Introduction

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A Focus on War and Displacement

This book is about young people – children and adolescents – who have
grown up with armed conflict, social upheaval and massive loss. As such,
it bears testimony to the grim effects of warfare on the young. War leads
not just to widespread death, but also to extensive displacement, over-
whelming fear and economic devastation. It divides communities,
destroys trust, weakens social ties, threatens household survival and
undermines the family's capacity to care for its most vulnerable members.
Every year it kills and maims countless numbers of young people, under-
mines thousands of others psychologically and deprives many of the eco-
nomic, educational, health and social opportunities which most of us con-
sider essential for children's effective growth and wellbeing.

During the course of the twentieth century there was a significant
growth in the frequency of armed conflicts internationally. This has left a
terrible legacy at the dawn of the twenty-first century, in which political
hostilities have become firmly entrenched in many parts of the world.
Most modern conflicts occur within states and are associated with
extreme inequity in the distribution of resources; repressive and unjust
governance; failed development; burgeoning black economies fuelled by
the trade in arms and drugs; sectarian strife and other massively desta-
bilising forces. One of the chief characteristics of this kind of warfare is
that the elimination of civilians is the prime military objective, with civil-
ian casualties rising sharply in recent conflicts as a proportion of the total
(Machel 2000).

The fact that most modern hostilities are internal presents a special risk
to young people. Fighting takes place in homes, fields and streets, and

involves acts of extreme brutality and personal violence. The categories 'civilian' and 'combatant' are blurred, with children and youth, their families, neighbours and communities emerging as both victims and perpetrators. Because they are generally more agile, impressionable and expendable than adults, the young are actively recruited by many military units. Since they can carry, clean, reload and fire modern light arms with ease, the spread of small weapons in recent decades has exacerbated this trend. While many are engaged directly in combat, an even greater number are involved in ancillary functions, such as intelligence gathering, the delivery of food to the front line, road and bridge maintenance and repair, that are essential to the military endeavour. The distinction between civilian and combatant becomes especially confused with the prevalence of these kinds of quasi-military roles.

In such situations, children and adolescents are jeopardised not merely as random casualties but also because, as active agents of violence or members of military support teams, they are viewed as legitimate objects of attack. In addition, the political, criminal or military activities they engage in during war may bring them into conflict with the law, especially where emergency legislation is invoked. During flight or in post-conflict settings, involvement in such activities may result in denial of refugee status and exclusion from the benefits accruing to that status. Children are also vulnerable to atrocities because the mistreatment of the young undermines adult resistance: for example, children may be tortured, slaughtered or used as human shields to force parents to relinquish information. Finally, in the general climate of lawlessness and impunity that is so often associated with political conflict, many children are also exposed to raised levels of criminal violence. And as families come under increasing pressure from many different kinds of adversities, so children also become prone to greater domestic abuse.

Researching Young People in War

The War Literature

In recognition of the extent of civilian suffering globally and of the need to better understand the human consequences of severe adversity, there now exists a significant literature on young people affected by war and displacement (see, for example, Ayalon 1983; Djeddah and Shah 1996; Elbedour, et al. 1993; Gupta 2000; Hamilton and Man 1998; Hjern et al. 1991; Macksoud 1992; Magwaza et al. 1993; McHan 1985; Miller 1996; Sack et al. 1986; Ziv and Israeli 1973). Most of this literature is based on research conducted within the disciplines of medicine, psychiatry and psychology and adheres to a biomedical paradigm. Starting with the seminal work of Anne Freud and Dorothy Burlingham in the aftermath of the

Second World War, highlighting the catastrophic effects of war on the young has long been the central project of this research. The focus has been episodes of violence and loss – like shootings, torture, or forced migration – as such events are normally understood to be the defining feature of war. These events are conceptualised as antithetical to normal human experience, for their devastatingly destructive impact is felt not just at a personal and familial level but throughout society as a whole (Ager 1996: 16). Invoking the concept of trauma, assessing the prevalence of distressing psychological symptoms in affected populations and the diagnosis of disorders is the major objective of this enterprise. Many scholars confine themselves to assessment of prevalence of one particularly acute psychiatric condition, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD; see, for example, Kinzie et al. 1986; Magwaza et al. 1993; Nader and Pynoos 1993). PTSD was first distinguished as a syndrome in U.S. veterans of the Vietnam War and has subsequently been identified by the World Health Organisation as the most severe psychiatric disorder and primary stress resulting from a catastrophe.

In terms of how conflict affects the young, the accepted wisdom emerging from this kind of research is that the impact is resoundingly negative. Furthermore tenure this negative impact is seen as consistent; since it is generally thought that child development and wellbeing are based in biological and psychological structures that are fairly uniform across class and culture, children's responses are regarded as more or less the same everywhere. Much of the research also holds that the progression towards adulthood occurs in recognisable stages, early behaviours and experiences being causally related to subsequent developmental achievements. Therefore, it is posited that children exposed to stressful war events are prone not merely to traumatic reactions in both the shorter and longer term, but also to developmental impairment.

With regard to research methods, the notion that young people's responses are universally determined has justified the use of precoded research instruments, the majority of which have been developed in and imported from the minority industrialised world. These instruments are intended to quantify children's exposure to highly stressful incidents, whether as witnesses, victims, or perpetrators (see Garbarino and Kostelny 1996; Gupta 2000; Hjern et al. 1991; Willis and Gonzalez 1998), and gauge their psychological and emotional responses. Adverse effects on mental health are normally recorded through behaviour checklists or diagnostic questionnaires that list indicators of somatisation, behavioural and relationship problems, and/or psychological symptoms (Ahearn and Athey 1991; Gibbs and Boyden 1995). In most cases the informants are adults – parents, teachers or others presumed to be in close contact with children. The majority of studies are based on an extremely limited period of fieldwork; many rely solely on quantitative information, and often

focus on children's responses to a single, acute episode of violence, separation or loss. Frequently, a single method is employed for assessing exposure to events and a second for measuring responses.

The war literature has produced an extremely consistent set of ideas, theories and results, many of which appear quite compelling. It chronicles the atrocities and physical, emotional and psychological effects of warfare. It provides important insights into young people's suffering and has raised awareness within academe, among aid and relief agencies and the general public as a whole, of some of their therapeutic, developmental and security needs. In many cases it has also had practical impact, having been employed in the planning and design of important interventions in health, education, psychosocial support and other areas.

Given the highly pernicious nature of conflict, it may seem self-evident that the dominant research focus on the psychopathological impacts on children is the most appropriate. Undoubtedly, some young people are overwhelmed emotionally and psychologically by such changes and by their exposure to highly stressful events: this is an important dimension of human experience that needs full exploration through research. Acknowledging this, the concept of trauma has become particularly pervasive in the literature. In some countries, the concept has even begun to influence public perception concerning not just major societal adversities but also random and far more minor incidents, like mass shootings or suicides, and major automobile or aircraft accidents. The power of the trauma model and other psychopathological paradigms is unquestionable. Nevertheless, fuller consideration of the assumptions that underlie such models brings into doubt the relevance and validity of some of the key findings.

An almost exclusive focus on intrapsychic functioning and impacts has certain adverse implications in terms of conceptualisation of the issues. It reflects the tendency of psychological and medical assessments to ignore the wider societal destruction that is associated with most conflicts. In this way, such studies have the effect of both pathologising the survivors of conflict and individualising a phenomenon that is in fact profoundly political. In most cases war is both causal in and consequent upon massive societal transformations; such transformations cannot be disregarded if research is to convey an effective understanding of the roots, nature and effects of armed conflict. War pervades all aspects of society, its institutions, political structures, culture, economy and communication systems. It does not just cause psychological and emotional harm, but also attacks the most fundamental conditions of sociality, endangering social allegiances and confidence, and drastically reducing social interaction and trust. To focus on individual reactions to highly stressful incidents is to lose sight of these important dimensions of conflict.

One can also take issue with prevalent research findings concerning the ways in which young people are affected by armed conflict. First, within

the biomedical framework it is posited that a fairly mechanistic relationship exists between cause and effect: the young are exposed to and victims of a specific traumatic experience and suffer a disorder as a consequence of that experience. As indicated, such a framework generally omits important environmental and relational dimensions of people's lives, whereas in practice these are fundamental to the social integration, protection, care and development of the young. Even in the most stressful of situations, young people's psychological and emotional health, as much as their development, is heavily mediated by relationships with caregivers, peers and others, by access to services and availability of opportunities. In other words, the notion that a direct relation in mental health and development can be discerned between cause and effect is problematic. Different mediating factors come into play in different contexts and with different individuals, but the general point is that these factors can render the individual stronger or weaker, depending on the specific circumstances and context.

Second, medical investigations tend to yield an almost unitary representation of conflict that is bound neither by time nor context; a given percentage of children are exposed to a given range of experiences, with certain physical or mental consequences. In this way, children and adolescents are portrayed as the passive recipients of adult agency, the victims of wars waged by others and of brutality that is alien and imposed. Even when the young are researched in their role as combatants they are thought of as being divorced from the conditions and ideologies that produce and reproduce political violence. Personal volition is denied and emphasis given to their vulnerability and helplessness, to their abduction and forced conscription by brainwashing, treachery and deceit. The reality is more complex, in that some young people assume a voluntary role in combat even while others are abducted or otherwise cajoled into taking up arms. Moreover, children and adolescents can be very active in defining their own allegiances during conflict, as well as their own strategies for coping and survival. This implies that the prevailing dichotomy between adult as active perpetrator and child as passive victim needs challenging.

Third, psychiatric assessments that focus on traumatic reactions tend to overlook the broader range of attitudinal, emotional, developmental and behavioural effects in children and adolescents – the formation and maintenance of moral values, social competencies and a sense of self-efficacy, for example. Young people's experiences of war are far more diverse, subtle and complex than is implied by models that focus solely on individualised, traumatic responses to violent events.

A fourth concern is that a-historical analyses belie evidence that war is normally experienced as an ongoing, continuous phenomenon whose effects persist long after actual combat has ceased. The suffering of war is

not contained in a single traumatic episode, or even a multiplicity of such episodes, but in a complex interplay of detrimental circumstances that endure and change over time (Cairns 1996; Ressler et al. 1992). Indeed, while it is true that certain experiences – such as rape, death and separation from family – have a high potential to overwhelm young people psychologically in any situation or context, it is not self-evident that isolated events of acute stress always have the greatest psychological impact (Garbarino and Kostelny 1996: 33). The culmination of stress in a long-term chronic situation can be most detrimental to psychological and emotional wellbeing.

A fifth issue has to do with the cultural specificity of biomedicine as an interpretative model and in particular with the notion of post-traumatic stress disorder, which originated in a specific country and set of historical circumstances. Several critics have questioned whether such a diagnostic tool, so firmly rooted in a specific psychiatric tradition, is appropriate for universal use, and many have argued for greater recognition of cultural understandings of misfortune, health and healing.

Sixth, due to the persistence of theories of child development that rely heavily on universal biological and psychological processes, differences of culture, social power and identity tend to be underplayed in much of the orthodox research on young people in war. Hence, paradoxically, mental health research that is designed to measure the impacts of conflict through individual responses has the effect of concealing major personal and social distinctions between individual children. The tendency to study children as an undifferentiated category disregards recent evidence from social science research that social status is a major determinant of childhood survival and wellbeing. It also ignores recent child development research that reaches beyond the commonalities of the human condition to highlight also major individual differences between the young. These differences arise from a combination of genetic heritage and personal agency and from the interaction of these two forces with and within a specific set of historical, social and cultural circumstances.

Shifting the Paradigm

There remain major gaps in understanding and knowledge and major methodological challenges in relation to young people's engagement with war. Despite some significant advances, scholarship has yet to capture the true magnitude, nature or effects of such experiences. There is a serious dearth of systematic empirical information, especially concerning long-term outcomes. There is immense scope for the development and refinement of research with war-affected and displaced children and adolescents. Further investigation is essential to balance the weight of research that has so far focused on the impact of war on mental health with work

that looks at, for example, how political conflict affects adolescents' economic and social roles and integration, and its effect on gender relations, power within childhood and intergenerational relations. More research is essential also to understanding why children take up arms, what are their sources of emotional and social support and their strategies for survival and coping. Studies are needed to illuminate how children in different cultures perceive suffering, misfortune, healing and recovery, and the formation of their political and ideological commitments.

The present volume, which is driven mainly by anthropological theory and ethnographic methods, as opposed to medical or psychological paradigms, aims to complement the existing research with new findings and insights as well as to provide very different perspectives on many of the key issues. With an explicit focus on the narratives of young people, the chapters draw largely on the ethnographic literature and on first-hand accounts of conflict-affected populations in Guatemala, Liberia, Sri Lanka, Burma, Mozambique, Uganda, Jordan, Kosovo and Angola. Because the chapters in the collection are based mainly on detailed ethnographic research over extended periods, the events to which young people have been exposed are placed in a longer-term biographical context. This makes it possible to go beyond the immediate aftermath of a crisis and obtain a sense of its changing impact on and meaning for young people over time. Indeed, many of the research subjects whose stories form the heart of the book are young adults who have been asked to reflect on their past experiences as children living through war or displacement.

The collection warns us, first and foremost, against simplistic assumptions about children's reactions to conflict, suggesting that while it is difficult to exaggerate the horrors of war, it is quite possible to overuse concepts such as trauma. Young people's responses to war are revealed as multifaceted and nuanced; age is not necessarily the critical determinant of vulnerability, and even when profoundly distressed or troubled, the young frequently exercise remarkable resilience. In addition to the atrocities, the authors describe the aspirations and hopes, successes and achievements of young people and their ingenious survival strategies. Even when confronted by appalling adversities, it is revealed that many are able to influence positively their own fate and that of others who depend on them, such as younger siblings, sick parents, or their own children. The overwhelming lesson is that war does not inevitably destroy all that it touches, and that while war causes many to become extremely vulnerable, vulnerability does not in itself preclude ability.

At the same time, context is found to play a critical role in shaping personal responses to war and considerable space in the collection is given over to discussion of the material, social structural and ideational conditions that frame young people's experiences of adversity. Thus, reflection on children's condition, on their ideas, feelings and ways of coping with

conflict, is closely juxtaposed with analysis of the broader ideological and structural transformations associated with war. Social constructs like child, youth and family, and practices in child rearing and childcare come to acquire new meanings and functions. As the circumstances and contributions of children and adults, girls and boys, and men and women are altered, so are the definitions and expectations of childhood, youth, adulthood, girlhood, boyhood and other social categories. Many young people assume proto-adult roles within the home and on the battlefield. Alterations in status, role and circumstance are found to have fundamental implications for survival and for self-perception, identity and adaptation during and following war.

By building the empirical evidence on the testimonies of young people who have lived through war and displacement, the volume favours an emic over an etic perspective. This entails a shift in research emphasis from the measurement of universal signs and symptoms of psychological and emotional distress towards reflection and analysis of subjective understandings and meanings. Populations exposed to war and displacement commonly have a heightened need to interpret, understand and explain the extraordinary events to which they have been exposed. In this volume, considerable weight is given to such cultural narratives of war, which are revealed as invoking culturally endorsed codes of conduct and powerful symbols of loyalty and belonging. These cultural narratives enable groups involved in conflict to define themselves as distinct from others, providing them with their own particular histories, and locating them in relation to key military and political processes and events. Often they assign individuals to the category of perpetrator or victim, thereby establishing culpability and innocence in relation to atrocities committed. In some cases they can even provide mechanisms for forgiveness and redemption that may promote social healing and reconciliation when conflict has ceased.

Researching young people's experiences of conflict and displacement requires considerable attention to methodological issues and some dexterity in the application of methods. And yet the literature in this field is rather deficient, for aside from occasional bland descriptions of research instruments and brief accounts of how statistics are compiled and analysed, very few scholars explore the methods used or obstacles encountered in the field. The emphasis on young people's narratives in this volume brings to the fore issues of research methodology, methods and ethics. Several authors point to the need for innovation in this area, since it is argued that precoded instruments such as questionnaires and symptom checklists cannot capture the true nature of war experiences or their meanings for affected populations. Attention is paid to the shifting, ambiguous and elusive nature of evidence in the context and aftermath of war, and to the special difficulties of conducting research with young

people who are marginalised both socially and politically and whose views are overlooked by the powers that be.

Finally, as the collection questions accepted wisdom regarding family, children, childhood, adolescence and young people's involvement in war, so it highlights the implications for policy and practice. Clear indications are given of the need for review and change of objectives, approaches and strategies in humanitarian and other forms of provision for young people caught up in conflict. Perhaps the greatest of these suggestions raised in the volume is the acknowledgement that children and young people can and do reflect upon their own experiences of conflict. Too often programmes for war-affected children are dictated by adults' perceptions of the impact of war on young people. This volume is a powerful testimony to the ability of young people to analyse their past troubles and present concerns. Starting from children's and young people's definitions of constraints and opportunities is an important step in devising policy and programmes based upon a lived rather than theorised reality.

The Structure of the Volume

The collection has been divided into six sections with the intention of grouping the chapters according to the major issue(s) addressed by each one. The structure is as follows.

The Contexts of War

The book begins with contributions by Gillian Mann and Victor Igreja, both of whom challenge notions about the universality of human responses to adversity and emphasise how social and cultural context plays a critical role in framing the effects of war on children. Mann examines the literature on children separated from their families, decrying the tendency to research what she terms 'the generic child' and to ignore differences of status within childhood. In her view social distinctions such as gender, ethnicity and religious affiliation play a fundamental part in defining children's experiences of family separation and shaping the meanings they give to these experiences. She stresses the importance of social and cultural constructions of family and childhood, theories of child development and the nature of childcare practices in different communities in influencing children's understandings of and responses to events in their lives.

Writing about the Gorongosa region of Mozambique, Igreja's chapter has a similar focus in that it emphasises the cultural norms and social relations through which children experience armed conflict. He shows how prolonged exposure to civil war and drought in the region deprived the

people of Gorongosa of vital social and cultural resources that had given meaning to their existence and allowed expression of their collective identity. The conflict created profound discontinuities within the family, with extremely serious consequences for the very young. In particular, key life-regulating rituals and cultural mechanisms of infant care were disrupted, threatening infant wellbeing and survival to a degree that could not be explained simply by poverty or food scarcity. By highlighting the devastating social and cultural consequences of conflict, Igreja intends to critique orthodox psychological research that confines itself to intrapsychic functioning and psychopathological outcomes.

In these chapters there are significant insights for aid policies and interventions, the most notable being the need to guard against unwarranted assumptions of children's needs based on globalised understanding of family and child. But they also diverge in certain important respects. Hence, Mann explores the ethnographic evidence from many different societies and finds that in communities where delegated parenting is the norm, child-rearing tasks are shared among a large family group. She challenges accepted views about the interdependence between parents and offspring and stresses the positive reinforcement – emotional and practical – which children gain from intimate relationships with siblings and peers. Igreja, on the other hand, is concerned with the exclusivity of the maternal–infant bond and pinpoints it as the key cultural resource in the care and survival of very young children. Similarly, while Mann calls for child protection measures to be built around local beliefs and practices, Igreja warns that these practices may be irretrievably disrupted and distorted in war and may therefore not serve children at all well.

Vulnerability and Resilience among Adolescent Girls

In the chapters by Joanna de Berry and Aisling Swaine with Thomas Feeny, the wartime experiences of adolescent girls are analysed. De Berry focuses on young girls who lived in government settlement camps during the 1987 to 1992 civil war in the Teso region of north-east Uganda. Exploring the social relationships, structures and strategies that operate during conflict, she highlights the girls' vulnerability to grave sexual violations, arguing that the investigation of sexual abuse requires a critical examination of the specific ways in which people become and are made vulnerable in the context in which they live. Vulnerability is not an inherent characteristic of adolescent girls, she maintains, but was in this case a direct consequence of the pattern of social life that evolved in the camps. Nor was the vulnerability of these young women all-encompassing and permanent, since their testimonies reveal that even while experiencing great sadness and pain they showed immense courage during the conflict and remarkable resilience in its aftermath.

Swaine and Feeny write about the wartime recollections of two groups of adolescent girls, both Albanian Kosovars. One group was based in a refugee camp in Albania and the second had also been displaced but by the time of the field research had returned to Kosovo. The authors argue that the wartime experiences of adolescent girls can only be understood by recognising their status as a specific social category circumscribed by gender, ethnicity and generation. The suggestion is that even though adolescents have certain developmental competencies that separate them from children, they lack the social and personal attributes that define adulthood. Moreover, in the patriarchal context of Albanian Kosovar society, unmarried adolescent girls have very particular susceptibilities and experience conflict in ways that are quite distinct from other social groups. Due to the war there was greater risk of sexual violence and fewer societal mechanisms for protecting girls against it. Yet at the same time in Kosovar society it is not thought appropriate for girls to provide for their own protection, and this constituted an additional source of risk for young girls during the conflict.

Both chapters argue that marriage is valued socially as a means of protecting adolescent girls against sexual violation, whilst also showing that the girls themselves perceive such matters rather differently. In their view, early and/or arranged marriages can lead to new difficulties and suffering and living independently may have greater advantages. This highlights how, despite their evident vulnerability and the tenuous support from the wider community these girls retain an ability to analyse their circumstances, activate their own definitions and choices, make meaning, define action and shape the environment in which they live. Indeed, the powerful stories told in the chapters disclose the complex way in which human frailty interacts with human courage and ingenuity during adversity. They also stress how some of the greatest threats to the wellbeing of the young are due not to enemy action but to the behaviour of kin, neighbours or other members of their own community who are driven by self-interest and/or complicity with adversaries.

What is a Child?

It is now a fairly well established axiom of sociology and anthropology that childhood and youth are social rather than biological constructs. The chapters by Jessica Schafer, Harry West and Andrew Mawson all demonstrate how readily and effectively such constructs may be manipulated during conflict to serve political or military ends, with important implications for post-conflict social reintegration and for aid policy and practice.

Writing about Mozambique – although concerning themselves with different historical periods, cultural regions and combatant groups – Schafer and West both explore the ideological basis for young people's

engagement in warfare. They are critical of orthodox scholarship in this field and especially the premise that young combatants undergo a process of coercion, brutalisation and desocialisation to reach a state in which violence is normalised. West argues instead for the importance of revolutionary ideology in moulding the experience of female combatants, whereas Schafer speaks of patriarchal modelling. In fact, for the young fighters studied by Schafer violence was not even the most devastating aspect of war; many of them found separation from family far more painful. Appropriating Shona patriarchal imagery and casting the troops as children and leaders as fathers, the RENAMO forces filled this void and ensured filial loyalty and discipline through a system of 're-socialisation' using concepts of substitute kinship. West emphasises how the heroic images of the Front for the Liberation of Mozambique (FELIMO) Destacamento Feminino had a compelling influence on young girls, acting as a powerful incentive to their recruitment. With a clear view of their political role, the 'girls with guns' who feature in his chapter were not inducted into mindless violence but acted as central players in the historical drama that defined their times. The implication of West's chapter is that young people are not merely the passive receptors of adult ideas. In fact, in war children may be at the forefront of value formation and attitudinal change, while adults – less able to accommodate and overcome the many shocks and losses they have undergone – sometimes cling to idealised notions of the past.

Mawson's chapter on northern Uganda reflects on some of the dilemmas that can arise when societies and states try to resolve what to do about children who have committed atrocities during conflict. He contends that in this context different actors – local, national and international – had very different agendas and that these were negotiated in the development of a system of justice. These negotiations involved reconciling differing concepts of who is a child and differing ideas about what constitutes culpability and responsibility. Hence, Mawson's concern is less with how social constructions of childhood influence children's experiences of war, than with how this particular social construction was used in Uganda as a means of facilitating reconciliation and peace. He describes how in a conflict that involves abduction and conscription and brings people of the same ethnic group into confrontation with each other, the Acholi notion of childhood as a life phase free of moral responsibility is used to grant impunity to perpetrators of violence, both children and adults. A highly inclusive conceptualisation of the social category of child, in which many adult perpetrators are also incorporated, facilitates an extremely tolerant and liberal approach to justice. As such, the chapter emphasises the potential disjunction between international and local norms and standards in relation to both childhood and justice.

Children's Narratives

We have stated that in this volume the central empirical evidence is drawn from the narratives of children and young people who have experienced conflict and displacement. However, there are many difficulties associated with recording and interpreting the testimonies of young people affected by such adversities. One of the major challenges is the elusive nature of children's war testimonies. The chapters by Krisjon Rae Olson and Jason Hart explore the personal, social and political contexts in which children's narratives are not only constructed and represented but also modified and repressed. They describe situations in which the dominant cultural narrative of war provides an absolute truth that transcends all other versions of events, whilst also offering an overarching explanation of history. In this kind of context the voices and accounts of powerless groups generally become marginalised, the meta-narratives of war thereby undermining a real historical understanding of children. Hence, Olson argues that the settlement of thirty-six years of civil strife in Guatemala involved concealing children's experiences of violence within a master chronicle constructed by the Guatemalan Truth Commission. Similarly, Hart's chapter on Palestinian refugee children in Jordan deals with the suppression of young people's accounts by both nationalist and international interests that seek to promote a monolithic and seamless story of the Palestinian refugee experience.

Also emerging from these chapters is an important discussion of how children internalise, give meaning to and resist adult discourse and in particular how they reconcile their everyday experiences with adult interpretations of war events. Olson argues that taking children's voices seriously means acknowledging their active participation in social life, their engagement with the war and their suffering, which continues in the aftermath of conflict. Children in Santa María Nebaj, in the department of Quiché, are not only denied the refuge of social history, she suggests, but their consciousness of the atrocities and injustices of the past implies long term habituation to violence and loss. Hence her disturbing assertion about the necessary complicity of those who survive war in its violence.

Researching children who make up the third generation in a refugee population, Hart is not concerned with children's involvement in armed violence so much as their constructions of identity. He highlights how children negotiate the demands of parents and other adults who, as in many war-affected communities, are particularly insistent upon the conformity of the young to norms and values that are considered as defining their collective identity. Drawing upon the array of information and cultural material available, children demonstrate inherent creativity in fashioning identities which demonstrate their specificity as a generation. It is suggested that children and adults commonly reformulate identity and meaning in their lives in fundamentally different ways. This may be one

of the abiding legacies of conflict and displacement, producing a serious generational divide and thereby the potential for intergenerational strife.

Research Methodology and Methods

The central contribution of the chapters by Mats Utas, Carola Eyber and Alastair Ager, and Jo Boyden has to do with methodology and methods, which they maintain play a fundamental role in shaping research findings. Eyber and Ager, whose chapter draws on research in Angola with former combatants in the town of Lubango and in centres for the internally displaced in Huila province, demonstrate this point graphically by comparing findings arrived at through use of a series of contrasting methodologies and methods. The application of psychometric instruments yielded a diagnosis in which a significant percentage of these young people appeared to be traumatised – indeed, they were found to be suffering from a severe psychiatric condition, post traumatic stress disorder. Information derived from observation, focus group discussions and other participatory methods, however, revealed that the youths were astute analysts of their situation, fully engaged in income generating activities, sustaining relationships and functioning quite effectively in many other ways besides. The disparity in these findings leads the authors to highlight the inadequacy of a methodology based in the trauma discourse and of methods built on predetermined ideas about the nature of risk and response in populations exposed to massive societal disruptions. It also leads them to call for the use of participatory methods as the best means of gaining insight not only into the issues young people define as difficulties but also into their coping strategies and strengths.

Utas writes about fieldwork conducted with a group of young former combatants living in an abandoned factory in Monrovia, Liberia's capital. He examines the art of relationship building, highlighting the delicate and changeable association between ethnographer and research subject. The particular focus is on issues of truth and trust, the argument being that truth is bound by context and relationship and that in the volatile world of homeless and socially ostracised youth, trust, which is hard earned, is easily lost. In his discussion of methods, research based on rapid assessments and interviews, and research which is reliant on aid agencies for access to its subjects is found wanting. The grounds are that this kind of research yields standardised responses in victim modes and masks nuances of lived experience that may in practice be extremely meaningful to respondents. With its attention to the question of how researchers work with highly sensitive information and how they manage personal safety and the safety of their subjects, the chapter also touches on a range of important ethical issues.

Drawing mainly on fieldwork in Burma and Sri Lanka, the chapter by Boyden highlights some of the major methodological, practical and ethi-

cal challenges and dilemmas associated with ethnographic research with war-affected populations. She questions the role of research in the reporting of human suffering, describing the difficulty scholars confront when access to respondents is mediated by security forces who have a vested interest in controlling civilians, and when research findings are a potential source of intelligence information. She argues that while the research process depends on trust, in communities that have been embroiled in conflict this can be an extremely rare commodity. Under such circumstances research may create a disjunction with reality. She maintains that legitimate protection concerns arising from children's involvement in research can override important considerations regarding their political consciousness, development and activism. Addressing children's responses to misfortune, she stresses the need for methodological innovation and the use of interpretive models that are sensitive to culture. The piece ends with a call for ethical codes that respect children's political and social competencies.

Agendas for the Future

On the basis of her extensive experience in this field, Pamela Reynolds sketches out a research agenda for the future in her concluding chapter to the volume and proposes some of the most critical questions for further investigation and analysis. She interprets the child soldier phenomenon largely in terms of an international model of exploitation and oppression and reminds us of the profound personal risks for young people that may be associated with their co-option into cultures of violence. It is her core contention that children are central to the whole business of warfare, for adults become deeply reliant on their many and varied contributions during times of political strife. Thus, the young black activists in South Africa that she refers to played a critical part in the struggle against a deeply unjust and harsh regime.

Reynolds urges us to remember that seeking to explore and understand the impact of war on the young is not the same as to condone. In delving into the effects of relationships, social structures and cultural mechanisms that operate in war, in looking for order, explanation and resilience during conflict, we should not ignore the fact that for all the children and young people mentioned in this volume, life will never be the same again and theirs is a life marred by the most terrible of suffering. Indeed, a fuller understanding of what it means to be born into and grow up in wartime should only serve to strengthen a resolve to protect children and young people in conflict. The seeds of protection appear in all the chapters in this volume: protection given by cultural norms, by creative narrative, self-protection, the protection of friends, family and community, rebuilding protection in the light of peace, ethical protection.

Often broken, often damaged, weakened and changed, the personal and social resources for the protection of children in conflict nonetheless remain. The challenge now is how to move from better understanding of such resources into practice: the practice of using, rebuilding and restoring what preserves and gives hope for the many hundreds of thousands of children living through war. Children who will today wake up and hear the sound of gunfire, run from a battlefield, cry for a lost friend, be separated from home and family and wonder how they will ever make sense of what they are living through.

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