiences affected military operations, and the attitudes and practices of the individual British soldier.

Using the cases Bosnia (1992-95), Sierra Leone (2000-02), and Afghanistan (2001-12), it became evident that, not only had British soldiers *experienced* the presence of children in conflict areas, but that they had *encountered* children acting in a hostile manner. The experiences provided by the British soldiers produced an insight into the complex issues associated with encountering children in conflict zones, but also created knowledge as to the various ways children could partake in hostilities. The examples provided by former and serving British personnel showed how children could partake in armed conflict scenarios in

¹ Pederson, J. and Sommerfelt, T. 'Studying Children in Armed Conflict', *Social Indicators Research*, 2007, p.251-69.

various ways; including as fighters, suicide bombers, ‘dickers’, or even inadvertently as human shields. Children were experienced as hostile actors in a range of conflict zones. However, it is important to note that children were also present as bystanders to the conflict and, as the experiences have shown, can present their own set of challenges to military personnel who serve in the same environment. Therefore, this research project has also provided an ethnographic insight into the way children can be, and have been, used to participate in a hostile environment.

Having acknowledged that children could be present in the same environment as British military personnel, the thesis then examined *how does the MoD and British Army officially address the problem?* As previously mentioned, by examining the topic from both an individual and organisational perspective it became apparent that there were inconsistencies between the two narratives. The British Army as an organisation produced very little public material or guidance concerning the potential interaction with children in theatres of armed conflict. The child as an actor was mentioned on a political and legal level; discussing the policies of armed groups who recruit children and the legal frameworks in place regarding the recruitment of the child. However, there was little publicly available evidence to suggest that the issue was discussed at the tactical or strategic level. The experiences derived from British soldiers highlighted a multitude of ways in which they experienced the presence of children in various conflict zones, and that the child’s presence could have implications for military operations and present challenges in the operational environment. Therefore, this led to the third of the sub-questions outlined in this thesis; *does military training prepare the soldier for such situations?*

Through the analysis of the data collected from the experiences of serving and former soldiers, it became evident that the level of training received by British military personnel differed greatly. This could be due to the different periods the soldier’s served, their rank, and

the regiment in which they belonged to. However, a common theme emerged during the analysis regarding a lack of training on the subject of children. The FOI responses from the MoD also revealed that there was a lack of training materials and acknowledgement of the child actor in their current guidelines. The discussion with the MoD trainers highlighted that children would be incorporated into Mission Specific Training *if* there was evidence they were present in the conflict environment. All soldiers prior to deployment overseas undergo a training session to familiarise themselves with the RoE and the LOAC, which includes information concerning the recruitment of children. However, there is little publicly available evidence to suggest that British soldiers receive training with regard to the child who has the potential to be a hostile actor. The *Developing Leaders*² guide given to officers at the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst includes a judgement based scenario training exercise regarding the child spotter. However, this is only available to those attending RMAS and the guide does not provide any solutions or guidance on the issue, as its purpose is to provoke discussions on the subject of moral dilemmas. Although there is a lack of publicly available evidence and the interviews with former personnel highlighted a gap in the training provided, it is difficult to ascertain whether appropriately developed training would prepare soldiers for such situations.

The potential moral dilemma may still cause the soldier to delay their response or refuse to act regardless of the battlefield training provided on the subject. During the analysis of the soldiers' experiences, it became evident that, despite understanding the RoE, some soldiers still made reference to the combatant being a child. They recognised the actor as a child first, rather than as a combatant or a potential threat. This could result in a diminished response rate as the soldier is forced to make an ethical judgement as to how to respond. Whilst some soldiers recognised the actor as a child first, and a combatant second; other soldiers recognised the actor as a combatant first, and a child second. Therefore, this research

² *Developing Leaders: A British Army Guide*, 1st Edition, (Royal Military Academy Sandhurst, Surrey, 2014).

project demonstrates the diverse range of reactions that can arise from the issue of encountering children in conflict zones. An interesting finding that emerged from the data collected focused on the experiences of soldiers who were also fathers. Research suggests that when a soldier is inserted into a conflict environment, his training and preparation will take precedence over his role as a father.³ However, my research indicates that the soldier continues to make a connection between his own role as a father and the presence of children in the conflict environment, despite his military training. The soldier's individual response, emotions, and rationale of the situation will determine whether the training received provides an adequate level of preparation for such dilemmas and scenarios.

The aim of this research was to provide the British soldier with a voice in which their experiences could be heard and explored in relation to an under-researched issue; their reactions to the presence of children in theatres of armed conflict. Rather than focusing on the psychological implications, this thesis aimed to explore whether the presence of children had the potential to impact military operations. As the analysis concerning the implications for military operations was derived from British experiences, it does not produce a conclusive report that is likely to have universal applicability for all national armed forces. However, this research project does highlight the various ways the presence of children could be of critical operational importance. The data showed that the presence of children could, or had, resulted in a change to missions and the conduct of operations. The most prominent theme that emerged was the use of children as human shields. The experiences presented highlighted how air strikes would be called off or engagement ceased when it became known that children were in the area, or likely to be used as shields. Children who operated as 'dickers' could also provide challenges to operations as the British soldiers were aware that their

³ MacDermid, S., Schwarz, R., Faber, A., Adkins, J., Mishkind, M., and Weiss, H. 'Military Fathers on the Front Lines', taken from *'Situating Fathering: A Focus on Physical and Social Spaces'*, ed. by Marsiglio, W., Roy, K., and Fox, G. (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Maryland, 2005).

movements were being tracked by the enemy force. This led to heightened emotions as soldiers felt vulnerable to an attack. Altering the patrol patterns when children were present could also reinforce the notion that British troops did not want to engage or operate when children were in the immediate vicinity. This could result in enemy forces using children to their advantage. However, it is the use of Black Propaganda that could hamper both current and future military operations. Incidents, either hypothetical or real, involving children could impact relations with local, domestic, and international populations. The will of the people is important, and it is crucial to have the support of the people in order to achieve military success. Therefore, images of children being harmed or killed could have a detrimental effect on military operations. Ben-Ari highlighted the pressure professional soldiers faced in such situations ‘almost all of the actions of troops are constantly open to external scrutiny,’⁴ and it is this scrutiny that enemy forces are keen to exploit, for example the use of children as human shields.⁵ The insights provided by former and serving British soldiers highlighted how the presence of children could affect military operations.

The second part of the central research question asked how the presence of children could affect the attitudes and practices of individual British soldiers. As the soldier’s voice and insights on the topic of encountering children in conflict zones was lacking from the existing literature base, this thesis focused on the collection of data that would explore the issue from the perspective of the soldier who had experienced such a situation. Analysis of the data provided by British soldiers highlighted a range of attitudes towards the child. Themes emerged which showed how shared attitudes and experiences could be held by the

⁴ Ben-Ari, E. ‘Facing Child Soldiers, Moral Issues and ‘Real Soldiering’: Anthropological Perspectives on Professional Armed Forces’, *South African Journal of Military Studies*, Volume: 37, No: 1, 2009, p.16.

⁵Please see, Interview with Soldier D, Interviewed by Michelle Jones (Aberystwyth University, February 2015), and Fergusson, J. ‘*A Million Bullets: The Real Story of the British Army in Afghanistan*’, (Bantam Press, London, 2008), p.269-70.

soldier, despite differing conflict situations or rank status. Whilst common themes emerged across the data, other attitudes were unique and personal to the soldier depending upon the situation they were faced with, and the conflict they were operating in. There was also a divergence in attitudes towards the child who was an active participant in the conflict situation, and the child who was exposed to the conflict environment as a bystander. The data showed how the British soldier tended to attribute a greater deal of sympathy towards the child who they deemed to be both morally *and* physically innocent. Other soldiers recognised that the child actively participating in the conflict environment could be an innocent, due to their role as a child, but that their actions made them physically non-innocent and were therefore, a perpetrator.

It also became evident that many soldiers feared the child who was an active participant due to their unpredictable behaviour, lack of awareness regarding the laws of war, and the uncertain operational environment. The fear of violence can have a devastating impact on the well-being of the soldier, which produces psychological challenges associated with encountering the child. Most of the existing literature on the subject focuses on the psychological implications associated with the moral dilemma of encountering a child in a conflict zones, however; this thesis suggests that the fear of violence from the hostile child actor can be just as harmful as the actual engagement with the child.

Negative attitudes towards both enemy and allied forces who used children were also present in the data collected. The use of catamites emerged as a theme relevant to the Afghan conflict, and demonstrated how the use of children by an allied force could have a negative effect on unit cohesion and morale. Within the data, there was also evidence that soldiers' attitudes towards children varied depending upon the age and sex of the child. Those aged 15 to 17 were shown less compassion and sympathy than younger children, and females were often acknowledged as being more likely to be innocent than males. The responses by former

and serving British soldiers highlighted the difference in rationale, thought-processes, and attitudes towards the child, yet each response recognised the child status of the actor.

This is evident within the discussions about the individual practices and conduct of the soldiers. The data showed how some soldiers took active steps to alter their conduct when children were present; this could include lowering their weapon or actively engaging in conversation with the child. The motivations for changing their conduct or practice in the presence of the child are diverse; however it reinforces the notion that the soldier recognises the child as a separate category of people who require a different approach when engaging with them. The experiences collated demonstrated how the British soldier would alter their dress or conduct in order to be seen as less hostile and more approachable in the presence of children. Two of the experiences highlighted how the soldiers used events centred towards children to bolster relations with the local community. The data showed that British soldiers might alter their practices to avoid endangering a child or to appear less threatening towards the child in order to improve relations with the local community.

The experiences provided by British soldiers highlighted that children are seen as a distinct category of people, regardless of whether the child is a combatant or a civilian. The data demonstrated that the presence of children can affect military operations, and the attitudes and practices of individual British soldiers. The hypothesis suggested that, due to the nature of operations the British Army have been involved with, British soldiers would have experienced children in theatres of armed conflict. The presence of the child acting as a combatant could provide a moral dilemma for the professional soldier, which could generate challenges for both the soldier and the operation. Having examined the experiences provided by those who have conducted operational duties as part of the British Army, it has become evident that there are multiple narratives concerning the British soldiers' interactions with children in armed conflict. Although themes have emerged which show how British soldiers

have shared experiences concerning the role of the child, attitudes towards the child, and the implications the presence of the child has for military operations; it is also important to recognise the emotional challenges associated with encountering this particular actor and that the soldier's experience is unique. Therefore, an ethnographic approach is beneficial for conducting research in this area due to the complex issues associated with the topic.

The benefits of ethnographic research also became evident during the analysis on the topic of children and armed conflict. By incorporating the historical and ethnographic narratives, it helped build a detailed and comprehensive understanding of the subject. The global humanitarian discourse has provided a one-dimensional perspective on the topic, reducing the agency of the child and promoting their image as a victim of exploitation. Sarah and David Rosen noted the victim portrayal of the child soldier in which their 'essential quality is their vulnerability. They are dependent, exploited, and powerless.'⁶ Whilst the global humanitarian discourse remains dominant, the adoption of ethnographic research in the field will help to counter claims that a 'child soldier phenomenon' is in existence and produce a narrative which focuses on the complex issues associated with the child actor. The current narrative associated with the global humanitarian discourse focuses on returning the child to a period of childhood, with no acknowledgement of the child's role or motivations for partaking in the conflict, which does little to acknowledge the various issues associated with children's participation in armed conflict.

Although this thesis does not wish to normalise the presence of children in theatres of armed conflict; it does understand that, until the child is removed from such environments, discussions about how to interact with the child actor and awareness of the challenges the hostile child actor poses should be acknowledged in order to provide support and training to

⁶ Rosen, S.M. and Rosen, D.M. 'Representing Child Soldiers in Fiction and Film', *Peace Review: A Journal of Social Justice*, Volume: 24, p.305.

professional military personnel. By producing a narrative which highlights that children can be *both* victims and perpetrators, it will acknowledge the complex role of the child actor and provide a more nuanced understanding concerning their presence and motivations in theatres of armed conflict. This will be beneficial to military personnel who need to be aware of the type of actor they might face in a hostile environment, as well as providing those working with children in post-conflict environments a more realistic interpretation of the needs associated with this particular actor.

Under the global humanitarian discourse, a range of child protection measures and legal initiatives designed to eradicate the use of children in armed conflict were produced. These were all deeply rooted in the traditions associated with the Western concept of childhood, which suggested that the child is worthy of protection and lacks rationale in their decision making processes. Therefore, as the mainstream narrative concerning the topic of children in armed conflict is rooted in the global humanitarian discourse, the child is seen as a passive creature; in need of protection, and is only partaking in conflict situations due to the manipulation and exploitation by the adult population. This can cause a moral dilemma for the professional soldier who acknowledges the perceived moral innocence of the child yet could be faced with a child combatant who has the potential to be a lethal threat, and is therefore no longer physically innocent. The attribution of innocence to the child is an important factor. Through discussions with British personnel it became evident that different levels of innocence were attributed to the child depending on their participation levels, their gender, and their age. Females and younger children were given more sympathy by the adult male soldier, and those who were bystanders to the conflict were seen to be more innocent than those who played an active role. Bernsten and Mæland discussed the potential moral dilemma and suggested that ‘soldiers must therefore exercise restraint and accept greater risk to minimize harm inflicted on child soldiers, not because they are not moral agents, but

because of their vulnerability and protected status as children.’⁷ This removes the notion that children can have agency concerning their motivations and conduct during hostilities. By suggesting that soldiers should be willing to take a greater risk rather than harm a child; it demonstrates to armed groups that children continue to offer tactical advantages, therefore does little to reduce the recruitment or use of children in armed conflict.

Existing literature on the subject of encountering children in conflict zones highlighted the potential moral dilemma that could arise, however this research project uses the experiences of British soldiers to highlight that there is no common narrative concerning the interaction between professional soldiers and children. The perspectives, understandings, and attitudes of the British soldier towards the child was dependent upon a number of factors, such as their own rationale and the conflict situation. There was no universal response or reaction from the British soldier, and the level of innocence (both moral and physical) attributed to the child depended upon a range of factors. Some acknowledged that their training would override their thought process, therefore the child would be viewed as a combatant. Others suggested that, whilst they saw the threat the child posed as a combatant, they would not be able to engage or would engage but recognised the implications this would have on their well-being after the event. Therefore, the suggestion that professional soldiers *will* face a moral dilemma is quite generalised and those working on the topic should be aware of the more nuanced narratives concerning the range of complex issues associated with the subject.

⁷ Berntsen, T.A. and Mæland, B. ‘The Agency of Child Soldiers: Rethinking the Principles of Discrimination’, taken from Allhoff, F., Evans, N., and Henschke, A. ed, *The Routledge Handbook of Ethics and War: Just War Theory in the Twenty-First Century*, (Routledge, Oxon, 2013), p.280.

6.2 Recommendations for Practitioners

Although keen to examine the topic from a British lens, it is important to note that the issue of encountering children in armed conflict affects various professional national militaries. Therefore, discussions and recommendations made in this chapter have been drawn from proposals by other military organisations, international agencies, and my own research findings. However, as this thesis is focused on the British Army and British soldiers, it will provide a set of recommendations that could be incorporated by the organisation based on their own existing practices and frameworks.

6.2.1 Military Training

The *Global Strategic Trends 2040* report⁸ acknowledged that child soldiers could cause implications for their personnel in the future. However, the report does not acknowledge that British soldiers already have experience operating in conflict environments with hostile child actors or child soldiers. Nor that the presence of children in theatres of armed conflict can cause psychological and tactical challenges for professional military personnel. Acknowledging that the child has the potential to be a lethal threat needs to be incorporated into British doctrine, military training, and guidelines. Such information needs to be presented in a language that is clear and accessible to all personnel.⁹ Although the *Developing Leaders* guide¹⁰ discussed the child spotter as moral dilemma, this is the only example found in which the child is mentioned as a hostile threat and the document is only available to the officer ranks at Sandhurst (RMAS).

⁸ ‘*Global Strategic Trends – Out to 2040*’, Strategic Trends Programme, Ministry of Defence, DCDC, 4th Edition, 2013.

⁹ Whitman, S., Zayed, T., and Conradi, C. ‘*Child Soldiers: A Handbook for Security Sector Actors*’, Second Edition, (Romeo Dallaire Child Soldiers Initiative, Halifax, 2014).

¹⁰ ‘*Developing Leaders: A British Army Guide*’, 1st Edition, (Royal Military Academy Sandhurst, Surrey, 2014).

The moral dilemma associated with encountering children in conflict zones should be considered and spoken about *prior* to soldiers entering the operational field. When discussing the tactical advantages children offer in armed conflict, Tynes stated that ‘the armed forces must incorporate child-soldier ethics into basic training. When it comes to child soldiers, morals are the foundation for problem-solving, not the barrier.’¹¹ Ethical and judgement training are already undertaken by the British Army, as outlined in their use of FIBUA¹² training exercises and the Urban Warrior 5¹³ programme. However; the hostile child actor has yet to be incorporated into such exercises. Although there are ethical concerns regarding the use of children in a role-play environment for military training, computer generated imagery (CGI) technology could be used to emulate the role of the child.¹⁴

6.2.2 Child Protection Training

*Child Soldiers: A Handbook for Security Sector Actors*¹⁵ provides training for security sector actors on the topic of interacting with children in conflict zones. The aim of the organisation is to eradicate the use of children in armed conflict situations, therefore they seek to remove the tactical advantage associated with the child. By training military personnel in child protection issues, it would increase their awareness and knowledge on the topic which could in turn aid the efforts to reduce child recruitment. For example, training soldiers to look out for signs of child recruitment would help to capture adult recruiters and

¹¹ Tynes, R., ‘Child Soldier as Tactical Innovation’, *Air and Space Power Journal*, Volume 22, No: 1, 2008, taken from www.airpower.maxwell.af.mil/apjinternational/apj-s/2008/1tri08/tyneseng.htm, accessed on 13th June 2014, p.5.

¹² Please see, Interview with Soldier D, Interviewed by Michelle Jones (Aberystwyth University, February 2015), and Baker, B. ‘*Tanks on the Doorstep*’, *Army Technology*, 27th May 2014, taken from www.army-technology.com/features/featuretanks-on-the-doorstep-evolution-of-the-military-training-village-4274482, accessed on 14th August 2014, np.

¹³ ‘Army Conducts Largest Ever Virtual Battlefield Simulation Experiment’, *Ministry of Defence News*, 31st January 2013, taken from <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/army-conducts-largest-ever-virtual-battlefield-simulation-experiment>, accessed on 14th June 2015, np.

¹⁴ Comer, B. and Grosse, J. ‘*Employing Human Role-Players in Simulation-Based Training for Asymmetric and Unconventional Warfare*’ (Simulation Training and Technology Centre, Florida, 2004), p.2.

¹⁵ Whitman, S. et al. ‘*Child Soldiers: A Handbook for Security Sector Actors*’, (Halifax, 2014).

disrupt the recruitment process. By decreasing the amount of child soldiers present in the operational environment, it would also decrease the likelihood for military personnel to encounter such an actor.

6.2.3 Increased Intelligence

Debriefs need to be undertaken with all units and personnel who have operated in regions where children have been present. This would help to build a comprehensive understanding of the type of roles children have played, the situations in which they are used, and the environments in which they were part of. As the discussions about the issue, from both an academic and military perspective, are still emerging it is important to collate as much evidence as possible to ensure that the material can be used to create guidance and training which can aid organisations attempting to provide solutions. Therefore, it is important that any training provided is based on real-life situations in order to enhance the soldier's training experience and awareness of the issue. Cultural intelligence seminars¹⁶ provide a wealth of information for the soldier about to deploy into a particular environment, therefore discussions about children could be incorporated into these programmes. These seminars provide information on the culture and region in which soldiers are due to deploy. The CETO report also acknowledges the importance of cultural and situational training, suggesting that

training should familiarize Marines with the issue as it exists; examine countries, regions, and conflicts where Marines may encounter child soldiers; identify tactics, techniques, and procedures that will best help them deal with child soldiers; inform Marines of relevant international law, including obligations under international laws; and prepare them for the dilemma they will face both on the battlefield and after.¹⁷

¹⁶ Borchini, C., Lanz, S. and O'Connell, E. 'Child Soldiers: Implications for US Forces', *Center for Emerging Threats and Opportunities*, CETO 005-02, Marine Warfighting Laboratory, Quantico, VA, November 2002, p.29.

¹⁷ Borchini, C., Lanz, S. and O'Connell, E. 'Child Soldiers: Implications for US Forces', CETO, Quantico, VA, 2002, p.29.

This can also be applied to the British context. The MoD should use all available information to build their understanding and to develop training packages dedicated to preparing British soldiers for the range of circumstances they could encounter within the operational landscape.

6.2.4 Tactical Changes

The *Child Soldiers: A Handbook for Security Sector Actors*¹⁸ suggests a number of initiatives to counter the enemy's tactical advantage of using children. Their research suggests that by removing the tactical advantage associated with the use of children in conflict zones, then enemy forces will eventually stop using children. During the interview, Whitman summarised the issue stating that the enemy

use children because it is a tactical abuse of children and as long as we are not prepared for it then we continue to give them that advantage right, so we need to find a way to take away that surprise and shock element of it.¹⁹

Removing the shock element can be conducted by increasing training procedures and formulating guidelines that prepare professional military troops to the type of actor they are likely to face. If professional soldiers are aware that children are likely to be present and know how to respond, then the shock factor will be reduced.

Other suggestions involve professional militaries changing their tactics. Children in certain situations are likely to be more fearful of loud noises, therefore firing for shock (rather than to kill) or using demonstrative fire can help to disperse large groups of children. Helicopter gunships were used in Sierra Leone and were deemed an effective tactic in frightening units of child soldiers.²⁰ Smoke bombs can also be used to disperse groups of

¹⁸ Whitman, S. et al. '*Child Soldiers: A Handbook for Security Sector Actors*', (Halifax, 2014).

¹⁹ Interview with Shelley Whitman from Child Soldiers Initiative, Interviewed by Michelle Jones (Aberystwyth University, 13th March 2015).

²⁰ Singer, P.W. '*Facing Saddam's Child Soldiers*', Paper presented for the Saban Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution, 14th January 2003, taken from <http://www.brookings.edu/research/papers/2003/01/14iraq-singer>, accessed on 12th December 2012, p.4.

children; however, there are concerns about the effect of such gasses on children. These methods can also be counter-intuitive, as the child may become aware that the weapon being used against them is not as lethal as the weapon they are in possession of; thus the child is aware that they have the tactical advantage. A change in tactics can be beneficial in avoiding child casualties or fatalities; however, such decisions need to be balanced with a long term strategic perspective which aims to reduce the number of recruits. By choosing not to engage due to the potential presence of children, the military force is bending to the will of the enemy. If the professional military force engages in a firefight, it will distract the enemy and allow child soldiers hoping to escape an opportunity to break away from their unit and surrender.²¹ This will be beneficial in reducing the number of child recruits; however, it is specific to children who are likely to have been forcibly recruited rather than children who have volunteered for service and are willing fighters.

6.2.5 Psychological Operations

Psychological Operations (PsyOps) are also deemed to be effective in reducing the number of children recruited into enemy forces. The CETO report suggests that psychological operations ‘should be integrated with other efforts to convince child soldiers to stop fighting, leave their units, and begin the process of rehabilitation and reintegration back into society.’²² Despite recommendations, there is no evidence (to date) to suggest that this tactic has been adopted. Again, this is likely to only be effective with children who have been recruited forcibly into an armed group or those becoming despondent with the conflict. NGOs and other aid agencies have also requested external military forces to focus their operations on securing known recruitment areas in order to disrupt the recruitment process. These

²¹ Interview with Shelley Whitman from Child Soldiers Initiative, Interviewed by Michelle Jones (Aberystwyth University, 13th March 2015).

²² Borchini, C., Lanz, S. and O’Connell, E. ‘Child Soldiers: Implications for US Forces’, CETO, Quantico, VA, 2002, p.24.

organisations also suggest that professional military forces should target the adult leadership. By removing the adult leaders, it will allow children to escape and seek help. Targeting the adult leadership will also help to fracture the enemy force, thus destabilising their operational capabilities and effectiveness. Greater research needs to be conducted into the use of non-lethal weapons in order to reduce the level of harm aimed at the child, as well as the psychological implications for the professional soldier forced to engage with them. Although tactical initiatives are recommended, enemy forces continue to evolve their methods in order to ensure they maintain a tactical advantage over the professional forces; for example, the evolved use of child suicide bombers by ISIS and Boko Haram.

6.3 Avenues for Further Research

Whilst the previous section has drawn upon a range of measures that could be implemented by the MoD or British Army to provide training, support and guidance to British personnel; this does not suggest that further research does not need to be conducted in the area. As an exploratory piece of research, the aim was to highlight that British soldiers *do* encounter children in conflict zones and that the consequences of such interactions can have implications for both the military operation and the well-being of the soldier. Whilst this thesis has highlighted that British soldiers have operated in regions where children have been present, the experiences provided by the soldiers has resulted in the formation of further avenues for research.

Due to the constraints associated with PhD research, this project lacked the funding and time frame to conduct a large survey of the experiences of military personnel. It drew upon sources available and access to serving military personnel was prohibited. Therefore, it is hoped that if the MoD recognise the benefits of such research, then future projects could work alongside the organisation, which would allow access to serving personnel. Future

research could be conducted which incorporate other service areas. This could include the implications for members of the RAF Regiment, Royal Marines, or pilots. During the analysis process, a number of soldiers mentioned their role as a father. Therefore, further research could be conducted specifically on this participant group. Research could also be conducted with members of other national military forces. To date women in the British Armed Forces are not allowed to operate in a front-line capacity, however, this restriction does not apply to women in other national armed forces. Therefore, research could be conducted with women who are soldiers *and* mothers.

The purpose of this research project was to explore the topic of children being present in theatres of armed conflict from the perspective of a professional military force. The British Army were chosen due to the knowledge gaps on the subject, and due to their experience in various conflict situations. By drawing upon the experiences of British personnel, this research project explored the various ways military personnel can encounter children in theatres of armed conflict. This not only provides knowledge on the subject of military encounters with children, but also provides an insight into the various roles children can play in conflict zones. This was an exploratory project that sought to gain an insight into how the presence of children in theatres of armed conflict could affect British military operations, and the attitudes and practices of individual British soldiers. Whilst shared experiences and themes emerged within the data, the experiences of a soldier are also personal and unique. However, the research conducted did suggest that the child is seen as a separate category of persons by the soldier; and that the presence of the child can alter the soldier's practices and attitudes, as well as creating implications military operations.

This piece of research was designed with the objective to produce knowledge which was deemed to be missing from the existing literature search. Therefore, this thesis should provide some important and original contributions to knowledge. The aim of this research

project was to draw upon the oral and written testimonies of British soldiers in order to allow their voices or narratives to emerge. This would provide the research project with face validity and the opportunity to gather information about the topic from the participants who had experienced such situations first-hand. Whilst the organisational perspective provides an insight into the expected protocols associated with encountering children in armed conflict, it is through the soldiers' experiences that knowledge can be created about the role of the child and how their presence can have implications on the battlefield. As this thesis approaches the subject from a bottom-up perspective, it recognises the importance of gathering data from participants who have experienced the conflict environment. Therefore, this thesis makes a contribution to the field of military studies by employing an under-used methodological approach.

Whilst acknowledging the soldiers' voice is important and provides an original contribution to academic knowledge, the thesis also contributes to other areas within the field of military studies, in particular the subjects of military culture and military sociology. The thesis discusses the British Army's relationship with children which will build upon the work conducted by military sociologists interested in the role of civil-military relations. A contribution can also be made to the body of knowledge interested in the culture of the British Army as this thesis traces the evolution of the British Army into a professional military force, their ethos, and training practices. Children can be both victims and perpetrators; and this thesis uses the British soldiers' experiences to show how the child acting in a hostile manner can have implications for military operations and the well-being of professional armed forces. The thesis will also contribute to the field of security studies as it recognises the role of the child as a non-traditional security issue which presents a potential moral and practical dilemma for professional armed forces who operate in the same operational landscape.

This thesis acknowledges that an ethnographic approach is needed when conducting research on the subject of children in armed conflict, and on the professional soldier's experience when encountering the child. In order to provide policy relevant solutions to both parties, it is important to recognise the actor's own experiences and perspectives. The British Army are likely to face future deployments into regions where they have to operate amongst the civilian population, or against an adversary who will use the civilian status to achieve a tactical advantage. Whilst Western expectations of childhood depict that children and war should be two separate entities; the British Army need to be aware that their personnel are likely to be deployed into an operational environment in which children can be present as active participants, used by the enemy force as a tactical advantage, or even just be part of the operational landscape. This thesis approached the subject from the British soldier's perspective in order to highlight their experiences in operating in conflict environments where children are present. The complex and varied nature of this actor can present tactical, operational, and emotional challenges for the British Army and its personnel.

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Appendices

Appendix A

The following themes and questions were used during the interviews with former service personnel who served in the British Army. The interviews conducted were semi-structured and the questions were used to discuss the wider themes associated with military personnel encountering children in theatres of armed conflict. All questions were designed and approved with the help and support of Aberystwyth University's Research Ethics Committee.

Theme One:

The discussion of general attitudes towards children being present on the battlefield.

What roles do you associate with children in armed conflict?

- Which conflicts that members of the British Armed Forces have partaken in do you believe have involved children in armed conflict scenarios?
- Why do you feel children are used in armed conflict scenarios?
- What tactical advantages do you feel children offer to armed groups?
- Do you feel that children could be used by armed groups to specifically target Western forces?

Theme Two:

The discussion of children in armed conflict as portrayed by the media, NGOs and charities.

- When thinking about children in armed conflict – are you aware of any campaigns used by NGOs or charities that relate to the topic of children in armed conflict?
- If aware of such campaigns, do you feel the media and NGOs accurately represent the role of children in armed conflict (based on your own experiences)?
- Which regions do you feel the use of children in armed conflict is an issue?

Theme Three:

The discussion of children in theatres of armed conflict.

- Did you see or encounter children during active service?
- If so, in which regions did you encounter children?
- Did you have any direct interaction with children during active service?
- Have you encountered children in a hostile environment?
- Drawing upon your own experience, what type of roles have you seen children play in armed conflict scenarios?
- How did you feel when you saw a child in a hostile environment?
- What is your perception of the child taking part in armed conflict?
- What challenges do you feel arise when confronted with a child in a hostile environment?
- If having encountered a child in a hostile situation once, do you feel this is likely to alter your perception and image of any child in that environment?
- Do you feel children involved in armed conflict are victims? Perpetrators? Or both?

- Did the presence of children on the battlefield alter your conduct or the conduct of those around you? If so, how?

Theme Four:

The discussion of training and guidelines concerning children in armed conflict.

- What type of pre-deployment training did you receive?
- Did you receive any training or advice concerning the potential interaction with children?
- Were there clear guidelines concerning what action should be taken when faced with a child who is a hostile threat?
- Do you believe there is a need to adapt RoE and SoPs to acknowledge the issue of children being present in conflict scenarios?
- What type of training, exercises, guidelines etc. could be produced which would be beneficial to soldiers in that type of environment?
- What type of pre-deployment information do you feel would be relevant to soldiers entering an environment where children might be present?
- What type of post- deployment advice or programmes do you feel would be relevant to soldiers who have encountered children in hostile environments?

Appendix B

The following questions or themes were used in the elite interviews conducted during my time in New York City (2014). These interviews were semi-structured and the questions were used to discuss the wider themes associated with children in armed conflict. All questions were designed and approved with the help and support of Aberystwyth University's Research Ethics Committee.

1. Do you believe the current guidelines and standards concerning the age of recruitment into military forces or armed groups is appropriate?
2. With regard to the Straight 18 campaign, what is your / your organisation's position (or view) concerning this campaign? Do you believe a universal standard or ethnographic approach is more appropriate when determining military recruitment standards?
3. Within the academic literature, there are discussions about the differences between children who volunteer for armed service and those who are forcibly recruited.
 - a. Have you / your organisation encountered such differences amongst the children you work with?
 - b. If so, how have you / your organisation dealt with or responded to this challenge?
4. The recruitment of under 18s is not purely an issue for the Global South – could you expand on your organisation's policy concerning the recruitment of under 18s in Western countries (for example, the US, the UK and Australia)?
5. Discussion on the theme of campaign literature used by NGOs and International Charities – A large amount of the campaign literature seems to depict a young child, from African origin and holding a style of weapon. Why does your organisation/ organisations opt to use such visual images?
6. In which regions, do you / your organisation feel the use of children in armed conflict is causing the most concern?
7. My research project focuses on the use of children in armed conflict in the following regions. Could we discuss whether you/ your organisation has worked with, or does engage with children in these areas?
 - a. Bosnia –
 - b. Sierra Leone –
 - c. Afghanistan –
8. What type of roles do children play in contemporary theatres of armed conflict?
9. A lot of the literature produced by certain humanitarian organisations suggest that children are taking a more direct role in hostilities – do you / your organisation subscribe to this school of thought?
10. Is there any evidence to suggest that children's roles in armed conflict is changing?

11. Do you think, or have any evidence to suggest, that children are becoming more involved in terrorist attacks or with terrorist organisations? (Starting point for a discussion about the role of ISIS and Boko Haram, with a specific reference to media suggestions that children are becoming increasingly involved in suicide bombing missions).

12. Since the 1990s discussions about child soldiers has been referred to as a ‘child soldier phenomenon’ – do you believe this term accurately describes the issues faced by the international community and organisations in relation to the topic of children and armed conflict?

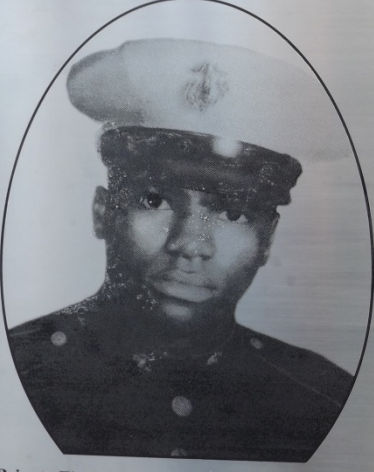
14. What advantages can children offer to armed groups in theatres of armed conflict?

15. Is there any evidence to suggest that children have been used or have the potential to be used against Western forces due to their status as minors?

16. Is there any other information you feel would be relevant to any of the above questions or which may be beneficial to my research?

Appendix C

*The Youngest American Serviceman
Killed in Action in the Vietnam War*



Private First Class Dan Bullock was fourteen years old when he altered his birth certificate in order to join the United States Marine Corps. He was killed at the age of fifteen while serving his country in the Vietnam War.

Semper Fi

COMPANY F
2nd Battalion, 5th Marines
1st Marine Division (Rein) FMF
FPO San Francisco, California 96602

June 11, 1969

Mr. and Mrs. B. Bullock
279 Lee Avenue
Brooklyn, NY 11206

Dear Mr. and Mrs. Bullock:

The recent death of your son, Private First Class Dan Bullock, U. S. Marine Corps, on June 7, 1969, at An Hoa Combat Base, Quang Nam Province, Republic of Vietnam, is a source of great sorrow to me and all the members of Company F. Please accept our deepest sympathy in your bereavement.

Dan was assigned as a Rifleman in the Second Platoon of Company F. During the early morning hours on June 7, Company F was in night defensive positions on the perimeter of the An Hoa Combat Base. An assault of the lines by North Vietnamese Soldiers started at approximately 1:00 a.m. Dan immediately realized that the attack was stronger than usual and that the ammunition supply was becoming depleted. He rushed to get more ammunition for his unit. He constantly exposed himself to the enemy fire in order to keep the company supplied with the ammunition needed to hold off the attack. As the attack pressed on, Dan again went to get more ammunition when he was mortally wounded by a burst of enemy small arms and died instantly at approximately 1:50 a.m.

It may comfort you to know that Dan received the ministrations of his faith by Lieutenant Commander R. W. Harper, Chaplain, U. S. Navy. Also, a Memorial Service was held on June 8, allowing all of his friends to pay a last tribute to him.

Dan was one of the finest Marines I have ever known, and he was well liked and admired by everyone who knew him. He took pride in doing every job well and constantly displayed those qualities of eagerness and self-reliance that gained him the respect he well deserved. Although I realize words can do little to console you, I hope the knowledge that we share in your sorrow will, in some measure, alleviate the suffering caused by your great loss.

Dan's personal effects have been prepared for shipment and will be forwarded to you in the near future.

In the difficult days ahead, please do not hesitate to write to me.

Sincerely yours,
R. H. Kingrey
R. H. Kingrey
Captain, U. S. Marine Corps
Commanding

Photograph taken 4th April 2014, New York City Vietnam War Memorial Plaza (by Michelle Jones).

Appendix D

'I, (state your full name), swear by Almighty God that I will be faithful and bear true allegiance to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth the Second, her heirs and successors, and that will, as in duty bound, honestly and faithfully defend Her Majesty, her heirs and successors, in person, crown and dignity against all enemies, and will observe and obey all orders of Her Majesty, her heirs and successors, and of the generals and officers set over me.'

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