

**Screening African Conflicts: The different faces of Africa's Child Soldiers**

**Afro-pessimistic / Afro-optimistic Portrayals on Screen**

by

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## DECLARATION

This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

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## ABSTRACT

When discussing and addressing child soldiering in Africa, both in print or in film, there are a number of key factors that need to be considered. For example, taking into account the root causes for both recruitment and voluntary enlistment – which include the changed nature of weapons and warfare, the breakdown of law and order, and intolerable levels of poverty, unemployment and also the social pressures on children to engage in armed conflicts. By bearing these factors in mind when delving into this complex subject matter, helped in ascertaining the ways in which certain modalities of thinking about Africa, as well as her child soldiers, influence Western perspectives, convictions and beliefs via a variety of media.

However, for this particular dissertation, the focus is turned entirely to the Afro-pessimistic / Afro-optimistic cinematic representations of African child soldiers in three case study films: *Ezra* (2007), *The Silent Army* (2008) and *War Witch* (2012). These films were closely analysed at the hand of certain research question which ultimately allowed for both researcher and reader to keep an open mind when being confronted with the different faces of Africa's children on screen.

Films create vivid familiarities and powerful emotional relationships by establishing close connections to a world that is wholly unfamiliar and succeeds to de-familiarize the present as well as the past. The social functioning of the film industry takes on exceptional importance when considering the facts about the ways in which a motion picture positions itself vis-à-vis a particular conflict or social and political issue such as child soldiering in Africa.

Feature films also carry with them the potential to play a unique and crucial role in introducing Westerners to the African continent and its people and in engaging them in African experiences. Film is also a very powerful medium, and for that reason it becomes all the more important to address the veracity of fiction films introducing viewers to Africa and her child soldiers. Cinematic representations succeed in integrating in individual characters multiple aspects of politics, society, and cultures, and the dramatic stories told in feature films elicit emotional responses and provoke calls to action through the individual characters' that inspire empathy for people living in dismal conditions in Africa's distant lands.

Such intimate portraits of people who belong to different cultures, experience a different history, and who live in quite different economic and political climates, are particularly important with audiences that start out with negative views of the *Other*. Thus, to ascertain and adequately address these issues of representation, notions of insider / outsider debates, as well as that of the politics of the gaze in feature films, magic realism, complex political victims and perpetrators were problematized and scrutinised in order to access the harsh reality faced by so many of Africa's vulnerable children, and the effects that these Afro-optimistic / Afro-pessimistic portrayals have on viewers' perceptions of child soldiers in Africa.

Consequently, the main aim of this dissertation is to successfully illustrate how Afro-pessimism (as well as in some cases Afro-optimism), as modalities of thinking about the African continent, feature in (cinematic) discourses about Africa's child soldiers. Specific questions are asked and investigated as to whether these films deem Africa and its child soldiers as just another unfixable aspect of Africa's reality, continually in need of Western salvation, or whether there are some on-screen depictions that portray stories of hope, resilience and courage.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to extend an enormous amount of gratitude towards my supervisor, Associate Professor Martin Botha - without your continuous backing, enthusiasm and guidance this study would not have been envisioned or been able to take form.

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To Sue Ogterop, at the University of Cape Town's African Studies Library, thank you very much for assisting me in my research efforts during my research. A great deal of gratitude must also be extended to Ingrid Thompson, the Subject Librarian at the Humanities Information Division at the University of Cape Town's Chancellor Oppenheimer Library, for her continued support and assistance.

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## TECHNICAL NOTES BY THE AUTHOR

### REFERENCING SYSTEM:

The Chicago Referencing System (16th edition - notes and bibliography) is used for this thesis, and the electronic referencing programme RefWorks was utilised to set-up, finalize and generate all reference information contained in the footnotes and bibliography.

- This system includes the use of abbreviated / shortened versions of a particular source - that is used after the first official mention / footnote of that particular source and / or on a new page.

For example:

- <sup>1</sup> C. Singer and L. Dovey, "Representations of African Childhood in Conflict and Post-Conflict Contexts: Johnny Mad Dog, Ezra, and Sleepwalking Land," in *Lost and Othered Children in Contemporary Cinema*, eds. D. C. Olson and A. Scahill (Plymouth, United Kingdom: Lexington Books, 2012), 151.
  - <sup>1</sup> Singer and Dovey, *Representations of African Childhood in Conflict and Post-Conflict Contexts: Johnny Mad Dog, Ezra, and Sleepwalking Land*, 152.
- It also allows for the use of the term *ibid* when the same source is used consecutively in the footnotes (on the same page).

For example:

- <sup>1</sup> N. Mboti, "To show the World as it is, Or as it is Not: The Gaze of Hollywood Films about Africa," *African Identities* 8, no. 4 (2010), 317.
- <sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 317-318.

- Lastly, footnotes are always inserted at the end of a sentence, even though a certain quotation may only form a small part of the sentence.

For example:

- According to Honwana, with ‘these multiple, interstitial positions’, child soldiers exemplify the condition of concurrently having multifaceted and complex identities and wholly wanting and lingering for a stable, unwavering, and socially defined place to call home.<sup>1</sup>

#### QUOTATION SYSTEM AND STYLE:

The following quotation system is used in this thesis:

- For single / individual quotations: ‘.....’ (Single quotation marks)

For example:

- ‘Child soldier... means any person under 18 years of age who is part of any kind of regular or irregular armed force or armed group in any capacity.’

- For quotation within another quotation: “..... ‘.....’ .....” (Double quotation marks on outside, single quotation marks on the inside)

For example:

- “The *old wars* [of the world] were fought under a set of battle rules with clear political objectives, well defined standards of victory and defeat, boundaries to battlefields, and a distinction between civilians and combatants. [These so-called] *new wars*, [according to Rosen and other scholars], are ‘aimless, formless, and without real political purposes’ and have no rules of warfare.”

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<sup>1</sup> E.g. xxxxxxxxxxxx

## **DISSERTATION STRUCTURE AND OVERVIEW OF CHAPTERS**

Following the brief introduction, the five main chapters of this dissertation are laid out and constructed in such a manner that allows for an easy flow of information. It is also designed this way to provide readers with a clear understanding of the phenomenon of child soldiering in Africa, with specific reference being made to the ways in which the issues surrounding child soldiering are being addressed through the medium of film. Additionally, a list of abbreviations, as well as a glossary of key concepts, themes and theories is also provided for further reference and understanding.

### **CHAPTER ONE: BACKGROUND, RATIONALE AND OBJECTIVES**

During this chapter a brief literature background of child soldiering is provided, as well as the research design, and specific research questions that structured this study. This acts as a guide for readers to bear in mind what the aims and objectives of this study is.

Here the broad context(s) of war, poverty, politics, culture and tradition in Africa (and their interrelatedness) are touched upon by drawing on the works of scholars who specialise in the field of children at war / child soldiers such as A. Honwana, D.M. Rosen, L.B. Eichstadt and P.W Singer. The broad context that is provided serves to inform the subsequent chapter layouts and descriptions for this dissertation. Specific research questions, which are formulated to address the complex issues of child soldiering in Africa, will aid this.

### **CHAPTER TWO: METHODOLOGICAL AND THEMATIC FRAMEWORK**

The second chapter explores both the methodologies and thematic works that influenced and helped shape this research study. This study approached the task of film analysis by using multiple methodologies, theoretical and thematic themes. Issues such as how scholars and academic theorists approach studies of child soldiering in Africa are relayed to the ways in which filmmakers embark on the journey to act as *griots* and to tell stories / convey 'reality' through the means of feature films will be central to the research at hand.

Directly flowing from the aforementioned issue is that it then becomes crucial to address questions of reality, and documenting the 'truth' - looking at the intricate debates of taking Africa to the silver screen. This is done, whilst also scrutinising the methodological problems of studying child soldiers – both in theory as well as the practice of putting this tragic phenomenon on screen.

Themes and concepts, as applied in the analysis of the three films used as case studies, as well as to the related research questions, are informed by a number of writers representing a diversity of academic disciplines. Lastly, the approach to the analysis of the case study films are be addressed, as well as why these specific films were chosen for research purposes. Key concepts and themes that inform and strengthen this study are also discussed and include notions such as complex political victimhood, compassion fatigue, ethnographical spectacle, and magic realism.

### **CHAPTER THREE: THE CONTEXT OF WAR: CHILD SOLDIERING IN AFRICA**

During chapter three the various complex context(s) of African conflicts are placed under the spotlight. Political, economic and social facets of both cross-border as well as internal conflicts will be examined in order to ascertain how these unrests have given rise to (and continue to fuel) the horrific phenomenon of child soldiers in Africa. Due to the scope of this study, the focus however only falls on general, overarching remarks with regards to child soldiering in Africa rather than aiming to clarify these pressing issues as they pertain to specific African countries. Yet, where specific countries, regions and militias are identified in the cinematic narratives of the case study films, a brief background is provided in order to guide and assist the particular cinematic analysis.

The different 'phases' of child soldiering are carefully scrutinised. Firstly, this includes looking at the recruitment / enlistment of young boys and girls (albeit forced or voluntary). Secondly the purposes and tasks that these child recruits are required to fulfil in these conflict situations are addressed and the role of warlords also become relevant here and will be discussed. Then, attention is briefly turned to the international relations that have been put in place to curb the use of child soldiers. And finally, the focus is turned to the challenges faced by these boys and girls after they escape, or are freed / rescued from their captors. As a result, the (P)DDR programmes, headed by various NGOs and church groups, are also discussed.

## CHAPTER FOUR: SCREENING AFRICAN CONFLICTS

Chapter four addresses some serious and difficult issues / questions surrounding the debate of how African conflicts are depicted in the media – and in particular in feature films. These issues are addressed through a range of sections to ensure a thorough analysis of how Africa and her crisis situations and conflicts are put to screen. Firstly, an issue closely (inter)related to the aforementioned debate(s) is what has been referred to as the ‘ethics of representation’ and it argues that there are moral imperatives which might appropriately be seen as common to all professional reproductions and the use of still and / or moving images (both on- and off-screen). Other crucial issues that are scrutinised during this chapter are the notions of postmodernism and the crisis of representation.

Parallel to the abovementioned, this chapter discusses the so-called *African Gaze* and the problematic insider / outsider debates. Mboti argues that ‘the function of cinematic images is to communicate *specific ways - gazes - of seeing the world*. Behind every film, then, is a gaze, or a *conscious* attempt to see the world in a certain way. Gazes are not objective, nor do they really need to be. Rather, gazes are part of communities of meaning that have no inherent validity, but must of necessity be contested, celebrated, or fought over. Gazes not only imply a source and a sender, but have never had the capacity to show the world *as it is*.<sup>2</sup> Mboti also states that ‘film texts that purport to be able to project Africa ‘believably’, ‘realistically’ and ‘truthfully’ are either carelessly mistaken, or simply working a deception.’<sup>3</sup> This then underscores the debates surrounding the difficulties faced by image-makers and filmmakers in documenting the *Other*.

Theories of audience perception(s), expectation(s) and reception(s) are also examined in order to ascertain what can be ‘anticipated’ from the depiction(s) of certain topics on screen as well as how these representations (of Africa, its unrests and in particular its child soldiers) are received (and perceived) by audiences. Here, one has to pay attention to how the Afro-pessimistic / Afro-optimistic views of a reality (an African reality) far-removed from their own influences an audience to receive, engage with and respond to visual depictions of Africa’s child soldiers.

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<sup>2</sup> N. Mboti, "To show the World as it is, Or as it is Not: The Gaze of Hollywood Films about Africa," *African Identities* 8, no. 4 (2010), 317.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 317-318.

Lastly, this chapter points out, and in the end effectively challenges, conventional / stereotypical representations of Africa and its people. Drawing on the works and efforts of countless scholars and writers such as M. Thackway, L. Saxton, M. Evans and I. Glenn the chapter provides literature on the *(re)imagining of a continent*. The study considers the conflicting narratives of child soldiers - as both victims and perpetrators, and how this complex perception translates to ambiguous readings of such images (both in print and on screen). By taking into account both the Afro-pessimistic and Afro-optimistic portrayals of Africa, (and then in particular child soldiers) that are available to audiences, allows for crucial discussion(s) that will be dealt with in this section. It then ultimately also informs the rest of the study when the later chapters deal with three case studies of feature films that take the phenomenon of child soldiers to the silver screens.

#### **CHAPTER FIVE: FILM ANALYSES**

The research for this chapter is structured in such a manner to provide ground-breaking knowledge on the (cinematic) representation of African-conflicts - with special focus on child soldiering. Furthermore, this dissertation, and its parameters, draws on previous studies done on the broader subject matter of films that depict Africa's hardships, whilst still maintaining a great degree of originality. Therefore, the three case studies is not limited to a certain period or genre, but is rather chosen after careful consideration of what each one of the three case study films in particular can bring to the study. Analyses focus on the complex (and at times highly stereotypical) ways in which child soldiers are represented in films. This is done within the thematic framework of Afro-pessimism and Afro-optimism.

This final chapter then, consequently, is dedicated solely to the in-depth analyses of the feature films used as case studies. Each film is examined and discussed individually against the intricate backdrop of existing literature and public discourse on child soldiers in Africa (as discussed in chapters one, two and three). The three films that are analysed against these methodological and thematic frameworks as in the first four chapters are: *Ezra* (2007); *The Silent Army* (2008) and *War Witch* (2012). During the final conclusions of this study, a brief summary of all the findings of the case study analyses (at the hand of the pre-defined set of research questions) is also provided.

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<b>AI</b>	Amnesty International
<b>APC</b>	All People's Congress (Sierra Leone)
<b>CRC</b>	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
<b>CSC</b>	Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers
<b>DRC</b>	Democratic Republic of the Congo
<b>ECOWAS</b>	Economic Community of West African States
<b>HIV/AIDS</b>	Human Immune Deficiency Virus Infection / Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
<b>HRW</b>	Human Rights Watch
<b>IC</b>	Invisible Children
<b>ICC</b>	International Criminal Court
<b>IDP</b>	Internally Displaced Person
<b>ILO</b>	International Labour Organisation
<b>IMF</b>	International Monetary Fund
<b>KP</b>	The Kimberley Process
<b>LRA</b>	Lord's Resistance Army
<b>NGO</b>	Non-governmental Organisation
<b>OAS</b>	Organization of American States
<b>OAU</b>	Organization of African Unity
<b>OSCE</b>	Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe

<b>(P)DDR</b>	Prevention, Disarmament, Demobilisation, and Reintegration Programmes
<b>POW</b>	Prisoner of War
<b>PTSD</b>	Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
<b>RENAMO</b>	Resistência Nacional Moçambicana (Mozambican National Resistance)
<b>RUF</b>	Revolutionary United Front (Sierra Leone)
<b>SCSL</b>	Special Court for Sierra Leone
<b>SLA</b>	Sierra Leone Army
<b>SLTRC</b>	Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission
<b>TRC</b>	Truth and Reconciliation Commission
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>UNDP</b>	United Nations Development Program
<b>UNICEF</b>	United Nations Children's Fund
<b>UNITA</b>	União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola (National Union for the Total Independence of Angola)

## GLOSSARY – KEY CONCEPTS, THEMES AND THEORIES

### i. African Warlords

'Assuming that leadership is highly regarded on the [African] continent, or there exists what Chabal and Daloz refer to as individualisation of politics, the field of *warlordism* has taken on even greater emphasis [in the past few decades].'<sup>4</sup> A warlord is a non-state actor and so operates without any interference from the state (implying that the state is relatively weak); *warlordism* is also a highly militarised condition. It also has its constituency and in that small vacuum it creates a work area.<sup>5</sup> A warlord also has, [what Lawack refers to as] *military legitimacy*, but little political legitimacy. However, [consequently it is crucial to note] that *warlordism* does not enjoy a positive connotation / reputation.<sup>6</sup>

### ii. Afro-pessimism

Stereotypes of Afro-pessimism have always pervaded thinking about Africa and the difficulties faced by those who live within her borders. In a similar manner these preconceived and biased notions have the tendency to portray Africans as incapable of self-rule in Western discourse and film can be seen as part of an overall hegemonic strategy to maintain economic and political power on the continent. The term gained currency in the 1980s, when many Africanists in Western creditor countries believed that there was no hope for consolidating democracy and achieving sustainable economic development in the region.

### iii. Afro-optimism

Afro-optimism is defined as a state of absolute conviction that a bright future lies ahead of the African continent, and that the sons and daughters of the continent will be the crafters of such a future.

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<sup>4</sup> M. S. Lawack, "Warlords in Africa: A Comparative Study of Jonas Savimbi and Farah Aideed" (Masters of Arts, University of Stellenbosch), 14.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

#### **iv. Audience Identification**

'*Identification* is a mechanism through which audience members experience reception and interpretation of the text [or film] from the inside, as if the events were happening to them. Identification is tied to the social effects of media in general; to the learning of violence from violent films and television, specifically; and is a central mechanism for explaining [or making sense of] such effects.'<sup>7</sup> This theory also then links to notions of reception theories which are discussed later.

#### **v. Audience Perspectives**

Thomas Austin advocates that 'feeling and knowing are two axes of possible viewer engagement, two sets of pleasures, two currencies of value, potentially available to documentary audiences.'<sup>8</sup> These modes of experience are best approached analytically as co-present: they can and do overlap for many viewers. Their exact balance will of course depend on the specificities of the [film] text, and on the perspective of individual viewers, who may value each quality differently.<sup>9</sup>

#### **vi. Audience Reception**

Audience reception theories acknowledge that audiences are not homogenous and that their experiences, (perceptions and receptions) of what they see in films may be context specific. These theories are able to examine the individual's subject position, the text's mode of production, and the circumstances of the showing of the work. Consequently, the interaction of these various factors impact on and affects the reception of the various audiences.

#### **vii. Black Noir**

*Black noir* itself signifies another genre of film noir, one in which black (primarily African American) filmmakers appropriate noir techniques to address and redress black experiences.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> J. Cohen, "Defining Identification: A Theoretical Look at the Identification of Audiences with Media Characters," *Mass Communication & Society* 4, no. 3 (2001), 245.

<sup>8</sup> T. Austin, "Seeing, Feeling, Knowing: A Case Study of Audience Perspectives on Screen Documentary," *Participations: Online Journal of Audience and Reception Studies* 2, no. 1 (2005), 10.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>10</sup> D. A. Mafe, "(Mis)Imagining Africa in the New Millennium: The Constant Gardener and Blood Diamond," *Camera Obscura* 25, no. 3 75 (2011), 71.

### **viii. Burden of Representation**

Shohat and Stam write that 'on the symbolic battlegrounds of the mass media, the struggle over representation in the simulacra realm homologises that of the political sphere, where questions of imitation and representation easily slide into issues of delegation and voice.'<sup>11</sup>

### **ix. Child Soldiers**

According to the 1997 Cape Town Principles:

'Child soldier... means any person under 18 years of age who is part of any kind of regular or irregular armed force or armed group in any capacity.'<sup>12</sup>

These capacities included but are not limited to tasks such as cooks, porters, messengers, and those accompanying such groups, other than purely as family members. It includes girls [and boys] recruited for sexual purposes and forced marriage. It does not, therefore, only refer to a child who is carrying or has carried / used weapons.

In 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of Children (UNCRC) defines a child as someone below the age of 18. However, it is important also to take into account that the definition of childhood varies extensively across various cultures – especially in Africa. Within many of these cultures, young children assume work and social and household responsibilities in order to help provide for their families. In many cultures then, during times of war, these responsibilities are extended to protect and serve their communities.

### **x. Cinematic Production**

Cinematic production is socially constructed 'within a three-cornered association between filmmakers, film spectators, and the film-texts themselves, and at every point in that nexus of relationships, [one] encounters negotiation and interaction involving active social beings and institutionalised social practices.'<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> E. Shohat and R. Stam, "Stereotype, Realism and the Struggle Over Representation," in *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media*, eds. E. Shohat and R. Stam, First ed. (London: Routledge, 1994), 178-179.

<sup>12</sup> D. M. Rosen, *Armies of the Young: Child Soldiers in War and Terrorism* (London: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 9.

<sup>13</sup> A. Tudor, "Sociology and Film," in *Film Studies: Critical Approaches*, eds. J. Hill and P. Church-Gibson (London, UK: Oxford University Press, 2000), 194.

### **xi. Conflict versus War**

According to Käkönen, peace research defines a *conflict* as 'a conflict of interests between two or more parties in which — in the spirit of the Realist tradition — the constellation of game is of a zero sum nature.'<sup>14</sup> Hence, a conflict can be an unarmed serious political, diplomatic or economic confrontation between countries or groups.

A *war* is, in turn, [is defined as] 'a prolonged or organised armed clash. A war is commonly also characterised by at least 1,000 deaths. Therefore, a war is a part of the more comprehensive concept of a conflict. According to this definition, the conflicts in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Sierra Leone are wars.'<sup>15</sup>

### **xii. Compassion Fatigue**

The term *compassion fatigue*, by its real name, points to the indifference towards the suffering of others. With regards to cinematic representations of armed conflicts, civil unrests and cases of child soldiering in Africa, it implies that recurring / specific renderings of these situations may leave audiences numb to the real situation on the ground in these distressing situations.

### **xiii. Complex Political Perpetrators**

'The concept of [*complex political perpetrators*] aptly describes a generation of youth who have grown up in settings of chronic crisis and, presented with a set of 'choice less decisions', develop strategies to navigate complex, violent terrains.'<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> M. Vehnäkäki, "Diamonds and Warlords: The Geography of War in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Sierra Leone," *Nordic Journal of African Studies* 11, no. 1 (2002), 49.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> E. K. Baines, "Complex Political Perpetrators: Reflections on Dominic Ongwen," *Journal of Modern African Studies* 47, no. 2 (2009), 164-165.

#### xiv. Complex Political Victims

'The *complex political victim* is a victim who is no longer chained to the characteristics of complete innocence and purity, but remains a victim nonetheless.'<sup>17</sup> And what emerges from this definition is "a victim who may bear some discursive responsibility for his / her victimisation – a victim who may have a contradictory set of 'interests' and as such would have difficulty fitting into the traditional script of the 'ideal victim.'"<sup>18</sup>

#### xv. Crisis of Representation

According to Stuart Hall the word *representation* in a way 'has a double meaning, even in its common-sense understanding. It does mean *to present, to image, to depict* – or *to offer a depiction of something else*.'<sup>19</sup> But he then goes on to state that 'the word *representation* or *representation* does carry with it the notion that something was there already and, through the media, has been *represented*.'<sup>20</sup>

Media practices, like feature films, represent certain topics, types of people, events, represent situations – in other words this signifies that within the notion of representations lies the idea of *giving meaning*. So, the representation is the way in which meaning is somehow given to the things which are depicted through the (moving) images on movie screens which *stand for* that which is being conveyed / portrayed.

The *crisis of representation* thus comes in at the juncture of these representations, and the multitude of possible meanings inferred by the images used on screen. Also, this points to the purposes and motivations of filmmakers to frame / represent certain images in a particular way – causing for a crisis in the act of representation as they (the filmmakers) do so to shape audience perceptions and understandings of the situation(s) depicted.

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<sup>17</sup> E. Bouris, *Complex Political Victims* (Bloomfield: Kumarian Press Inc., 2007), 10.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>19</sup> S. Hall, "Representation and the Media," Media Education Foundation, [http://www.mediaed.org/assets/products/409/transcript\\_409.pdf](http://www.mediaed.org/assets/products/409/transcript_409.pdf) (Accessed 12 February, 2013).

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

## **xvi. Chronic Crisis**

The term *chronic crisis* describes the settings in which 'decline and conflict become the societal states from which people make sense of events inscribing the devastation in the everydayness of life.'<sup>21</sup>

## **xvii. Ethics of Representation**

Although journalists, scholars and filmmakers alike may all use photographic technologies for different purposes and in different ways, there are [according to Gross] moral imperatives which might appropriately be seen as common to all professional [(re)productions] and uses of [both still and moving] images.<sup>22</sup> These are, firstly, the image maker's commitment to him / herself to produce movies [still and/or moving] which reflect his / her intention(s), to the best of his / her ability.

Secondly, it involves the image maker's responsibility to adhere to the standards of his / her profession, and to fulfil his / her commitment to the institutions or individuals who have made the production economically possible; and then, thirdly, it signals to the image maker's obligation to his / her subjects, and [very importantly] and fourthly, the image maker's responsibility to the audience(s).<sup>23</sup>

Gross then also goes further to state that the 'constellation of responsibility and standards shifts' when one applies it to the practice of different professions [such as reporters, scholars and filmmakers], but in some way these combine to define an ethical position for image-making, and by contrast, to identify locations of unethical practices.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Baines, *Complex Political Perpetrators: Reflections on Dominic Ongwen*, 165.

<sup>22</sup> L. Gross, J. S. Katz and J. Ruby, *Image Ethics: The Moral Rights of Subjects in Photographs, Film, and Television* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1991), 6.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

### **xviii. Ethnographical Spectacle**

Sterling argues that when one examines the ways in which Hollywood and its commentators fetishize Africa and then in particular African conflicts, one is subjected to another form of what she considers to be an 'ethnographic spectacle.'<sup>25</sup>

She contends that Western films become a form of 'cinematic trauma, as they are built on the foundation of empire building, the causative narrative of the civilising mission – they presuppose and reaffirm an understanding of the African world / [reality] as a world of chaos, as world in perpetual need that only Western intervention can save.'<sup>26</sup>

### **xix. Fiction / Feature Films**

*Fiction / feature films* create vivid familiarities and powerful emotional relationships by establishing close connections to a world that is wholly unfamiliar and succeeds to de-familiarise the present as well as the past. The social functioning of the film industry takes on exceptional importance when considering the facts about the ways in which a motion picture positions itself vis-à-vis a particular conflict.

### **xx. Film Adaptation**

Van Vugt writes that '*film adaptation* is the transfer of a written work to film. It is recognised as a type of derivative work. Whether adhering strictly to the source material or interpreting concepts derived from the original work, adaptations are necessarily extensions or interpretations of the original story. These interpretations can augment or detract from the original work.'<sup>27</sup>

He quotes Konigsberg when he then goes further to state that 'when referring to adaptations, this paper will use the broad definition – 'a work in one medium that derives its impulse as well as varying number of its elements from a work in a different medium.'<sup>28</sup> Consequently, it can be argued that this definition

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<sup>25</sup> C. Sterling, "Visions of War, Testaments of Peace: The "Burden" of Sierra Leone," in *Narrating War and Peace in Africa*, eds. L. Falola and H. Ter Haar (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2010), 196.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 196-197.

<sup>27</sup> N. Van Vugt, "Film Adaptation, Alternative Cinema and Lynchian Moments of Transposition" (Master of Arts in Communication and New Media, McMaster University), 1.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

can then extend to a multitude of interpreted works, and is thus not limited to a specific medium, or genre.

#### **xxi. Genre**

In film theory, the term / concept *genre* refers to the method based on similarities in the narrative elements from which films are constructed. It points to a specific class or category of artistic endeavour which carries with it a particular and unique form, content, style and cinematic technique.

#### **xxii. Magical Realism**

According to Jean-Pierre Durix, 'our most restrictive [understanding and] definition of the term [*magical realism*], the magic realist aims at a basis of mimetic illusion while destroying it regularly with a strange treatment of time, space, characters, or what many people (in the Western world at least) take as the basic rules of the physical world.'<sup>29</sup>

#### **xxiii. Mediatization**

According to Stig Hjarvard, 'a theory of *mediatization* has to be able to describe overall developmental trends in society across different contexts and, by means of concrete analysis, demonstrate the impacts of media on various institutions and spheres of human activity.'<sup>30</sup> It refers to 'a sociocultural process of media influencing and being influenced by the individuals, communities, and systems in which they are embedded.'<sup>31</sup>

#### **xxiv. Militia**

The concept of *militia* is usually deployed when describing the 'taking part in some form of inter (or intra) group fighting within a geographical area, and as belonging to a specific group or leader. However, [it should be noted that the *militia*] cannot be defined solely in terms of their role as agents of warlord power in contemporary Africa.'<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> S. Schroeder, *Rediscovering Magical Realism in the Americas*. Greenwood Publishing Group, 2004), 5.

<sup>30</sup> B. Karlin and R. A. Matthew, "Kony 2012 and the Mediatization of Child Soldiers," *Peace Review* 24, no. 3 (2012), 255.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> A. Hills, "Warlords, Militia and Conflict in Contemporary Africa: A Re-Examination of Terms," *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 8, no. 1 (1997), 39.

## **xxv. Militarisation**

The term *militarisation* describes 'non-civilian attributes of refugee populated areas, including inflows of weapons, military training, and recruitment [and] may also include actions of refugees and / or exiles who engage in non-civilian activities outside the refugee camp, yet who depend on assistance from refugees or international [aid] organisations.'<sup>33</sup> Militarisation further then implies that the refugee community 'lacks the protection mandated by international law(s) and has lost its civilian character.'<sup>34</sup>

## **xxvi. Necropolitics**

*Necropolitics* can be described as the relationship between sovereignty and power; over life and death. In his article *Necropolitics*, Achille Mbembe argues that 'contemporary forms of subjugation of life to the power of death profoundly reconfigure the relations among resistance, sacrifice, and terror.'<sup>35</sup>

## **xxvii. Night Commuters / Night Wanderers**

In Northern Uganda, '*night commuters*, most of whom are children, flee the insecurity of their [rural] communities each evening unsupervised out of fear of being abducted and to seek safety in hospitals and city shelters.'<sup>36</sup>

## **xxviii. Noir Atlantic**

Mafe points to Dan Flory who defines the term *noir Atlantic* as 'a sensibility about the global connectedness of various oppressions, as well as an awareness of various shared values, ideals, and possible solutions that might remedy the social problems posed by such oppressions. Flory uses *noir Atlantic* as a constructive term - one that speaks to the 'internationalisation of black noir.'<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> S. K. Lischer, "War, Displacement, and the Recruitment of Child Soldiers in the Democratic Republic of Congo," in *Child Soldiers in the Age of Fractured States*, ed. Gates, S. & Reich, S. (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2010), 146.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 146.

<sup>35</sup> J. A. Mbembé and L. Meintjes, "Necropolitics," *Public Culture* 15, no. 1 (2003), 39.

<sup>36</sup> M. J. Westerhaus et al., "Framing HIV Prevention Discourse to Encompass the Complexities of War in Northern Uganda," *American Journal of Public Health* 97, no. 7 (2007), 1184.

<sup>37</sup> Mafe, "(Mis)Imagining Africa in the New Millennium: *The Constant Gardener* and *Blood Diamond*," 71.

### **xxix. *Old Wars and New Wars***

Rosen contends that “the *old wars* [of the world] were fought under a [specific] set of battle rules with clear political objectives, well defined standards of victory and defeat, boundaries to battlefields, and a distinction between civilians and combatants. [However, the so-called] *new wars* being fought in present-day [according to Rosen and other scholars], are ‘aimless, formless, and without real political purposes’ and have no rules of warfare.”<sup>38</sup>

### **xxx. *Othering***

The act of *othering* signifies that ‘symbolic boundaries are central to all culture.’<sup>39</sup> By marking ‘*difference*’ it leads us, symbolically, to close ranks, shore up culture and to stigmatise and expel anything which is defined as tainted, unusual and non-standard. *Othering*, as an extension of stereotyping, in other words, is part of the maintenance of social and symbolic order. It sets up a symbolic frontier between the normal and the different; the regular and the uncontrolled; the acceptable and the unacceptable; what belongs and what does not or is ‘Other’ - between insiders and outsiders; and Us and Them.<sup>40</sup>

### **xxxi. ‘*Othered Children*’**

The term “*othered children* challenges deeply-held convictions about the *naturalness* of childhood, particularly as childlike bodies are defined as ‘vulnerable’, ‘dependent’, ‘innocent’, and simultaneously asexual / heterosexual... [Consequently, it becomes clear that] the *othered child* has occupied the interstice within an identity that is constructed for them via adults, and when such children strain against adult constructions, they become marginalised, outside the idealised notions of what children should be.”<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> A. Samphansakul, "Child Soldiers and Intrastate Armed Conflicts: An Analysis of the Recruitments of Child Soldiers in Civil Wars between 2001 and 2003" (Master of Arts, University of North Texas), 8.

<sup>39</sup> S. Hall, "The Spectacle of the 'Other'," in *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, Vol. 2 (London: Sage Publications Limited, 1997), 237.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 238.

<sup>41</sup> C. Singer and L. Dovey, "Representations of African Childhood in Conflict and Post-Conflict Contexts: Johnny Mad Dog, Ezra, and Sleepwalking Land," in *Lost and Othered Children in Contemporary Cinema*, eds. D. C. Olson and A. Scahill (Plymouth, United Kingdom: Lexington Books, 2012), x.

### **xxxii. (P)DDR Programmes**

(P)DDR programmes is best viewed as an integrated *set* of processes, which are themselves a part of the wider peace process. As the problem of child soldiering in Africa gains prominence on international humanitarian agendas another aspect of these programmes have taken shape and that is to put in place *prevention* methods to curb the recruitment as well as re-recruitment and active use of young boys and girls in civil conflicts. Definitions of the remaining aspects of a (P)DDR-programme are:

*Disarmament* is the collection, documentation, control, and disposal of small arms, ammunition, explosives, and light and heavy weapons of combatants, and often also of the civilian population. Disarmament also includes the development of responsible arms management programmes.<sup>42</sup>

*Demobilisation* is the formal and controlled discharge of active combatants from armed forces or other armed groups. The first stage of demobilisation may extend from the processing of individual combatants in temporary centres to the massing of troops in camps designated for this purpose.<sup>43</sup>

*Reintegration* is the process by which ex-combatants acquire civilian status and gain sustainable employment and income. Reintegration is essentially a social and economic process with an open timeframe, primarily taking place in communities at the local level.

These (P)DDR programmes form part of the general development of a specific country and is a national responsibility, and often necessitates long-term external assistance.<sup>44</sup> Of all of these, reintegration remains the biggest challenge, the most expensive and labour intensive one, and is yet crucial to any sustainable outcome.

### **xxxiii. Politics of the Gaze**

The function of cinematic images is to communicate specific ways – *gazes* – of seeing the world. Behind every film, then, is a gaze, or a conscious attempt to see the world in a certain way. *Gazes* are not objective, nor do they really need to be.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> W. Kilroy, "Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration: The Co-Evolution of Concepts, Practices, and Understanding," (2009), 2.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Mboti, *To show the World as it is, Or as it is Not: The Gaze of Hollywood Films about Africa*, 317.

Instead, Mboti goes further by arguing that:

“Gazes are part of communities of meaning that have no inherent validity, but must, out of necessity, be contested, celebrated, or fought over. Gazes not only imply a source and a sender, but it has never had the capacity to show the world as it is. In any case, truth – whatever it is – cannot fit a cinematic frame, but merely exceeds it. Film texts that purport to be able to project Africa ‘believably’, ‘realistically’ and ‘truthfully’ are either carelessly mistaken, or simply working a deception.”<sup>46</sup>

#### **xxxiv. Postmodernist Film Theory**

*Postmodernist films* characteristically have three key features that set it apart from modernist cinema or the traditional narrative film. Firstly, there is the pastiche and imitation of many different genres and styles. Consequently, in essence, this means that postmodern films are comfortable with mixing together many contrasting kinds of film as well as the ways / styles of film-making together into the same movie.

Secondly, there is the self-reflexivity of technique that highlights the production and inter-relatedness of the specific image being used to other images in media (visual or print) and not to any kind of external reality. This is done by emphasising the constructed / artistically created nature of the image in ways that are in direct reference to its production and also by giving emphasis to the explicit inter-textuality and references to other (visual) media and texts. Another commonly deployed method used to highlight the constructed nature of visual and moving images on screen is then the intentional deconstruction and fragmentation of linear time.

Then lastly, the third characteristic involves the undoing and breakdown of the distinction between high and low art styles; and techniques and texts. This is then also an extension of the tendency towards pastiche and the collaboration of styles, and genres. It typically extends to a mixing of techniques that traditionally come with value judgments as to their worth and place in culture and the creative and artistic spheres.

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<sup>46</sup> Mboti, *To show the World as it is, Or as it is Not: The Gaze of Hollywood Films about Africa*, 317.

### **xxxv. Recruitment**

The Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers (CSC) supports a definition of the term *recruit* which 'recognises three different means by which persons become members of armed forces or armed groups: *compulsory, voluntary, and forcible recruitment*.'<sup>47</sup>

*Compulsory recruitment* is defined in national legislation and thus typically applies to regular conscript armed forces. *Voluntary recruitment* occurs without conscription or force, and in the context of national forces is usually regulated by law or policy. *Forcible recruitment* entails the use of force outside the law, for instance in the form of abduction or other duress.<sup>48</sup> It is, however, very important to note that the lines between compulsory, voluntary and forced recruitment are often blurred.

### **xxxvi. Representation and Identity**

Cinema plays an important role in the establishment, maintenance, and transformation of national, and transnational, *identities*: 'Film has become a means of constructing and interrogating the diverse and multiple identities by which people define themselves and their realities.'<sup>49</sup>

Stuart Hall defines *representation* as the use of language to say something meaningful about, or to represent the world meaningfully to other people. Representation involves 'the use of language, signs and images which stand for and represent things.'<sup>50</sup> Thus, feature films are approached as a space where meanings are produced and exchanged [mediated] between people transnationally.

### **xxxvii. Runaway Norms**

*Runaway Norms* can "come to be seen as the 'right thinking' by most members of a group. They are taught to new members and imposed on old members who appear to question them."<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, *United Nations Security Council Resolution 1379* (London: Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, [2002]).

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> M. Thackway, *Africa Shoots Back: Alternative Perspectives in Sub-Saharan Francophone African Film*. (United Kingdom, Oxford: James Curry Ltd, 2003), 3.

<sup>50</sup> S. Hall, *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, Vol. 2, Sage Publications Limited, 1997), 15.

<sup>51</sup> J. Leatherman and N. Griffin, "Runaway Norms and Complex Political Victimhood: Child Soldier and Challenges for Peace Processes." (Annual Meeting of the ISA's 50th Annual Convention), New York Marriot Marquis, New York, 2009, 1.

### xxxviii. Social Ecologies

According to Goodwin-Gill and Cohn the term *social ecologies* is 'used to describe how a society, or family, interprets or values, a conflict and how these interpretations influence children to enlist.'<sup>52</sup> These *social ecologies* 'may include perceptions of how minority groups, ethnic communities, households and families have been marginalised or the need to redress long-running family feuds and historical disputes.'<sup>53</sup>

### xxxix. Spectatorship

Oakley views the feature film as a 'derived intentional object, created by someone with specific ordered properties; [and] as with any work of art, [one] can experience [these properties / attributes] as concretised [and set] pre-aesthetic wholes and as complex layered aesthetic objects.'<sup>54</sup> [Consequently] in each case, the *spectator* constructs (or reconstructs) meaning through processes of 'filling in the gaps' with presupposed knowledge to produce understanding.<sup>55</sup>

### xl. Stereotyping

Stuart Hall argues that *stereotyping* can be linked to questions of difference, representation and power. He writes that this is to have and / or take 'the power to represent someone or something in a certain way - within a certain 'regime' or 'representation.'<sup>56</sup> This definition of power is most relevant to the representation of African conflicts, and in particular child soldiers.

Stereotypes make visible the invisible, and stabilise that which is in reality fluid and much closer to the norm – they strengthen ethnic, cultural, and social *othering* by reinforcing notions of 'us' and 'them.' Shohat and Stam writes then that the 'sensitivity surrounding stereotypes and distortions largely arises

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<sup>52</sup> D. J. Francis, "Recruitment and use of Child Soldiers in Africa's Conflict Zones: National and International Implications," *Political Violence, Organised Crime, Terrorism and Youth* (2007), 6.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> T. Oakley, "Toward a General Theory of Film Spectatorship," *Case Western Reserve University*, in: <http://www.case.edu/artsci/enql/Library/OakleyTheoryFilmSpectator.Pdf> (2003), 2.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Hall, *The Spectacle of the 'Other'*, 259.

from powerlessness of historically marginalised groups to control their own representations' [in the media, and especially in feature films].<sup>57</sup>

#### **xli. Target Audiences**

In cinematic analysis it is important to consider who has the right to speak for whom: two strains are relevant here - firstly, about whom is being spoken, and secondly, who is being spoken to, are relevant. Consequently, for a particular cinematic analysis, the question of 'to whom', or *target audience*, is of central importance to this discussion, since it is likely to influence the representations on screen – both fictional and non-fictional.

#### **xlii. Transmedia Storytelling**

Henry Jenkins defines *transmedia* storytelling as a process in which 'integral elements of a fiction get dispersed systematically across multiple delivery channels for the purpose of creating a unified and coordinated entertainment experience [and] ideally, each medium makes its own unique contribution to the unfolding of the story.'<sup>58</sup> It involves an emphasis on 'world building' rather than plot or character-driven narratives, multiple points of entry for differently engaged audiences, co-creation and collaboration across various professional and fan sites of production, and collective intelligence, as audiences become 'hunters and gathers', collecting and sharing information across media.<sup>59</sup>

Jenkins argues that *transmedia* storytelling is not merely about new media, even though it often makes comprehensive use of it. In fact, in order to best understand the concept, it helps to have 'an expansive notion of the word *media* as any channel through which new meaning or information is added to the larger story - be it a [feature film]; piece of clothing, an action figure, or a live in-person performance.'<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Shohat and Stam, *Stereotype, Realism and the Struggle Over Representation*, 180-182.

<sup>58</sup> H. Jenkins, "Transmedia Storytelling and Entertainment: An Annotated Syllabus," *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies* 24, no. 6 (2010), 944.

<sup>59</sup> L. Swartz, "Invisible Children: Transmedia, Storytelling, Mobilization," (2012), 2.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

### **xliii. Trauma**

Anthonissen Evi writes that '*trauma* is generally defined as the response to an overwhelming event which precludes cognitive registration in the victim's mind at the time of its occurrence. Due to the fact that the event is not fully experienced when it happens, it belatedly returns in the form of uncontrolled and repetitive hallucinations, nightmares and other related phenomena. The individual is thus possessed by the traumatic event and its belated repetitions which resist being integrated into his or her consciousness.'<sup>61</sup>

### **xliv. Questions of Realism in Film**

Assumptions / questions about *realism* in the cinema are frequently tied to concepts of indexicality prevailing between the photographic image and its referent. Nakassis refers to Williams' notions that films 'make reference to the real world or to an idea of the real world, and the understanding that they do make such reference is a part of the way in which spectators themselves understand them.'<sup>62</sup>

Stephen Prince in turn writes that "cinematic realism is viewed as a discourse *coded* for transparency such that the indexicality of photographic realism is replaced by a view of the 'reality-effect' produced by codes and discourse."<sup>63</sup>

### **xlv. Visuality *Textuality* and Truth**

Visual *textuality* has a particular relationship to truth. While semantically speaking, the visual image is but another type of symbol it is already a mediated text / and experience for audiences. The possibility of film as a *mediated text* and as a transparent form of communication has formed extensive and sustained commentary throughout the life of film, centring on the idea of verisimilitude, or that which approximates or represents life directly.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> E. Anthonissen, "Representing the Trauma of Child Soldiers: Ishmael Beah's *A Long Way Gone* and Uzodinma Iweala's *Beasts of no Nation*" (Master in de Taal- en Letterkunde: Engels), 6.

<sup>62</sup> C. V. Nakassis, "Theorizing Film Realism Empirically," *New Cinemas: Journal of Contemporary Film* 7, no. 3 (2009), 225.

<sup>63</sup> S. Prince, "True Lies: Perceptual Realism, Digital Images, and Film Theory," *Film Quarterly* 49, no. 3 (1996), 30.

<sup>64</sup> S. Tascon, "Considering Human Rights Films, Representation, and Ethics: Whose Face?" *Human Rights Quarterly* 34, no. 3 (2012), 869.

Film studies have continued this conversation within film scholarship, as this genre is directly affected by ideas of *truth* and verisimilitude and has a long tradition of discussions. The apparent proximity between object and symbol in visual images dissolves some of that which blocks, or at least suspends, our acceptance of a symbol's veracity and trustworthiness. Visual symbols are often viewed as having a direct relationship to the object, and thus often interpreted as giving the viewer access to the truth in ways other communication forms perhaps cannot.<sup>65</sup>

#### **xlvi. Visual Literacy**

According to Tomaselli and Eke '*visual literacy* involves learning how to approach critical interpretations of visual messages (cinema, television, video, photography, [and other] graphics)' etcetera.<sup>66</sup>

#### **xlvii. War Machine**

Moynagh describes the term *war machine* as 'a system for producing power and profits from violent conflict. It is also a regime of subjection that produces exploitable infra-humanity: the refugee, the civilian soldier, the sex slave, the child soldier. From a human-rights perspective, these are clearly the violated, those in need of intervention, and those whose rights need to be restored.'<sup>67</sup>

#### **xlviii. War Witches / Child Witches**

The term *war witch / child witch* refers to 'those children who are thrown away by their families because they are [regarded] to be 'sorcerers' after tragedy has befallen the family.'<sup>68</sup> These children then are ostracised and in their desperation, they become 'soldiers and, through their involvement in armed conflict, inflict violence and death on others, including children.'<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Tascon, *Considering Human Rights Films, Representation, and Ethics: Whose Face?*, 869.

<sup>66</sup> K. Tomaselli and M. Eke, "Perspectives on Orality in African Cinema," *Oral Tradition* 10, no. 1 (1995), 112.

<sup>67</sup> M. Moynagh, "Human Rights, Child-Soldier Narratives, and the Problem of Form." *Research in African Literatures* 42, no. 4 (2011), 42.

<sup>68</sup> N. Cahn, "Poor Children: Child Witches and Child Soldiers in Sub-Saharan Africa," *Ohio State Journal of Criminal Law* 3 (2005), 413.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

## **xlix. Western Media**

For the current thesis, the working definition / classification of *western media* encapsulates firstly, many western countries, for example the United States of America and various European countries, and secondly the respective media organisations operating on these continents and then in specific countries. It can then be assumed that where needed the emphasis will also fall on other multinational and non-governmental corporations and institutions.

### **I. White Man's Burden**

At the core of Kipling's poem, *The White Man's Burden*, lays the notion that the supposed or presumed responsibility of white people to come to the salvation, to govern and to impart their culture to non-white people, often put forward as an explanation for, and in defence of, European colonialism.

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## INTRODUCTION

'It would be naïve to deny this 'visual' evidence of the violence and civil conflicts [as portrayed in Western media] that have ravaged many African nations in the post-colonial era, and their consequences for children... Journalists and filmmakers [alike] certainly need to report and make known such suffering; to do otherwise would simply be irresponsible. However, the question of how such African children are represented – particularly by non-Africans – needs to be considered carefully.'<sup>70</sup>

Children's participation in wars is not a phenomenon specific to our times, and over the past decades this problem has gained new proportions in modern-day, war-torn countries. The prevalence of child soldiering is evident in many countries around the world where defenceless children are exploited as soldiers and for other 'duties' within the militia or army ranks. The global scope, however, should not, according to Wessells, obscure the regional and country-specific variations of child soldiering.<sup>71</sup> The variations and depth of the problems faced by children in these situations are best contextualised and comprehended within the framework of specific conflicts and regions.

Consequently, when discussing and addressing child soldiering, in either print or in film, there are a number of key factors that need to be considered. These include taking into account the root causes of this horrific phenomenon, for 'too much now follows the changed nature of weapons and warfare, the breakdown of law and order, and intolerable levels of poverty, unemployment and also the social pressures on children to engage in armed conflicts.'<sup>72</sup> And subsequently by bearing these core factors in mind when delving into this complex subject matter will aid in the analysis of the three case study films, and will subsequently enable both the researcher and reader to keep an open mind when analysing the different faces of Africa's child soldiers on screen.

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<sup>70</sup> Singer and Dovey, *Representations of African Childhood in Conflict and Post-Conflict Contexts: Johnny Mad Dog, Ezra, and Sleepwalking Land*, 151.

<sup>71</sup> M. Wessells, "Child Soldiers," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 53, no. 6 (1997), 32-39.

<sup>72</sup> R. Brett and I. Specht, *Young Soldiers: Why they Choose to Fight* (Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers Inc., 2004), xiii-xiv.

In line with Singer and Dovey's research on the *Representations of African Childhood in Conflict and Post-Conflict Contexts*, this study's interest lies in specifically exploring the representation of African children in conflict situations through the medium of feature films. It has been prompted by, and is as Singer and Dovey point out, related to, 'the problems implicit in the capturing of still images of child soldiers via the genre of photojournalism – where such images of child soldiers frequently fail to contextualize the experiences of the children depicted.'<sup>73</sup>

Before embarking on a study of how child soldiers are represented in specifically cinematic arenas, one must also address crucial issues on how childhood in Africa and then notions of child soldiers in particular, are defined within the context of civil unrests and cross-border armed conflicts. For, as Singer and Dovey argue, such still images of children who are caught up in African conflicts 'perform a dual function. On the one hand – given their subject matter – they tend to subvert broad Western understandings of childhood as innocent and unfettered, while on the other hand, they would seem to play into Western [Afro-pessimistic] of African children as one-dimensional, brutalized victims.'<sup>74</sup>

However, Alcinda Honwana points out that 'unlike middle-class children whose parents and families are in a position to support them until they are able to sustain themselves (in many cases well over the age of eighteen), many children around the world assume work and social responsibilities at an early age.'<sup>75</sup> In addition, as Wessells shows, in 'times of war, many cultures regard fighting as an appropriate form of work, an extension of the labour adults provide for their families.'<sup>76</sup> Consequently, for the current research the interest lies with 'certain definitions of childhood, and in particular African-childhood' and how the three case study films in particular showcase these 'definitions.'<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Singer and Dovey, *Representations of African Childhood in Conflict and Post-Conflict Contexts: Johnny Mad Dog, Ezra, and Sleepwalking Land*, 152.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> A. Honwana, "Children's Involvement in War: Historical and Social Contexts," *The Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth* 1, no. 1 (2008), 144.

<sup>76</sup> M. G. Wessells, *Child Soldiers: From Violence to Protection* (Harvard University Press, 2006), 7.

<sup>77</sup> Singer and Dovey, *Representations of African Childhood in Conflict and Post-Conflict Contexts: Johnny Mad Dog, Ezra, and Sleepwalking Land*, 152.

Feature films, like photojournalism, 'cannot be exempted from scrutiny in terms of its (re)presentation of violence', but it will be argued that feature films have the potential to play a unique and crucial role in introducing Westerners to the African continent and its people, and in engaging them in African experiences.<sup>78</sup>

Social scientists tend to favour documentaries, and while few would argue any longer that they are more 'objective' than fiction films, there still seems to be a feeling that they are more 'real.' During the last decade numerous feature films, which centres on the dilemmas of modern African states, have been released and nearly all of these films are marked by what one can regard as key features of Afro-pessimism and ultimately such feature films often claim to succeed in taking 'real events' to audiences who are far-removed from the realities that are depicted on screen, and accordingly then, also influencing audience perceptions and future expectations of cinematic narratives that deal with dilemmas set on the African continent.

However, the postmodernist film theory challenges and questions everything that claims to signify / point to a certain truth, real, and / or authentic cinematic depictions. Lisa Downing writes that 'the postmodern untying of narratives – of identity, and humanness – from fixed posts of meaning, can conversely be seen to constitute nothing so much as a mobilization of the power of questioning.'<sup>79</sup>

Considering that film is a powerful medium makes it all the more important to address the veracity with which fiction films are introducing viewers to Africa. Fiction is not 'just fiction' - instead it shapes audiences' ideas and can also influence action and question powerful notions.<sup>80</sup> This is especially important when considering the fact that fiction films usually reach much wider audiences than documentaries do. Also, fiction is particularly persuasive when audiences have little factual information and tend to assume that fiction and fact coincide. Such is the case for many viewers of African films.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Singer and Dovey, *Representations of African Childhood in Conflict and Post-Conflict Contexts: Johnny Mad Dog, Ezra, and Sleepwalking Land*, 153.

<sup>79</sup> L. Downing, "What if we are Post-Ethical? Postmodernism's Ethics and Aesthetics." in *Film and Ethics: Foreclosed Encounters*, eds. L. Downing and L. Saxton (New York: Routledge, 2010), 158.

<sup>80</sup> J. Gugler, "African Films in the Classroom," *African Studies Review* 53, no. 3 (2010), 7.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

The naïve assumption of many viewers that they are being introduced to an African 'reality' is fostered by the realistic presentation adopted by most African fiction films as well as writing. This, then, is particularly true within the context of postmodernism.

Films succeed in integrating in individual characters multiple aspects of politics, society, and culture. The dramatic stories told in films elicit emotional responses and the individual characters inspire empathy for people living in dismal conditions in Africa's distant lands. Such intimate portraits of people who belong to different cultures, experience a different history, and who live in quite different economic and social and political climates, are particularly important with audiences that start out with negative views of the *Other*.

*Othering* is defined as 'the practice of comparing ourselves, as an individual or a group, to others while at the same time distancing ourselves from them. We depict the other as being somehow inherently different from ourselves. This distance helps to create and solidifies our own identity as the norm.'<sup>82</sup> In other words, one could say that by concentrating on the difference between ourselves and others we create our own identity. *Othering* is a way in which groups can form and gain cohesion. Symbolic representations of sameness are created within an 'imagined' group.<sup>83</sup> This always includes notions of being different from others, from those who do not belong to one's own group. Bender notes Friese's argument that these notions 'create boundaries between conceptions of us and them.'<sup>84</sup> It helps in the formation of (imagined) groups and more importantly separates members of a particular group from the 'others'.

Debbie Olson and Andrew Scahill write that:

'Children have been part of the cinematic landscape since the silent film era, yet children are rarely part of the theoretical landscape of film analysis. Western cinema abounds with images of non-normative childhood, [and] rather than relegating the role of the non-normative child to the

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<sup>82</sup> D. Bender, *Othering and De-Othering in Israel and Palestine. The Case of Windows-channels for Communication*. (MA Thesis, University of Amsterdam: 2011), 29.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

margins, [this particular study] seeks to illustrate that the most common and endearing tropes in film is the lost and *othered* child.<sup>85</sup>

The *othered child* has long occupied the space within an (social and familial) identity that is constructed for them via adults, and 'when such children strain against adult constructions, they become marginalised, outside the idealised notions of what children should be.'<sup>86</sup> In the case study films that will be used for this thesis, children are depicted as sites of 'despair, knowingness, death, and violence.'<sup>87</sup> Western audiences are so used to representations of child soldiers in conflict situations – they are depicted as being fatigued, bloodied, and desperate, and for Western audiences, these physical images of child soldiers are in direct opposition of the 'accepted' mental images of what childhood is, or then should be. This 'distinction' or break in acknowledgment of the reality of these young combatants ultimately results in the *othering* of these children. And in turn, the *othering* of these children also contributes to the *othering* of entire societies, countries and in the case of Africa, a continent. As a result the *othered* people's cultural, socio-political and economic histories and realities are reduced to notions of neediness and victimhood.<sup>88</sup>

Along with the notions of *othering*, the insider / outsider debates as well as that of the Politics of the Gaze will be problematized and examined. However, the proposed dissertation will not use the aforementioned ideological frameworks as a means to look at the ways in which child soldiers are portrayed in feature films. And rather, this dissertation will involve qualitative research on the various depictions of this harsh realities faced by so many of Africa's vulnerable children, and the affects that these Afro-optimistic / Afro-pessimistic portrayals have on viewers' perceptions of conflict and child soldiers in Africa.

It must be mentioned at this stage that for militant groups, there are obvious and clearly significant advantages to using child soldiers. As a result, these militant groups (or in some cases national armies) will use any method available to ensure the presence of children in their ranks. The media and popular

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<sup>85</sup> D. Olson and A. Scahill, "Introduction," in *Lost and Othered Children in Contemporary Cinema*, eds. D. Olson and A. Scahill (Plymouth, United Kingdom: Lexington Books, 2012), ix-x.

<sup>86</sup> <sup>86</sup> Olson and Scahill, "Introduction," in *Lost and Othered Children in Contemporary Cinema*, x.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> A.M.S Watson, Guardians of the Peace? The Significance of Children in to Continued Militarisation in *The Militarization of Childhood – Thinking Beyond the Global South*, ed. J.M. Beier. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan; 2011), 58.

culture have made famous the plight of child soldiers who are orphaned and forcefully drugged. For many children this is a reality, as these unfortunate children are forced to partake in military operations and to commit atrocities against their own people.<sup>89</sup>

Films succeed in creating vivid familiarities and powerful emotional relationships by establishing close connections to a world that is wholly unfamiliar to its audiences, and succeeds to de-familiarise the present as well as the past. Consequently, the social functioning of the film industry takes on exceptional importance when considering the facts about the ways in which a motion picture positions itself vis-à-vis a particular conflict or social and political issue such as child soldiering in Africa.

When considering the latter, key aspects, such as the views of the opposing governments and other armed rebel groups that are involved in these conflicts, or the intricate levels of the practise of war, and the recruitment and use of child soldiers, will come into question. The conflict to a certain extent stems from the ambiguity of being in favour of, or against war; and from the fact that both tendencies can be present in the same film.<sup>90</sup>

However broad the scope of academic literature on the subject matter, in order to focus the present study, the focus will fall on the following three feature films: *Ezra* (2007); *The Silent Army* (2008); and *War Witch* (2012) in order to ascertain how these films represent Africa's child soldiers on screen. As mentioned, although only three feature films will be used as case studies, throughout the dissertation mention will be given to other important films, and literary works that relate to the subject matter of child soldiers in Africa specifically. Consequently, it will be an aim of this study to show that the children depicted in these case study films are both troublesome and complex – because 'not only are they troublesome [and complex] in their actions (some delinquent, some violent, some antithetical to constructions of the familial) but they also trouble / problematize the boundaries of childhood itself.'<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> J. Plante, "The Children of War," *Human Rights & Human Welfare*, no. Topical Research Digest: Human Rights and Contemporary Slavery (2008), 22-37. <http://www.du.edu/korbel/hrhw/researchdigest/slavery/children.pdf>.

<sup>90</sup> J. D. Slocum, *Hollywood and War: The Film Reader*, ed. J. D. Slocum (New York, NY: Routledge, 2006), 11.

<sup>91</sup> Slocum, *Hollywood and War: The Film Reader*, 11.

In her careful examination of victims in Bosnia and Herzegovina and South Africa, Erica Bouris develops a theory on “why victims might act in such contradictory ways or, more precisely, in ways that ‘give space’ to their own victimization.”<sup>92</sup> By drawing on aspects of post-structural theory, Bouris reasons that the ‘identity and roles of victims are always multiple and defined by more than just their victimization.

An individual’s ethnic or racial identity, for instance, may compel him or her to act in ways that reproduce wider systems of oppression and violence.<sup>93</sup> Bouris then refers to this individual as a *complex political victim*.

In a review of Bouris’ work entitled, *Complex Political Victims*, Erin Baines noted that:

“Bouris illustrates at length that current approaches to peace building fail to recognize complex political victims, with the result that they fail to develop peace or justice strategies that include victims. These approaches are replete with simplistic categories of ‘victim’ and ‘perpetrator,’ in which the former is associated with innocence and the latter with guilt.”<sup>94</sup>

Consequently, “the ‘ideal’ victim is one that is helpless, vulnerable and in need of rescue. This ideal becomes a kind of benchmark for practitioners in the ‘messiness’ of conflict, as they sort those in need of rescue or justice from those who are less deserving. Thus, the idealization of victims can and does lead to the exclusion of people who have a more ambiguous status.”<sup>95</sup> These children then not only become *complex political victims*, but also complex political perpetrators, as Asimakopoulos explains. These young combatants come to ‘hold the identity of both victim and perpetrator due to complex circumstances.’<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> E. Baines, "Review: Complex Political Victims, Erica Bouris," *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 2, no. 3 (2008), 432.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Asimakopoulos, *Justice and Accountability: Complex Political Perpetrators Abducted as Children by the LRA in Northern Uganda*, 7-8.

And so, as Baines argues, that the concept of complex political perpetrators comes into play and subsequently raises difficult questions with regards to the complex identity of abductees, [volunteers]; their levels of responsibility with armed factions; and post-war accountability, justice and reintegration strategies.<sup>97</sup>

Bouris explains the contradictory ways in which victims might act when she adds that 'by not recognising this special category of people in justice pursuits after conflict by excluding them, this might lead to the social construction of an *Other*. This can result in dehumanization, often a first step to violence and conflict.'<sup>98</sup> Consequently, Baines introduces the concept of the complex political perpetrator and the term is used to describe 'a generation of victims in settings of chronic crisis who not only adapt to violence to survive, but thrive.'<sup>99</sup>

Yet, as Bouris reasons, 'perpetrators and victims are not homogeneous groups, and she rejects the clear-cut labels of victims as always innocent and helpless and perpetrators always only guilty.'<sup>100</sup> And so, it becomes an objective of this study to, through qualitative research and in-depth analysis of the case study films the current dissertation will aim to illustrate how these transgressive / neglectful representations of (African) children and childhood challenges the deeply held convictions about the supposed naturalness of a normative childhood. By exploring the concepts and theories of Afro-pessimism (as well as in some cases Afro-optimism), it will be aimed to show how these theories, as modalities of thinking about the Africa continent, feature in discourses about the Africa's child soldiers / African childhood.

The chapters of the dissertation will, consequently, pay attention to the phenomenon of child soldiering in Africa – asking and aiming to answer difficult questions. Themes and concepts such as the definition of a *child / childhood* under international law, background statistics, *othering*, *warlordism*, international involvement, complex political victims and (P)DDR programmes will be scrutinised in order to aid in later, more in-depth analysis of these issues that will follow in Chapter Two.

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<sup>97</sup> Asimakopoulos, *Justice and Accountability: Complex Political Perpetrators Abducted as Children by the LRA in Northern Uganda*, 8.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 10-11.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*

The diverse visual representations of child soldiers will then subsequently also be addressed. When taking these differences into account, these representations will be placed against the global discursive order with regards to child soldiering in order to ascertain which narratives (written, verbal and visual) inform specific Afro-pessimistic and Afro-optimistic interpretations. With the latter being said, it will then also be important to take into account what the perspectives and expectations the audiences have when being confronted with visual representations of Africa's child soldiers.

The endemic, and Afro-pessimistic, stereotyping of Africa (and her peoples) in the Western media continues to reinforce and crystallise an image of the continent which is so 'pervasive and profound that Westerners just believe Africa has intractable problems.'<sup>101</sup> Therefore, as Jere-Melanda points out, 'for Western audiences which have perpetually been fed with news and misinformation that pep them up as better-than-thou, through articles, images, hooks and films that dehumanise Africa and other such places and their people, it is quite easy to see what type of *self-understanding* about Africa they have derived from their media.'<sup>102</sup>

It is important to state that the research of this study will not focus on the ways in which some critics and scholars may find feature films that deal with Africa and its child soldiers as wanting, but rather the aim will be to purely investigate the manners in which this horrific phenomenon is being taken to audiences around the world - by both African-born and international directors and producers.

In order to do this, mention must however be given to aspects such as *Othering*, the African Gaze and the aspects of the Insider-Outsider debates, as well as audience perspectives and expectations. This will be done in order to understand and grapple with some of the Afro-pessimistic and Afro-optimistic traits that may or may not be evident in the representations of Africa, the conflicts fought both within and across national and regional borders, as well as the effects these conflicts have on the continent's child population.

However, one must not be disillusioned to think that the answers to these questions are easily forthcoming. Instead, one needs to rather acknowledge that they are quite often extremely limiting in their definition of the concept / phenomenon of both childhood in Africa, as well as of child soldiers and the subsequent representation thereof in feature films.

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<sup>101</sup> R. Jere-Malanda, "And Now.. Positive Africa," *New African: Exposed - Western Media Bias Against Africa*, June, 2008, 36.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

## CHAPTER ONE: BACKGROUND, RATIONALE AND OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this study is to make a theoretical contribution to the field of film studies with particular application to the visual representation of Africa's child soldiers in feature films. By theorising the history (and current state) of African conflicts and specifically child soldiering, the aim is to demonstrate how these theoretical aspects may be practically applied when examining feature films.

The core chapters: chapter two, chapter three and chapter four of the study, are therefore a literature study, which examine a wide array of complex aspects on Africa, its conflicts and child soldiers relevant to this study. Chapter five contains the film analyses of the three chosen case study feature films. The current dissertation, thus, employs the literature study as a research method. This is done because it is in keeping with the main purpose and aim of the study, which is to make a pioneering contribution to the particular body of literature.

### 1.1 BROAD CONTEXT: WAR, POVERTY, POLITICS, AND CHILD SOLDIERS

In the African civil wars of the last thirty years, an increasing number of combatants are as young as 8 or 10 - with girls also forced into (or joining) armed forces becoming an increasingly common occurrence. In many conflicts child soldiers are the main combatants, and consequently child recruiting becomes the main means of enabling fighting and the onset of severe conflict. Although forced recruitment is widespread in many of these conflicts, Wessells also points out that this one-sided viewpoint fails to notice another cardinal part of child soldiering. He argues that children who grow up in war zones often may not see a positive place for themselves within their community - they are *othered*, repressed, and excluded from basic needs such as education and health, and upon this, they feel estranged from and alienated by their own culture.

Deprived of their rights to schooling and protection, child soldiers often become a 'means of continuing protracted arms struggles and cycles of violence.'<sup>103</sup> They become 'vehicles of violence' rather than citizens who could stabilise and rebuild their communities.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Wessells, *Child Soldiers: From Violence to Protection*, 2.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

These children turn to violence as a means to replace the existing social order with one that offers protections, social 'justice' and political and economic opportunities.<sup>105</sup> Thus, in finding meaning in the struggle and violence, many of these children may be drawn into armed groups without unequivocal coercion and intimidation.

Other crucial factors to take into account are the socio-economic challenges faced by war-torn states around the world. Children exposed to famine, severe poverty, HIV / AIDS, education (or the lack thereof) and refugee situations fall prey to recruiters and are easily influenced / convinced by ideological propaganda during wartimes. These dire circumstances create favourable environments for the continued child recruitment by warlords, as well as government groups, for their armed defence forces.

Alcinda Honwana notes that the concerns over child soldiers are first and foremost ingrained in the predicament of the post-colonial state in Africa. This crisis is mirrored in ethnic conflicts over power sharing, identity and access to resources, to name but a few.<sup>106</sup> Other contributing factors include the incapability of the governments to provide for and keep its citizens out of harm's way; and the collapse of social and economic structures in rural areas with the subsequent massive migration to urban areas. The escalation in armed clashes resulted in civilians [and especially children] bearing the brunt.<sup>107</sup>

Honwana further contends that the crisis of child soldiering in post-colonial Africa is fuelled by persistent armed conflict and civil unrests, and HIV / AIDS, which precipitates a crisis within the family, a keystone institution of African societies. These stable community structures are now under continuous threat because their capacity to establish adaptive change in order to create meaningful, sustainable, and coherent patterns of everyday life is severely weakened.

The intensification and upsurge of such armed conflicts, into which youth and young people are drawn, can be viewed as an outright symptom of such crisis situations. In the case of Mozambique and Angola, Honwana advocates that this crisis was exacerbated by both external and internal pressures, and that the South African apartheid regime's destabilisation policies and direct support of rebel movements aggravated the situation in these hostile environments in these two countries.

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<sup>105</sup> Wessells, *Child Soldiers: From Violence to Protection*, 3.

<sup>106</sup> A. Honwana, "Negotiating Post-War Identities: Child Soldiers in Mozambique and Angola," in *Contested Terrains and Constructed Categories: Contemporary Africa in Focus*, eds. George Clement Bond and Nigel C. Gibson (USA, New York: Westview Press, 2002), 3.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*

Together with this, other internal issues such as ethnic alliances and a general dissatisfaction with the state over the denunciation of traditional authorities and traditional cultural values determined the positions taken by some traditional chiefs, who helped to recruit youth and children to join the rebel forces.<sup>108</sup> Many children and youths also volunteered to join either the government or rebel forces as soldiers (or then for any duty deemed suitable for them). For many, being part of a coercive system and having a certain level of the control over an instrument of intimidation which was often the only access to food and to a sense of power, motivated many children to join forces with armed groups.

In the aftermath of war / conflicts, many of these youths continue to be defenceless; they have no proficiency, no jobs, no education and no guidance – and the dismal economic states in rural areas did not improve their situations either.<sup>109</sup> Persisting extreme poverty, lack of infrastructure (hospitals, schools), and difficult environmental conditions also continued.

Additionally, many young soldiers returning to their villages are met by these dire circumstances of communities that are not only physically devastated by the war, but have to cope with profound social wounds. These are just some of the dilemmas that face youth and children of war in the post-colonial state. For example, the vast number of children, who have been directly exposed to war as combatants in Angola and Mozambique, but also in other world countries, remains a stark reality that cannot be ignored or shunned away. Both RENAMO and UNITA were active in recruiting children to their armies.

There are also accounts of the use of children in the government forces in the two countries, although to a lesser extent. This systematic inclination to recruit and employ children as soldiers was often based on assumptions that children are easier to be in command of and to manipulate, are easily programmed to feel little fear or rebellion for their actions and are with no trouble programmed to think of war and only war. Children are also believed to possess excessive vigour that can be used; once trained they carried out attacks with greater fervour and brutality than did adults. The Machel-report deplores the fact that children are often deliberately brutalised in order to harden them into more ruthless soldiers.

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<sup>108</sup> Honwana, *Negotiating Post-War Identities: Child Soldiers in Mozambique and Angola*, 3.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*

It is also documented that in some conflicts, children have been forced to commit atrocities against their own families. Consequently, child soldiers find themselves in a position that breaks down dichotomies between civilian and combatant, victim and perpetrator, initiate and initiated, protector and protected. According to Honwana, with 'these multiple, interstitial positions', child soldiers exemplify the condition of concurrently having multifaceted and complex identities and wholly wanting and lingering for a stable, unwavering, and socially defined place to call home.<sup>110</sup>

These children who joined armed militias, albeit coerced or voluntarily, symbolise anomalies and infinite contradictions within a war context because they reside in a self-sufficient, self-governing world with its own rules and relations of power. Yet, they come from a communal, civil society ordered and guided by family, kinship, gender, and generation, and, after peace returns, they must re-enter a world whose primary values, beliefs and norms they have defied. They have been traumatised by their experiences, by the murders and other acts of brutality and violation they have committed, witnessed, and feared or suffered themselves, as well as by the abrupt and total ruin of their previous ties to kin and community.

The broad context provided here will set the scene for the discussion(s) on the visual depictions of child soldiers in feature films that will follow. By drawing on the existing literature, and other academic sources and views on this distressing phenomenon, the discussion(s) are approached and dealt with according to a particular set of research questions which were specifically formulated and structured for this study.

## **1.2 RESEARCH DESIGN**

The dissertation will incorporate empirical, and qualitative research on the various, and complex depictions of this harsh reality faced by so many of Africa's vulnerable children, and the effects that these Afro-optimistic / Afro-pessimistic portrayals have on viewers' perceptions of child soldiers in Africa. When considering the complex and difficult subject-matters of the films that will be used as case studies, a close analysis will consequently be required. Each analysis will be put against the backdrop of various thematic, theoretical (and historical) interpretations of Afro-pessimism in film and the depictions of African conflicts in general, and then child soldiers specifically.

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<sup>110</sup> Honwana, *Negotiating Post-War Identities: Child Soldiers in Mozambique and Angola*, 4.

During the analysis, specific elements in each film will be examined, guided by the specifically designed research questions, in order to determine how the conflict within the specific conflict situation is represented or articulated in the film. The goal of this approach is to determine whether the conflict (and its effects) are presented as the central concern in the storyline, or relegated to background. It will then also aim to look at the mechanisms used by the main character(s) to deal with the overarching conflict. Both areas are examined with the use of neo-colonial theories and context, and provide material with which to examine the presence of neo-colonial relationships conveyed in film.

Research will include the close examination of the three case study feature films and how they portray the complex issues of the recruitment of child soldiers, their hazardous and brutal life as well as the daunting post-conflict challenges faced by Africa's children. Against this literary context, the three case studies will be analysed against the intricate backdrop of Afro-pessimistic / Afro-optimistic portrayals of Africa, and in particular of Africa's child soldiers. The films *Ezra* (2007); *The Silent Army* (2008); and *War Witch* (2012) will comprise the bulk of research data that will be analysed. By looking at these three films irrespectively, data will be gathered and examined in order to ascertain the manners in which these films depict child soldiers and the horrific reality that they are caught up in.

A variety of methodologies and paradigms for a thematic / conceptual and analytical framework will be applied to the critical analyses of the data gathered. Taking each case study film as a standalone example of the different ways in which Africa and its child soldiers are represented in feature films, the tropes of complex political victims, complex political perpetrators, compassion fatigue, magic realism and the ethnographic spectacle (as modalities of thinking) will be deployed in order to provide an account which is as balanced and objective as possible.

The proposed analysis is multi-disciplinary in nature and therefore the research will be based on a pre-defined set of research questions that will draw on themes and theories from a diverse selection of academic disciplines to conduct a thorough, in-depth analysis.

### 1.3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS / RATIONALE

For the purposes of this dissertation, the specific set of research questions were designed and formulated to specifically address the way(s) in which Africa's child soldiers have been, and still are being portrayed in feature films. It aims to track the shifts in the different Afro-pessimistic and Afro-optimistic manners of introducing audiences to the distressing phenomenon of child soldiering. These questions are:

#### **Focal Question:**

- When taking feature films about African conflicts, and especially those concerning child soldiers in Africa into account, what are the preconceived Afro-pessimistic / Afro-optimistic ways of thinking about this phenomenon that can be identified?

#### **Sub-questions related to the focal question:**

- What are the differences, and / or correlations, between the respective screen portrayals in feature films of child soldiers?
- How do the roles of both the cinematic and photographic lens play into the construction of *difference* and enforce / strengthen derogatory perceptions of the *Other*?
- What are the significance of these Afro-pessimistic / Afro-optimistic on-screen portrayals of child soldiers to its audiences, and how are they Afro-pessimistic / Afro-optimistic in nature?
- Are there identifiable cinematic narratives that deal with Africa, its conflicts and in particular its child soldiers, that stimulate and continue to feed specific interpretations and expectations of socio-political and economic climates of the continent?
- How do the notions of complex political victims / perpetrators, ethnographical spectacle, compassion fatigue and magic realism act as modalities of thinking with regards to feature films dealing with African child soldiers?
- What are the corresponding, and conflicting, traits of films which have the phenomenon of child soldiering as a central part of its storyline?

## **CHAPTER TWO: METHODOLOGICAL AND THEMATIC FRAMEWORK**

This study comprises a literature study and a case study approach. The first part of the study is a literature study and focuses on the theorisation of African conflicts, and then particularly child soldiering. The latter part of the study comprises of an application of the theoretical principles to three case study films.

### **2.1. METHODOLOGICAL PROBLEMS IN THE STUDY OF CHILD SOLDIERS – BOTH IN THEORY AND FILM**

Despite the fact that the phenomenon of child soldiering in Africa (and around the world) is probably the most disheartening and immensely emotional topic / aspect of international conflicts the methodological principles and guidelines which promote good scholarship are still crucial when engaging with this subject matter. This is crucial for written, as well as visual, interpretations, analyses and depictions of child soldiers caught-up in the grips of civil and international conflicts.

For the purposes of this dissertation the focus falls on the visual representations of Africa's child soldiers, however, in order to do this thoroughly, these research issues will also be placed against the vast backdrop of academic literature on child soldiers. How one conducts research (on any subject) usually depends on the fundamental questions asked during the research process. As mentioned, the study at hand is guided by its own set of pre-structured research questions. By addressing these questions the aim is to assess the ways in which statistics of child soldiers and their realities are relayed onto the far-removed silver screens around the globe.

Children who get caught-up in armed conflicts do so in a whole host of ways. Children are displaced, separated from their parents, families and communities and they are subjected to various forms of exploitation and violence (even in peace-time). They witness horrific atrocities and in many instances are expected to carry out massacres and raids on their own villages. The young children are deprived of a care-free childhood, education and basic healthcare. Disadvantaged even in peace-time, young boys and girls are in consistent danger and subjected to sexual abuse, slavery, rape, and psychological torture at the hands of warlords and militants. Wars and other forms of armed conflicts have immense and far-reaching effects of Africa's young.

These changes and developments have not gone unnoticed, and in recent years, the impact of war and armed conflicts on children has moved to the forefront of political, humanitarian and academic agendas. The international community has taken numerous steps to address and to bring this distressing phenomenon to the attention of international readers and audiences.

One of these methods / mediums is the feature film. In the past decade there has been a vast array of films, as well as documentaries, who take subject with Africa and its child soldiers. If the study of child soldiers carries with it inherent methodological and theoretical challenges then the bar has been set higher when the medium of depiction / portrayal, shifts to the silver screen. Film as a powerful medium makes it is all the more important to address the veracity of fiction films introducing viewers to Africa. Fiction is never 'just fiction', instead it shapes ideas and can influence action.<sup>111</sup> This is especially important when considering the fact that fiction films usually reach much wider audiences than documentaries do.

Fiction is particularly persuasive when audiences have little factual information and tend to assume that fiction and fact coincide. Such is the case for many viewers of African films.<sup>112</sup> The naïve assumption of many viewers that they are being introduced to African 'reality' is fostered by the realistic presentation adopted by most African fiction, films as well as writing.

Directors of fiction films, like writers of fiction, have, of course, every license to imagine. Furthermore, they and their partisans may argue that what matters is not factual accuracy but the significance of events, and they may claim artistic license to make viewers empathize with their heroes, reject their villains, or experience ambiguity.<sup>113</sup> Screen depictions illuminate with images what text can barely convey, and they bring foreign settings alive in images, sound, characters, and story.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Gugler, *African Films in the Classroom*, 7.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

When researching child soldiering, one of the central questions / aspects is that of recruitment, volunteering and enlistment of children. Barry Ames points out the vagueness of the categories which exist in order to try to explain this. He writes that 'sometimes guerrilla and paramilitary groups abduct children; sometimes children join voluntarily; sometimes they are sold into combat groups by relatives.'<sup>115</sup> He goes further to state that 'a cursory reading of the qualitative literature on participation produces a common set of explanations.'<sup>116</sup>

The factors which contribute to the enlistment of children in armed forces can be divided into four broad categories. Firstly, 'grievance factors include poverty, loss of parents, lack of economic opportunity, abuse at home, ethnicity, and political belief. [Secondly], inducement factors include pay, glory and the promise of future material gains. [Thirdly], solidarity factors include group cohesion, village networks, and friends. [And fourthly], accessibility factors include the presence and vulnerability of refugee camps.'<sup>117</sup> These factors may be thought of as separate and / or as competing when in actual fact these diverse factors are often inter-related and the enlistment of child soldiers might consequently be due to a combination of the aforementioned factors.

The task, according to Ames, is then to 'assess the causes of children's participation and to [in the end aim] to determine the relative importance of various causal factors.'<sup>118</sup> It is however, very crucial to place these causal factors which Ames refer to into context – geographically, politically, socially and ethnically – in order to assess the extent of the challenges faced by Africa's child soldiers.

For example if one 'accepts the social contexts in which potential child soldiers live, [one] ought to be able to enrich the analyses of these contexts.'<sup>119</sup> For the purposes of the study at hand, the latter statement will entail that close attention be paid to the visual portrayal(s) of the various social contexts of child soldiers in the respective case study films. But, not only the depiction of social contexts will be examined, other contexts and factors (as mentioned before) will be carefully looked at in order to promote good and responsible scholarship on the subject matter.

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<sup>115</sup> B. Ames, "Methodological Problems in the Study of Child Soldiers," *Child Soldiers in the Age of Fractured States* (2007), 15.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 23.

Boyden and De Berry allude to this precise matter by stating that ‘studies are needed to illuminate how children in different cultures [and social, economic and political contexts] perceive misfortune, healing and recovery, and the formation of their [future] commitments.’<sup>120</sup> Boyden and De Berry’s study warns of the dangers of ‘simplistic assumptions about children’s reactions to conflict’ situations that they may / or may not be exposed to directly. It is also suggested that while it is indeed ‘difficult to exaggerate the horrors of war, it is quite possible to overuse concepts such as trauma.’<sup>121</sup>

According to Boyden and De Berry, ‘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.’<sup>122</sup> Here, once again, political, social, economic and ethnic context(s) is found to play critical roles in the shaping of personal experiences of and responses to war. ‘As the circumstances and contributions of children and adults - girls and boys, and men and woman - are altered [during times of conflict], so are the definitions and expectations of childhood, youth, adulthood, girlhood, boyhood and other social categories.’<sup>123</sup> These issues are but some that will be discussed in the chapters to follow.

As some of the case study films will show, many young people assume ‘proto-adult roles within the home, their communities as well as on the battlefield [and consequently] alterations in status, role and circumstances are found to have fundamental implications for survival and for self-perception, identity and adaption during and [in the aftermath] of war.’<sup>124</sup>

Thus, in order to ensure that the scope of case studies are inclusive and comprehensive in terms of Africa, its child soldiers and other role players caught-up in the grips of armed conflicts, the aforementioned methodological issues will be inferred by Afro-pessimistic / Afro-optimistic readings and portrayal(s) of these situations. A wide variety of feature films will be used in order to address the varying depictions of child soldiers and other role players such as warlords, international NGOs and humanitarian relief programmes.

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<sup>120</sup> J. Boyden and J. De Berry, *Children and Youth on the Front Line: Ethnography, Armed Conflict and Displacement*, eds. J. Boyden and J. De Berry, Vol. 14 (New York: Berghahn Books, 2004), xvii.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., xviii.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

## 2.2 INDUSTRY ASSESSMENT: TAKING AFRICA TO THE SILVER SCREEN

### 2.2.1 Historical Overview: History, Film, and Africa and its Conflicts

"Dovey has extensively explored [and investigated] the relationship between African cinema and the representation of violence, and she argues that 'given the imbrication of visual technologies in the exercise of violence, film as technology cannot be simply claimed as a means for working against the perpetuation of violence, which is why close attention has to be paid to the particular ways in which violence is represented' [not only] in African films [but also] in films about Africa by non-African directors."<sup>125</sup>

During this section attention is turned to debates and issues surrounding history, films and the use and deployment thereof in the various representations of Africa and its conflicts across different industries in the past. Aspects of this overview that will be touched upon include: Debates surrounding the history of film, the use of films in the filmic depictions and adaptations of historical records and events; the tradition of storytellers (*griots*) and links between this tradition, Africa and films for, by and about Africans; and the marketing of trauma.

Although mention will be given to these different aspects, it is important to reiterate that these issues will not (in)form the research praxis and / or the focus of this particular study. Rather, issue will be taken with how child soldiers are portrayed in films, and this section will serve as an overview of various aspects in order to reach a platform from which to engage with such intricate debates.

In order to study the politics of filmic depictions and adaptations in African cinema, one first has to understand the socio-historical context of the moving image's arrival in Africa. The Lumière brothers invented cinema as an art medium in an era when Europe (and the entire Western world) was consolidating its colonial expansion.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> Singer and Dovey, *Representations of African Childhood in Conflict and Post-Conflict Contexts: Johnny Mad Dog, Ezra, and Sleepwalking Land*, 153.

<sup>126</sup> A. Tcheuyap, "African Cinema and the Politics of Adaptation (1)." *Post Script* 23, no. 3 (2004), 2.

These first cinema(s) emerged and took form in the 'context of a lasting monochromatic (white) and Eurocentric philosophical discourse that viewed non-whites, especially Africans and their lands, as animals and empty spaces to be conquered [and] the birth of the moving image occurs in philosophical and literary contexts that consider Africans, at the very best, as inferior human beings and cannibals to be rescued from savagery.'<sup>127</sup>

In these contexts (mis)conceptions, of all Africans, which were labelled as irrational and superstitious 'others', took form through the industry as they became the subjects of shameful and outrageous misrepresentations. Alexie Tcheuyap writes that:

'The power of film was [and can still be found in] the power to narrate. The Africa produced by 'colonial cameras' was exactly the kind of Africa invented and crafted by a racist rhetoric and philosophical tradition. The problem that the first representation of Africans in films raises is not really that of the legitimacy of a representation, but of the discourse behind it.'<sup>128</sup>

Furthermore, the first images of / on Africa were not only those of misrepresentation or appropriation of African identity. The first films shot and shown in this continent were part of the colonial endeavour, contributing to the implementation and solidification of colonialism in general. It is then, according to Tcheuyap, that 'within this context of problematic representations of African and cultural alienation that the problem of film adaptations [of other texts, and historical events] should be raised.'<sup>129</sup>

In the mid-1930s Louis Gottschalk wrote that 'no picture of a historical nature ought to be offered to the public until a reputable historian has had a chance to criticise it. The implications of Gottschalk's suggestion never rose to the occasion, and in light of the fact that it was partially impossible to have any form of power or say over the adaptations of history and / or any other contemporary event or issue, that reached the big screen, academic historians and other critics and scholars remained acutely dismissive of the film medium for an extensive period of time.

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<sup>127</sup> A. Tcheuyap, "African Cinema and the Politics of Adaptation (1)." *Post Script* 23, no. 3 (2004), 2-3.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*

It was, however, not until the late twentieth century when historical truth and credibility was called into question that (film) historians began to re-assess the value of both feature films (and then documentaries).<sup>130</sup> Many cinematic historians, like Rosenstone, have claimed that 'historical discourse' is larger than a mere set of norms based on pragmatic and empirical investigations of traditional historians' written scholarship. These historians have continuously and vehemently called for the expansion of the ways in which the understanding of the events that influence, shape and change the course of our lives (both past and present) is approached. And in a similar fashion they have urged audiences and critics to reconsider the relations between motion pictures; traditional written and oral accounts of events, and popular memory.<sup>131</sup>

Hayden White represents an inclination to, and conception of, the notion of the *constructionist* role of historians when it comes to cinematic historical depictions; and he also recognizes that the prospect exists for historians (and other scholars alike) to take up various perspectives in relation to a particular set of facts which in the end will be helpful for understanding some of the ways in which films and history relate to one another. Then, if there is at least some value in White's suggestion that the work of the historian is not far-flung from that of the storyteller (or *griot*) and then films – especially those that adhere to ideologies of pragmatism and verisimilitude – would show the potential to be commendable histories, capable of delivering an unrivalled depiction of the past and in bringing that past to life in ways that written histories (or accounts of any significant present-day event) cannot.<sup>132</sup>

With regards to the African film culture, and in the context of this dissertations, the depiction of Africa, the harsh conflicts troubling her citizens, and the child soldiers caught-up in the midst of these devastating wars more specifically, there have been significant developments in the assessment of cinematic representations of these issues during recent years.

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<sup>130</sup> P. Lambert and P. R. Schofield, *Making History: an Introduction to the history and Practices of a Discipline* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 250.

<sup>131</sup> Slocum, *Hollywood and War: The Film Reader*, 15.

<sup>132</sup> M. Chopra-Grant, *Cinema and History: The Telling of Stories* (New York: Wallflower Publishing, 2008), 6-7.

By taking pressing issues like colonial exploitation, tradition, hopes and civil conflicts, war, and in particular child soldiers to the international silver screens, the creation of such narratives that are based primarily on these current events as well as subjects of history have become a prominent trait of the film genres dealing with Africa, its cultures and other concerning issues.<sup>133</sup>

For the African filmmaker, Ousmane Sembene, the camera has come to play the same role the pen played with the 1950-1960 writers who condemned colonialism. Through his filmic depictions and adaptations Sembene is considered to be a *post-colonial / modern-day griot* of African filmmaking, and thus carries with him the aspiration and 'desire to reach a wider (and partly illiterate) audience, beyond the foreign language in which the literary work [used for adaptations] was written. Through [the moving image] and visual media he thus attempts to 'reduce the economic problem of books being more expensive than movie-going.'<sup>134</sup>

All these stratagems are aimed at the fulfilment of a single purpose: To successfully set-up, deploy and use moving (cinematic) images as tools for social transformation by not only informing, but at the same time educating, both local and international audiences about the dealings with the constant struggle, daily issues and predicaments of Africa and its citizens.<sup>135</sup>

According to Sembene, moving images, and cinematic portrayals of conflict situations, have fulfilled similar, if not the same, roles that the wartime munitions used have come to play during the freedom-wars in various countries and parts of the African continent. He goes further to say that although cinema does not kill physically, it was instead used to mentally and psychologically subjugate and suppress the African people during the time of colonialism [and] 'African films / adaptations are expected to liberate minds in the way weapons liberated African nations.'<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> M. Cham, "Film and History in Africa: A Critical Survey of Current Trends and Tendencies." (University of Cape Town, 6-8 July 2002, 2002).

<sup>134</sup> Tcheuyap, *African Cinema and the Politics of Adaptation (1)*, 4.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

It is then noteworthy, in this sense, to comment on the origins of Algerian cinema and how it 'was born in the liberation battlefields and that in a similar manner the Angolan and Mozambican cinemas are deeply rooted in and connected to national liberation wars.'<sup>137</sup> Thus, given this historical context, Tcheuyap argues that feature films, 'whether they take shape from original scripts or adapted from literature, have mostly privileged content, realism, social discourse and transformation over sophisticated aesthetic innovation.'<sup>138</sup>

Numerous studies by scholars across various disciplines, like Alexie Tcheuyap, have given emphasis to 'the specificities of African cinema. Among these, *orality* appears to have had the most significant impact on film aesthetics and ideology. The influence of *orality* in film is visible in the role of the *griot* who, according to Sembene,, is the core personality [and patriarchal or matriarchal figure] in traditional African [cinematic] societies.'<sup>139</sup>

Sembene defines this role of the storyteller / *griot* as:

'The function of this figure in cinema is multiple. It can be aesthetic, thematic, and ideological as well as linguistic. The approach to *orality* and its impact on [cinematic representations] and / or adaptations will, therefore, depend on the filmmaker's awareness of this concept and even of African cultures in general.'<sup>140</sup>

Tomaselli and Eke argue that, that which has been found wanting and 'lacking thus far in African discussions on visual literacy, especially relating to cinema, film, and video, are debates on how this idea could be applied in African countries to meet the demands of literate, semiliterate, and non-literate [audiences] interacting through western-African and African *orality*-based cultures.'<sup>141</sup> In their point of view, this is a crucial notion because they regard the act of visual imaging and filmic representations to 'fragment consciousness, situating the observer outside of what s/he sees. Though in contrast, sound incorporates, locating the observer at the centre of an auditory world.'<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> Tcheuyap, *African Cinema and the Politics of Adaptation (1)*, 4.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

<sup>141</sup> Tomaselli and Eke, *Perspectives on Orality in African Cinema*, 112.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

Consequently, it must be noted that literate cultures and communities, which stress the importance and value of the visual, gather and store knowledge in written and other kinds of documents provided by recording and retrieval technologies. Whereas, oral cultures, in contrast, finds knowledge and understanding in the 'popular communal memory.'<sup>143</sup> It is then within the aforementioned that a core aspect of the present study lies. By focussing on specific case study films pertaining to issues of child soldiering in Africa, focus will inevitably fall on the moving images (both Western and African in origin) that are 'beamed back' to audiences far removed from the 'realities' that they are confronted with on their screens.

In 1970 Laura Edmondson wrote a powerful article entitled *Marketing Trauma and the Theatre of War in Northern Uganda* wherein she argues that 'the concept of marketing provides a lens for exploring the roles of audiences and actors in the performance of war.'<sup>144</sup> The different aspects and 'contours of audience, genre, and narrative interact, overlap and in some instances fuse at certain stages throughout the exploration of various theatres of war. [And according to Edmondson] these 'multiple layers of spectatorship challenge and overturn the opposition of local and global upon which discourses of globalisation continue to depend.'<sup>145</sup>

Whilst studying these various theatres of war, in terms of both its reach and intensity, Mary Kaldor, has referred to the conflicts / wars of the past two decades as '*new wars*.' She notes that under 'the terms of these wars, which increasingly target civilians instead of combatants, the players seemingly try to outdo one another in the production of spectacles of atrocity.'<sup>146</sup>

Massacres, mass murder, and the maiming of civilians and the abduction of children are the methodologies du jour in African countries ravaged by these so-called *new wars*. Anthropologist Carolyn Nordstrom has studied and investigated these public displays of brutality "as a strategy meant to diminish local capacity for resistance - by forcing others to be witnesses of these atrocities carried out

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<sup>143</sup> Tomaselli and Eke, *Perspectives on Orality in African Cinema*, 112.

<sup>144</sup> L. Edmondson, "Marketing Trauma and the Theatre of War in Northern Uganda," *Theatre Journal* 57, no. 3 (2005), 453.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, 453.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, 453-454.

on community members, and families, the perpetrators succeed in ‘unmaking the world’ for victims and spectators alike, clearing the way for eventual surrender and defeat.”<sup>147</sup>

It is however important to realise that these atrocities or this ‘unmaking of the world,’ plays out before world in international theatres / arenas. Both the eyewitnesses and victims recount and communicate their testimony to the ‘international observers dotting the modern African warscape, who repackage / [represent] this testimony for the global stage in the format of human rights reports, world news, international aid policy [and feature films].’<sup>148</sup> These international and widespread audiences, consequently, provide the decisive and fundamental context(s) for the ways in which terror-warfare will be narrated, adapted, scripted and performed.<sup>149</sup>

Edmondson argues that both ‘anthropologists and theatre scholars alike [are prone to sneer at and criticise] realism as a medium for the representation of violence because it integrates the violence into a seamless status quo resistant to social change and intervention.’<sup>150</sup> Michael Taussig in turn, “singles out realism for a harsh critique in the context of cultures of terror, calling it a kind of ‘hermeneutic violence’ that ‘flattens contradiction and systematises chaos.’”<sup>151</sup>

Realism is, thus, generally understood as a conservative ideological weapon that domesticates and contains the destruction left in violence’s wake, despite the fact that there are scholars such as Vivian M. Patraka, who cautiously suggests that ‘there are conditions [in the representation of violence] under which the traditional techniques of realistic identification may be useful.’<sup>152</sup>

Provided that each of the dramatic and cinematic representations of Africa’s wars and her child soldiers, that will be analysed during this study, draw on the conventions associated with realism, the overlap between historical contexts, political climates, wartime narratives, and the Afro-pessimistic / Afro-optimistic representation thereof validates a closer consideration and analysis.

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<sup>147</sup> Edmondson, *Marketing Trauma and the Theatre of War in Northern Uganda.*, 453-454.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, 454-455.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, 460-461.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, 461

### 2.2.2 Telling Stories through Feature / Fiction Films

Both written narratives and feature films that are available to audiences today were influenced, shaped, written and / or produced by the circumstances which inspired them and / or in which they unfolded. M. Zafer Çetin writes in his article *Tales of Past, Present, and Future: Mythmaking and Nationalist Discourse in Turkish Politics* that '[although] it seems that stories about the past reflect interpretations of the present / presenter, they are used as investments for the future.'<sup>153</sup> He goes further and quotes Edward Said, who remarked, 'neither past nor present...has a complete meaning alone [and they rather] inform each other - each implies the other.'<sup>154</sup>

John Tosh emphasises the fact that one needs to harbour an *active historical consciousness* – one that is not resistant to change and other interpretations or representations. People create histories and relay differing 'realities' according to different circumstances and social, political and economic factors that are at play at a certain period in time. Drawing parallels between feature films and documentaries; and oral and written narratives, serves to be an extremely helpful tool in the process of understanding the ways in which the films of (as well as about) a certain period / event offer renderings and interpretations of that specific period or event.

It is in these corresponding traits that it becomes clear that 'there can be more than one manner of understanding and / or engaging with cinematic depictions of past events. Moreover, even though feature films run against our notion of proper history it remains a kind of history nonetheless. The medium of film has given scholars and viewers alike new tools to perceive and make sense of realities in a new way – including the realities of a past, which have not been open for discussion or that, has long since vanished from our sight.

However, profound questions are raised when one looks at the greater role of feature films in shaping, manipulating and informing viewers' understandings of [historical] events and about the roles both of technological media and of more traditional oral-based narratives, have come to play in the approach of making sense of stories / events which does not fall into one's reference system(s).<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> M. Z. Cetin, "Tales of Past, Present, and Future: Mythmaking and Nationalist Discourse in Turkish Politics," *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 24, no. 2 (2004), 347.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

<sup>155</sup> Slocum, *Hollywood and War: The Film Reader*, 14.

Ultimately, when considering the historical claims made by contemporary films in their portrayal and depiction of specific events, the challenge will be to look at the various ways of how such representations of both historical and present-day events affect the viewers' association with cinema along with cinema's relationship to the society to which that specific history and/or reality pertains.

Robert Brent Toplin stresses the fact that the meaning that films convey to its local and international viewers (may or may not) be problematic. He states that 'both praise and criticisms are essential in judging the work of [not only] cinematic historians [but all filmmakers alike]...' and that it does not help simply to reproach the work of cinematic historians, expecting them to function within the parameters and rigorous standards of scholarship vis-à-vis the representation of evidence.<sup>156</sup> Films succeed in creating intense familiarities and elicit powerful emotional relationships (between filmmaker(s), audiences and the film's subject matter / topic) by establishing close connections to a world that is wholly unfamiliar and succeeds to de-familiarise the present as well as the past.

The social functioning of feature films, as well as the film industry as a whole, takes on a remarkable level of importance when considering the diverse ways in which a motion picture positions itself in relation to a particular conflict. Key aspects, such as the views of the opposing governments and / or militia groups waging war, or the intricate levels of the practise of war in general come into question. This ideological 'conflict' to a certain extent, thus, stems from the harsh realities of for example child soldiers that are being represented; the ambiguity of being in favour of or against war; and from the fact that both tendencies can be present in the same film.<sup>157</sup>

When considering debates about the telling of stories, especially through feature films, one must see the need to acknowledge the fact that due to ever-changing social and political climates of countries as well as individual communities, 'genres are never static. Rather, they are constantly evolving with the times; they are paradoxically placed; they are conservative and innovative in so far as they respond to the industry and audience demands.'<sup>158</sup>

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<sup>156</sup> Lambert and Schofield, *Making History: an Introduction to the history and Practices of a Discipline*, 252.

<sup>157</sup> Slocum, *Hollywood and War: The Film Reader*, 11.

<sup>158</sup> T. Sakota-Kokot, "My War, Your War: Understanding Conflict in Africa and the Middle East through Fiction Film: Hotel Rwanda and the Kingdom" (PhD, University of the Witwatersrand), 64.

As Sakota-Kokot explains, a fitting example of the aforementioned can be seen with the vast amount of Spy Dramas that were produced and released 'during the Cold War. As the Berlin Wall and Iron Curtain came down, so did the audience demand and interest for the Spy genre.'<sup>159</sup> Thus, in addition, traditional genres also evolve and adapt to the ever-changing political and social climates that they are produced in and released into. Sakota-Kokot points to the work of O'Sullivan et al when arguing that 'genres are agents of ideological closure – they limit the meaning-potential of a given text [or narrative], and they [also minimise] the commercial risk of the producer corporations.'<sup>160</sup>

Thus, although 'genre characteristics limit the possibilities of the outcome of a film, genres serve an important role in terms of [spectatorship], audience [perspectives], expectations [and their receptions].'<sup>161</sup> It can therefore be argued that genres 'guarantee a certain amount of viewership which almost acts as a guarantee for audience numbers which contributes to box office success. In expecting a specific outcome of a genre, the dominant ideology prevails.'<sup>162</sup>

Sakota-Kokot then also contends that 'both the narrative formula and the characteristics of the genre [will ultimately] dictate the outcome of the story and [the extent to which] the audience buy into specific genres due to the expectations promoted by the genre.'<sup>163</sup> There are, according to Jane Feuer, three approaches to genre theory that can be identified. The first is the *aesthetic*; the second is the *ritual*, and the third is the *ideological* approach. Feuer argues that these approaches cannot be viewed / discussed as distinct and separate methodologies. However, she extends this notion by advocating that it is clearly evident that different writings, narrations and scripts will focus on different approaches.

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<sup>159</sup> Sakota-Kokot, *My War, Your War: Understanding Conflict in Africa and the Middle East through Fiction Film: Hotel Rwanda and the Kingdom*, 64.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

She writes:

[That firstly], the *aesthetic* approach defines genre in terms of the system of conventions that permits artistic expression. This would involve a text where Auteur theory and the evidence of the director's personal style are evident. In this instance, a work will be analysed with reference to how it fulfils or transcends a genre.<sup>164</sup>

The second approach, *ritual*, regards genre as an active exchange between industry and culture and then also allows for cultural expression. The audience may or may not fully identify with or comprehend the scenario(s) portrayed in a film but 'through an understanding of the cultural position presented in the narrative, the audience understands and empathises with the cultural position, and is negotiated into agreeing with the central message of the film.'<sup>165</sup> According to this approach, 'the film [then] negotiates the audience into adapting to change or understanding a cultural group *other* than that of the audience.'<sup>166</sup>

Finally, the *ideological* approach, views the term genre as 'an instrument of control, which merely reproduces the dominant beliefs of the capitalist system. [And] within this approach, 'the film [as a visual representation] hegemonically incorporates the audience into the dominant belief system and there is no room for negotiation.'<sup>167</sup>

Sakota-Kokot uses the film *Hotel Rwanda* as a prime example of how Feuer's approaches are taken to the silver screens. With regards to this 2004-film Sakota-Kokot writes that:

'Feuer's ritual as well as ideological approaches because on the one hand the film serves as an American representation of an African scenario / conflict. The audience is not necessarily familiar with the situation in the film, its geological position or the historic events depicted.'<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>164</sup> Sakota-Kokot, *My War, Your War: Understanding Conflict in Africa and the Middle East through Fiction Film: Hotel Rwanda and the Kingdom*, 69.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid., 70.

The three case study films for this particular study consequently can be said that it '[navigates and] negotiates audience(s) into understanding the film's interpretation of the conflict(s) by watching the central characters interact and reading the messages of the film – [consequently], the film reinstates its truth claim that the film is a depiction of the 'real' events.'<sup>169</sup> Stephan Prince writes that the common 'assumptions [and conventions] about realism in the cinema are frequently tied to [theories and notions] of indexicality prevailing between the photographic image and its referent. These, in turn, constitute part of the bifurcation between realism and formalism in film theory.'<sup>170</sup>

In her study of the 'intersection between realism and personal narratives of violence in [specifically] Northern Ireland, Allen Feldman calls attention to the [unfeasibility] of identifying singular origins for such a complex phenomenon.'<sup>171</sup> Edmondson contends that the shaping and 'moulding of [truly] realistic modes of depiction into a hierarchy of credibility and fact-setting and as a public form of truth-claiming and depictive legitimation was a long and fragmented historical labour that emerged in a variety of discontinuous - but overlapping social sites and not all at one time if [one] considers the respective development of state archiving, juridical rules of evidence, popular media, optical experimentation, art movements, and the commodification of visual experience.'<sup>172</sup>

In the specific social site(s) of the films that will be used as case studies during this study it should be stated that along with 'Feldman's list of cultural, legal, and artistic discourses' humanitarianism can be added to this list as yet 'another influence in the privileging of realism as a seemingly objective medium of representation.'<sup>173</sup>

The creation and development of a narrative / storyline / plot to "make sense of traumatic events is not in itself surprising. Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub write that in order to come to terms with trauma and transform it into a relatively contained memory of the past, 'a therapeutic process - a process of

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<sup>169</sup> Sakota-Kokot, *My War, Your War: Understanding Conflict in Africa and the Middle East through Fiction Film: Hotel Rwanda and the Kingdom*, 71.

<sup>170</sup> Prince, *True Lies: Perceptual Realism, Digital Images, and Film Theory*, 28.

<sup>171</sup> Edmondson, *Marketing Trauma and the Theatre of War in Northern Uganda*, 465.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid.

constructing a narrative, of reconstructing a history and essentially, of *re-externalising the event*—has to be set in motion.’<sup>174</sup>

In her study of post-war reconstruction in Peru, Francine A’ness thoughtfully elaborates upon Felman and Laub’s work, noting that the ‘production of testimony’ requires an atmosphere of stability. She states that ‘in order to speak about the traumatic event a victim needs to feel safe. He / she needs to know that what happened in the past has come to an end and, moreover, that the listener [and / or viewer] before whom he / she testifies is someone who will listen and in whom [s]he can trust.’<sup>175</sup> Although much has been done by government agencies, local and international NGOs, church groups and other humanitarian organisations, the harsh reality remains that Africa’s young children continue to be abducted, villages raided and people massacred.

As seen in cases of literature (and then, specifically feature films with regards to the dissertation at hand) ‘these narratives play out in region(s) where the population is most assuredly not safe [and] the narrative itself, with its promise of restoration, holds out a cultural lifeline, one that places survival in local hands as opposed to those of the capricious and indifferent state.’<sup>176</sup>

While it is true that in this socio-cultural sense, the modern media of cinema and television have not rendered the *griot* obsolete but rather considerably extended his range of action and even allowed him to reach a global audience, it may well be objected that filmmakers who comment critically upon their society can hardly be said to be an exclusively African phenomenon.

The adaptation of and the creation of narratives as well as the production of feature films dealing with extremely emotional and distressing issues like child soldiering in Africa has placed both traditional *griots* and modern filmmakers (both from Africa and the rest of the world) on par in the quest to tell the stories of unknown realities that would have otherwise be blanketed by a cloud of politics and silence. Consequently, it can be argued that not only African filmmakers, but filmmakers from all walks of life, take it upon themselves to fulfil the *griot’s* role as socio-cultural commentator(s) and [to] carry it on by means of cinema.

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<sup>174</sup> Edmondson, *Marketing Trauma and the Theatre of War in Northern Uganda*, 465.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*, 468.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*

Edmondson writes that:

‘Filmmakers see their art as commentaries on their societies in order to enlighten people about the contexts of their experiences. Thus, seen in broader terms, the filmmaker embodies the complex, yet multiple roles of *griots* / bards in their traditional contexts of origin. They are simultaneously social critics, historians, bards and seers; they criticise the present to encourage change; re-examine and reconstruct the past to shed more light on its effects on the present; and they transmit cultures and histories from the past generation to those who are present.’<sup>177</sup>

Jessica Senehi ascribes two aspects to *storytelling* in her article entitled *Constructive Storytelling: A Peace Process*. Firstly, she states that ‘storytelling is language.’<sup>178</sup> This encompasses not only vocabulary and grammar rules but also norms of communicative behaviour, and narrative forms – which renders language as society’s most multifaceted and complex symbolic system.

Accordingly, it can be argued that ‘language encodes the culture of a particular community, including shared understandings of identity, power, history, values, and utopian visions.’<sup>179</sup> Narratives may relate events or be overtly fictional, but it is never this clear-cut and narratives are should not be regarded to be based on pure fact or pure fiction. Rather, a fictional narrative may be used in a cogently manner to persuasively express notions that a certain narrative is perceived as true.

Senehi writes that:

‘Narratives can be related in a number of media such as books, periodicals, film, and video have the ability to disseminate knowledge widely. However, access to expression in these media is restricted and difficult.’<sup>180</sup>

Storytelling, as deployed within the research framework of this study consequently points to notions in which cinematic narratives and representations of Africa’s child soldiers are taken to audiences. The aforementioned notion also then informs debates surrounding realism in film(s) and will also be seen through an in-depth analysis of the three case study films in Chapter Five.

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<sup>177</sup> Edmondson, *Marketing Trauma and the Theatre of War in Northern Uganda*, 469-470.

<sup>178</sup> J. Senehi, "Constructive Storytelling: A Peace Process," *Peace and Conflict Studies* 9, no. 2 (2002), 43.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

### 2.3. DOCUMENTING THE 'TRUTH': THEORISING AND PROBLEMATISING REALISM IN FEATURE FILMS

'Thanks to Ousmane Sembené, I realised that film was not only entertainment, but could also be about one's awareness of one's own existence. The film made me question who I was. Good films have taught me much about contradictions within oneself and about social forces. Sometimes a film also makes painful things clear: things or truths that one would prefer to ignore. Once you have seen something... you [as audience member] become responsible.'<sup>181</sup>

- Gaston Kaboré

Renowned filmmakers like Dziga Vertov and John Grierson strongly hold the belief that it was not their sole responsibility (as filmmakers) to merely record, but rather to also *interpret* the world as they saw it. For Grierson and Vertov, 'the [filmmaker] does not merely record the world; he or she creates one consonant with what the filmmaker regards as actuality. Grierson argued that 'you photograph the natural life but you also, by your juxtaposition of detail, create an interpretation of it [...].'<sup>182</sup>

Vertov and Grierson further argued that 'filmmakers should produce a *kino pravda*, or 'cine truth,' that was unique to the vision of the world offered by the camera... Vertov's and Grierson's notion that the documentary film was an interpretation of the realistic scenes the camera captured makes their ideas parallel to those of film realists like Bazin. All three thought that cinema was a product of the creative abilities of the maker.'<sup>183</sup>

Westwell notes Rosenstone's point of view with regards to cinematic depictions, and further stresses that cinematic depictions of certain events are 'like the works of written history – thus, cinematic representations constitute facts by selecting traces of the past and enfolding them into a narrative.'<sup>184</sup>

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<sup>181</sup> G. Kaboré, *The Power of Culture*, 2005, <http://www.powerofculture.nl/en/current/2005/september/kobore.html>.

<sup>182</sup> K. Pischaske, "Colour Adjustment: Race and Representation in Post-Apartheid South African Documentary" (Doctor of Philosophy in Film and Media Studies, University of Cape Town), 22-23.

<sup>183</sup> Pischaske, *Colour Adjustment: Race and Representation in Post-Apartheid South African Documentary*, 22-23.

<sup>184</sup> G. Westwell, "Critical Approaches to the History Film - A Field in Search of a Methodology," *Rethinking History* 11, no. 4 (2007), 583.

And the great feature of a filmic representation, according to Lisa Pontecorvo, is that it is created for a particular audience.<sup>185</sup> As a result, the subject matter is the first and foremost decided upon, and then its representation is shaped with a specific audience in mind. Thus, it can be argued that feature films embrace a moral, as well as an aesthetic, prevalence with its audience by presenting itself as trusting and credulous.

According to Vertov both the movie camera and the processes involved in filmic depictions of (both historical and present-day) events, was invented in order to infiltrate deeper into the visual, perceptive world and to explore visual phenomena in order to ensure that we as viewers and onlookers never forget what happened in the past and what the future generations have to bear in mind.<sup>186</sup>

Bazin's theorisation of the viewer / spectator is 'based on man's trans-historic desire to arrest time [and death] through realist representation that is fulfilled by film. [And this in turn] is based on the suggestion that filmic / moving images inspire awe not by resemblance but through their indexical nature. Yet, [as Nakassis shows] this only holds to the extent that spectators know that filmic images are produced through the causal mechanisms inherent in image capture and development.'<sup>187</sup> Consequently, it can be argued that realism per se must ultimately 'be defined with respect to *actual* spectators' prior knowledge and expectations and not deducible from some form of transcendental framework. Implicit in this position, then, is that spectators take filmic images as 'slices of reality.'<sup>188</sup>

Nakassis goes further to state it is then indeed this assumption that justifies Bazin and Kracauer's theorisation of realism. They argue that it is due to 'our obsession for realism', 'our appetite for illusion', the 'irrational power' of photography and film 'to bear away our faith' that film(s) will 'induce a loss of awareness of the ["authentic"] reality itself.'<sup>189</sup>

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<sup>185</sup> P. Smith, *The Historian and Film*, ed. P. Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 24.

<sup>186</sup> P. Rabinowitz, "Wreckage upon Wreckage: History, Documentary and the Ruins of Memory," *History and Theory* 32, no. 2 (1993), 122.

<sup>187</sup> Nakassis, *Theorizing Film Realism Empirically*, 212.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*, 212-213.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*

Bazin's argument for this 'alleviation of alienation' also turns on the hypothesis that 'spectators view realist images as similar to their own experience of reality.'<sup>190</sup> On this matter Nakassis argues that 'it is [precisely] this *iconism* of [a certain] image [or set / sequence of images] with extra-textual reality that creates a familiarity for the spectator and thus acts to lessen his alienation from the world of dead objects that surround him, allowing him to identify with [a certain filmic representation].'<sup>191</sup>

In his article *Questions of Magnitude*, Bill Nichols, calls the moment at which a text submits an audience into its ideology, as *the crisis moment*. He draws his theories and arguments from the work of Frank Lentricchia who argues that 'the aesthetic moment of linkage (between ideology and form), is the manipulative moment at which the subject-audience is submitted to the productive force of ideology.'<sup>192</sup>

In understanding Nichols' use of Lentricchia, the 'submission' into a given text / narrative will ultimately be considered to be 'a question of magnitude. In other words, 'the (inter)relationship between 'myth, category and narrative' and how each one of these 'axes' influences and interacts with the *other*.'<sup>193</sup> Nichols argues that 'art (or the crisis moment of linkage between form and ideology), not only imitates life but equally influences it', and this is ultimately achieved by 'providing a significant form for the very aspects of subjective human experience it claims only to reflect.'<sup>194</sup> However, the complexity of the viewing position and the make-up of different audience members need to be taken into account.

Audience reception theories acknowledge that audiences are not homogenous and that their experiences, (perceptions and receptions), of what they see in films may be context specific. These theories are able to examine the individual's subject position, the text's mode of production, and the circumstances of the showing of the work. Consequently, the interaction of these various factors impact on and affects the reception of the various audiences. The aforementioned then also forms the core of Stuart Hall's convictions in his 1980-article entitled, *Encoding/Decoding*.

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<sup>190</sup> Nakassis, *Theorizing Film Realism Empirically*, 213.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid.

<sup>192</sup> Sakota-Kokot, *My War, Your War: Understanding Conflict in Africa and the Middle East through Fiction Film: Hotel Rwanda and the Kingdom*, 181.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid., 181-182.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid.

In *Encoding/Decoding* Hall proposed a new model of mass communication which highlighted the importance of active interpretation within relevant codes. On the one hand Hall's theory of encoding and decoding moves away from the view that the media (and in particular films) have the power to directly cause a certain behaviour in an individual. However, at the same time his theory holds onto the notion that the role of media (films) serves an agenda-setting function. Hall's model puts forward three central principles: Firstly, that the same event (visual text / message) can be encoded in more than one way; secondly, that the (visual) message contains more than one possible reading; and thirdly that the understanding the (visual) message can be a problematic process, regardless of how 'generally accepted' it may seem.

Hall further takes concern with the issue of how people make sense of media texts (like feature films), and presented three hypothetical methods of decoding. Hall, who often uses examples involving televised media to explain his ideas argues that the dominant philosophy is typically inscribed as the '*preferred reading*' in a media text, and that this is not automatically adopted by readers and / or viewers. The social situations of readers / viewers / listeners may lead them to adopt different stances. *Dominant readings* are produced by those whose current social situation and background favours the preferred reading. In turn *negotiated readings* are produced by those who inflect the preferred reading to take account of their social position; and *oppositional readings* are produced by those whose social position puts them into direct conflict with the preferred reading. However, Hall writes that:

'It is possible for a viewer to perfectly understand both the literal and the connotative inflection given by a discourse but to decode the message in a globally contrary way. He / she de-totalizes the message in the preferred code in order to re-totalize the message within some alternative framework of reference.'<sup>195</sup>

Hence, Hall concluded that while any text has the power to propose or suggest particular ideological readings, media texts (like films) can have numerous meanings, and that audiences are active decoders who will not necessarily accept the preferred reading being offered by the cinematic texts.<sup>196</sup> (1980: 209).

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<sup>195</sup> S. Hall, 'Encoding/Decoding' in *Culture, Media, Language* (New York: Routledge, 1980), 138.

<sup>196</sup> Hall, *Encoding/Decoding*, 209.

Thus, when considering reception theory in terms of feature films and its audiences, emphasis is given to the viewer's reception of a particular cinematic text and it stresses that a 'text' is under no circumstances just passively accepted by the audience. No, rather, the viewer interprets the meaning(s) of the specific filmic text based on his / her individual cultural background and life experiences.

In essence then, the meaning of a cinematic text is not inherent within the text itself, but is created within the relationship between the text and the viewer. A basic acceptance of the meaning of a specific filmic text tends to occur when a group of readers have a shared cultural background and interpret the film's text in similar ways. Alternatively, if two viewers have vastly different cultural and personal experiences, their reading of a text will vary greatly.

In reading a "film form, the audience becomes 'literate' in that form through repetition and the association of similarities that create a familiarity with the form. The viewer starts to recognise the framework which encompasses a film through identification and association. The audience thus becomes 'cultured' in that form, merely by watching it."<sup>197</sup> Therefore, on a socio-political and / or ethical level, the fiction film form that is based on fact, fits within the moulded expectations (and receptions) of the viewer. The viewer (who forms part of a society) watches the events which fit within a pre-existing narrative structure.<sup>198</sup> And here the viewer's individual subject position, the film's mode of production, as well as the screening of the particular film, also come into play as these various factors impact on and effects the reception of a particular audience.

With regards to the case study films for this study it can then be argued that the Afro-pessimistic and Afro-optimistic narrative structures will inform and mould the viewers' perspectives, expectations, anticipations of visual representations and receptions of Africa's child soldiers on screen. However, Sakota-Kokot writes that this then means that:

'There is no a priori existence of a form (belief, ideology and human experience) within a society because the viewer forms part of the society. In contrast, the audience has to be able to identify and recognise the form before he/she can understand the essence of the subject matter. In order

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<sup>197</sup> Sakota-Kokot, *My War, Your War: Understanding Conflict in Africa and the Middle East through Fiction Film: Hotel Rwanda and the Kingdom*, 181 - 182.

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.*, 182.

for this to occur, the essence takes shape around the form of the film (which the audience has become literate in through the act of watching).<sup>199</sup>

It is crucial then to note that this becomes apparent both in documentary and fiction film forms. Through the 'act of watching, the viewer becomes familiar with the exposition, followed by a probable closure or resolution evident in many fiction films. This is how one links ideology to a film form – the ideological expectations of the individual viewer dictate(s) how the specific film form represents them.<sup>200</sup>

In the study entitled, *Theorizing Film Realism Empirically*, Nakassis investigates, through the examination of so-called realist, commercial Tamil films, what a theory of realism would resemble if approached through working closely with viewers, filmmakers and a specific film form. In this particular study, as Nakassis notes, there are at least three aspects of realism at play.<sup>201</sup>

Firstly, it is noted that 'realism' was in many instances 'deployed by viewers and producers as a truth-functional correspondence relationship between representations and the 'real' world: a representation is real to the extent that tokens of it can be found in reality.'<sup>202</sup> Secondly, "'realism' is largely operationalized in the film theory literature in terms of formal features of texts or the cinematic 'apparatus'. And finally, 'realism' can be taken as socio-culturally relative to what some community – viewers, filmmakers, other cultural authorities – says it is."<sup>203</sup>

Nakassis, however points out that all of these views are problematic when taken into consideration on their own. Instead of being guided by only one of these abovementioned approaches to 'realism' one needs to consider a combination of these three aspects of 'realism.' Accordingly, Nakassis advocates the following three-part-approach in order to successfully comprehend 'realism' in general / across disciplines or genres.

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<sup>199</sup> Sakota-Kokot, *My War, Your War: Understanding Conflict in Africa and the Middle East through Fiction Film: Hotel Rwanda and the Kingdom*, 182.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid.

<sup>201</sup> Nakassis, *Theorizing Film Realism Empirically*, 224.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid.

Firstly, 'realism must be regarded as 'culturally mediated classifications of real / unreal.' Realism is understood (at some level) by those who deploy its rhetoric as a 'truth-functional correspondence relationship.'<sup>204</sup> In other words, 'realist texts *feel* realistic and are judged accordingly, although this is not to say that viewers in many cases mistake text for reality. C. Williams points out that, 'films make reference to the real world or to an idea of the real world, and the understanding that they do make such reference is a part of the way in which spectators themselves understand them'<sup>205</sup>

In the second instance, 'realism per se is 'definable only with respect to a [specific / defined] social domain.' It must be noted that the 'logics and contents of such classifications vary across and within film cultures' which implies that 'realism is always realism *to someone*; it has a social domain which can be specified sociologically (for example by age, gender, ethnicity, class, nation/region, etcetera).'<sup>206</sup> For example, the realism of in the case study films of this study is linked to the ethnic, economic, socio-political and personal domains of not only the child soldiers in Africa themselves, but also the social domains of audiences.

Then, lastly the third part of this approach is that 'realism is ultimately *inter-discursive*.' Realism, then, as stated in the first and second leg of this approach "involves the (regular) *mapping* of one set of representations – classifications of real and unreal – to another – a film or set of films – with respect to some social domain; that is, films 'fit' with other models of social reality available to viewers, and it is to this extent that films (and 'reality') are felt to be real or not."<sup>207</sup>

Consequently, in short, Nakassis argues that, 'realisms are always constituted through the confluence of multiple representations (and representational orders) of reality.'<sup>208</sup> This means that realism is always regarded to be *inter-discursive* and realism is always [only] 'realism *with respect to* other representations, both as converging descriptions of the 'real' and as contrastive representations of the 'unreal.'<sup>209</sup>

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<sup>204</sup> Nakassis, *Theorizing Film Realism Empirically*, 225.

<sup>205</sup> C. William, "Realism and Cinema: Introduction," in *Realism and the Cinema* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980), 10.

<sup>206</sup> Nakassis, *Theorizing Film Realism Empirically*, 225.

<sup>207</sup> *Ibid.*, 226.

<sup>208</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>209</sup> *Ibid.*

Bearing this three-part-approach in mind questions must then be asked as to how (and to what extent) the multitude of filmic representations, which attempt to define 'real', mutually reinforce one another or not with regards to a certain topic. This can be linked to the current study and how the various depictions of Africa's child soldiers continue to reinforce notions the 'real' against a backdrop of Afro-pessimism and Afro-optimism.<sup>210</sup>

It can then be argued that all of the aforementioned issues and debates surrounding realism, audience perspectives, and spectatorship in some way become part of the underlying considerations for the study at hand. Afro-pessimistic and Afro-optimistic representations of child soldiers in Africa can be traced back to questions of (perceptual) realism.

When considering the representation of African child soldiers, it then becomes imperative to take post-modernist theories on reality into account. For, post-modernism deconstructs any notion of reality which ultimately questions the possibility of an absolute truth.

The socio-political, cultural and political realms that audiences find themselves will indefinitely define the level of *perceptual realism* that they attribute to certain renderings / representations of issues. Spectatorship and audience perspectives are thusly informed by not only their own individual realities, but also by that exact 'reality' that can be read in newspapers and seen in television broadcasts. It is then when these aspects are relayed to filmic representations of events, issues and foreign situations that filmmakers and audiences alike may be confronted with the politics of realism, and problems in addressing 'realism' in films.

When one considers the public rhetoric and discourse about the continent of Africa in the public domain during the last two decades – albeit in print, on radio or on television or movie screens – audiences are confronted with stark contrasts and difficult debates surrounding the representation of Africa, its countries and its peoples. With regards to this particular study, both Afro-pessimistic and Afro-optimistic discourse have been rife in the narrative-formations and representation of Africa's child soldiers. The various films available on the subject matter considers its individual portrayal as 'realist' and 'pragmatic', and it is then herein that the underlying aim of this study lies. The objective is to evaluate the manners in which these cinematic representations of child soldiers construe and / or portray this phenomenon.

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<sup>210</sup> Nakassis, *Theorizing Film Realism Empirically*, 226.

In conclusion, it must be said that with images of child soldiers (both in print and on screen) in the public domain, the questions of how these images are seen, read, interpreted, and how they evoke emotional responses are important as they relate to the impact the images can have on the framing of the issue for the Western public.<sup>211</sup>

These issues and questions will now be addressed in the following chapters in an attempt to broaden the understanding of how people read, respond to images of child soldiers, interpret the lives of child soldiers through especially moving, cinematic images, and the potential effect that these visual representations of child soldiers can have.

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<sup>211</sup> D. Sharkey, "Picture the Child Soldier," *Peace Review* 24, no. 3 (July, 2012), 262.

#### 2.4. SELECTION OF FEATURE FILMS FOR ANALYSIS: FILM SYNOPSES

The Africa that audiences encounter in films, such as those mentioned above, has set the stage for an intriguing tension in contemporary thinking about Africa. Martha Evans and Ian Glenn write that the 'Afro-pessimist TIA (*This is Africa*) mantra – a sardonic response to African apathy and brutality rings especially true with audiences, and the abbreviations, apparently coined in the film *Blood Diamond*, has become part of popular discourses' in writings dealing with African issues.<sup>212</sup> According to Anna Leander, 'TIA comes to stand for the Africa as a world apart; a world where there is no public sphere, no politics, no state and hence no obvious 'voice' that could possibly be heard.'<sup>213</sup>

The three films that will be used as case studies for this study were carefully selected to ensure that the widest range of portrayals of child soldiers were included in the study. The films that were viewed and studied each carry with them immense depth into the debates surrounding, and realities of Africa's child soldiers. These three case study films were chosen after a close analysis of their individual impact on the subject-matter of child soldiering in Africa. Other influential films will also, however, be mentioned and given credit.

A brief synopsis will now be provided of each case study film, along with a brief motivation on why the specific film was chosen for this particular study. The three case studies are: *Ezra* (2007); *The Silent Army* (2008); and *War Witch* (2012).

##### ***Ezra* (2007):**

The film *Ezra* (2007), directed by Newton I. Aduaka, is regarded by many to be one of the first films to give an African perspective on the distressing phenomenon of abducting child soldiers into the continent's civil wars.<sup>214</sup> This film was shortlisted for this study because it is constructed around the life-story of a Sierra Leone boy swept away from his family by rebels and forced to fight in a devastating civil war attempt.

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<sup>212</sup> M. Evans and I. Glenn, "'TIA-this is Africa": Afropessimism in Twenty-First-Century Narrative Film," *Black Camera: An International Film Journal (the New Series)* 2, no. 1 (2010), 14-35.

<sup>213</sup> A. Leander, "Sign Wars: Hollywood Documentaries Branding Politics" (San Francisco International Studies Association Conference, Copenhagen Business School, 26-29 April 2008), 12.

<sup>214</sup> *Ezra*, DVD, directed by N. I. Aduaka (California, USA: California Newsreel, 2008)

The film also traces the boy's attempts to re-establish some sense of normalcy after fighting ceases and he is forced to speak before a Truth and Reconciliation Committee in Sierra Leone (TRCSL). Young Ezra (Mamoudu Turay Kamara) was only seven years old when rebels abducted him and spirited him away into the jungle for military training.

The cast includes Sierra Leoneans, Ugandans, Rwandans and Malians, as well as European and Americans of African descent. Most had not acted before, and two had actually been child soldiers. Aduaka says interviewed a number of child soldiers before he wrote his screenplay, and admits in interviews that these (former) child soldiers became a major source.<sup>215</sup>

The film, according to Aduaka, 'tries to show that colonialism set the stage for the African conflicts in which 15 million have died in the past half-century. He notes that European powers carved Africa into artificial nations and armed all sides of the wars that followed. In the research on and writing of the script Aduaka did not stray away from asking difficult questions - he was interested in what brought about this violence – where / what was its origins and what role did arms dealers (who he argues are people who are mostly westerners) or warlords play in the fuelling of these unrests.<sup>216</sup>

'Ezra makes the case that healing for individuals and societies can begin only after a truthful accounting is made, and forgiveness sought.<sup>217</sup> But the ambiguous ending of the film defies the conventional satisfactions of narrative sympathies as the character of Ezra presents an alternative to notions of adulthood and childhood in times of conflict.

The film represents / depicts the (unconventional) and difficult realities of child perpetrators and adult victims and notions of complex political victims can be applied in the analysis of the film. Therefore, *Ezra*, becomes a very poignant case study film to be incorporated in this study of Afro-pessimistic / Afro-optimistic portrayals of child soldiers.

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<sup>215</sup> "Ezra, A Tragic Tale of Child Soldiers in Africa," *Voice of America*, <http://www.voanews.com/content/a-13-2008-01-23-voa17-66789607/565770.html> (Accessed 29 May, 2013).

<sup>216</sup> Ibid.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid.

### ***The Silent Army (2008):***

*The Silent Army* is a recut, international version of the 2008 Dutch movie *Wit Licht* directed by Jean van de Velde about the hardships of Africa's child soldiers.<sup>218</sup> The film tells the story of Eduard Zuiderwijk (Marco Borsato) who runs a restaurant in a city in East Africa – even though the film was shot in Uganda, but the script avoids naming real places, rebel armies, or charity organisations).<sup>219</sup> After his wife's (Ricky Koole) sudden death, he is left to take care of his son Thomas (Siebe Schoneveld) on his own. When his son's best friend Abu is abducted by a rebel leader to be trained as a child soldier, Eduard goes in pursuit to save the boy and regain his son's respect.<sup>220</sup>

Abu's (Anderw Kintu) troubling journey after his abduction becomes the driving force behind the film's real dramatic focus.<sup>221</sup> The ensuing situation(s) he finds himself in after his abduction was lent intensity by the committed performances of Kintu and Mukiibi Nkaaga (General Obeke) Eduard's climactic encounter, with General Obeke at his military base-camp, plays cleverly with audience expectations and anticipations, suggesting that there is more than one truth lurking around in the dire situations, where it is commonly believed that the West carry hopes to solve problems through conscience-appeasing injections of international aid and relief efforts.<sup>222</sup>

On the official website of the organisation, War Child Holland, it is stated that 'having consulted on the original Dutch version of the movie, *Wit Licht*, War Child Holland hopes that the international attention to *The Silent Army* will not only help place the effect war has on children on a higher political and social agenda, but will also inspire as many people as possible to take action in the name of child soldiers and other children affected by war.'<sup>223</sup>

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<sup>218</sup> *The Silent Army*, DVD, directed by J. Van Der Velde (The Netherlands: Independent Film, 2008)

<sup>219</sup> K. G. F. Vissers, "The Silent Army. A Plot Summary," International Movie Database, [http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1189008/plotsummary?ref=tt\\_ov\\_pl](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1189008/plotsummary?ref=tt_ov_pl) (Accessed 3 June, 2013).

<sup>220</sup> Ibid.

<sup>221</sup> L. Marshall, "The Silent Army," *Screen Daily*, sec. Academy Awards Reviews, 24 May, 2009. (Accessed 3 June, 2013).

<sup>222</sup> Ibid.

<sup>223</sup> War Child Holland, <http://www.warchildholland.org/> (Accessed 14 December, 2012).

The film was chosen as case study in line with what numerous critics have noted that the film's plot seems to device yet 'another white man's burden / redemption.' Having similar narratives / plots as *Blood Diamond* and *Machine Gun Preacher*, in *The Silent Army*, it once again becomes evident that the 'stories of African child soldiers as told from the inside - such as in the films, *War Witch* and *Heart of Fire*' - offer much stronger, more visceral material than the dramas of rich white men confronted with the same.'<sup>224</sup>

Kapuściński's argues, that 'weapons are not only for waging war, but are a means of survival.'<sup>225</sup> The child soldiers in this particular film are caught-up in a rebel faction which illegally trades in weapons, and in the end, these weapons (guns and grenades) that are used to 'keep them inline' are used to allow Eduard to escape with Abu and other child soldiers when a young girl detonates a grenade and destroys the weapons. Consequently, the audience is left with an 'action movie in which the answers to all of life's problems are found at the end of a white-man's gun.'<sup>226</sup>

#### ***War Witch* (2012):**

Director Kim Nguyen's film, *War Witch (Rebelle)* (2012) tells the story of a girl child soldier in Africa who, despite the horrors she is forced to endure, turns her life around. The film was shot entirely in the Congo - a country with little history of filmmaking, and with a cast of mainly with non-professional actors.<sup>227</sup> It depicts the horrific realities and suffering faced by children and civilians during times of civil unrests and conflict. It follows 14-year-old Komona (Rachel Mwanza) and tells the story of her life since rebel warlords stormed her village, and she is kidnapped and falls pregnant.<sup>228</sup>

After being abducted and taken deep into the bush by the rebels, Komona quickly become acutely aware that the show of any emotion is the *kiss of death*: 'I had to learn,' she says in a memorable phrase, 'to make the tears go inside my head.'

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<sup>224</sup> B. Van Hoeij, "Review: 'The Silent Army'," *Variety*, 29 May, 2009, 1. (Accessed 4 June, 2013).

<sup>225</sup> Evans and Glenn, "TIA-this is Africa": *Afropessimism in Twenty-First-Century Narrative Film*, 27.

<sup>226</sup> A. Campbell, "A Review: 'The Silent Army'," *Subtitled Online*, 19 November, 2010. (Accessed 12 May, 2013).

<sup>227</sup> *War Witch* - Reviews, 17 September, 2012, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1820488/reviews>. (Accessed 26 May, 2013).

<sup>228</sup> *Ibid.*

She's brainwashed to treat her AK47 as her new mother and father and is also introduced to *magic milk*, a natural hallucinogenic substance found in the juice of specific trees. As Kenneth Turan notes, 'under the influence of that substance, Komona begins to see dead people (Nguyen handles these visions with particular artistry), and when she is the only child from her village to survive a government attack, the rebels start to think of her as a sorceress. Soon she is brought to meet the rebel leader, Great Tiger, who anoints her as his war witch.'<sup>229</sup>

The film tells of her struggle and journey to get herself out of this dangerous situation with an emphasis on her hopes for the future. Realistic images are interspersed with dream sequences which are rooted in African legends and which resonate with the immeasurable grief about communities' hardship and misery. Despite all the horrors she encounters, Komona proves to be a symbol of hope for a war-ravaged continent that is yearning for peace and stability.

The film, consequently, serves a good case study due to the fact of the focus on girl child soldiers and as a 'common theme shown in films and movies is seeing the images of beauty and hope in the midst of ugliness. This film features a modern ugliness in the world: child soldiers in African countries participating in fighting. It may be a civil war or a rebel mission but it is horrible experience.

Many child soldiers like Komona are ordered to kill their parents and are a permanent part of the army. It's a childhood stolen. [However], *War Witch*, does show the ugliness that Komona experiences but it also shows moments of [great courage and] hope that she can break free from her captivity.'<sup>230</sup>

The director deploys aspects of magic realism throughout the narrative *War Witch*, and it ultimately becomes a tool in the pursuit to actively dare audiences to challenge their own beliefs, and to seek new understandings of the complex phenomenon of child soldiers in Africa - what they endure, the realities they face and more significantly how their stories are represented on screen.

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<sup>229</sup> K. Turan, "War Witch: Child Soldier's Tale Offers Many Surprises," *Chicago Tribune*, 21 March, 2013, 2.

<sup>230</sup> Jon the Blogcentric, 27 January, 2013, <http://jontheblogcentric.wordpress.com/2013/01/27/movie-review-war-witch-rebelle/> (Accessed 18 June, 2013).

In conclusion, as can be seen, the abovementioned films all deal with many different and diverse depictions of Africa and its child soldiers. But in the end, this study will aim to apply these films / (re)presentations to academic theories and methodologies such as magic realism in order to ascertain the ways in which this particular film informs audiences of child soldiers in Africa.

As will be explored and shown in chapter five, the use of the 'concept of magic realism in, then, can itself signify resistance to central assimilation by more stable generic systems and more monumental theories of literary practice, a way of suggesting that there is something in the nature of the literature it identifies that confounds the capacities of the major genre systems to come to terms with it.'<sup>231</sup>

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<sup>231</sup> S. Slemon, "Magic Realism as Postcolonial Discourse," *Canadian Literature* 116, no. 1 (1988), 10.

### CHAPTER THREE: THE CONTEXT OF WAR: CHILD SOLDIERING IN AFRICA

Attention will now briefly be turned to a contextual, factual and statistical analysis of child soldiering in Africa. Aspects that will be touched upon are: the [internationally accepted] definitions of a child; statistics of this phenomenon; international laws guiding NGOs and other advocacy groups in their efforts to stop the use of young children in conflict situations; the forced recruitment and volunteering of young children; and (P)DDR programmes that are aimed at giving child soldiers a sense of hope after regaining their freedom. By engaging and grappling with the aforementioned issues pertaining to child soldiering it will undoubtedly set the scene and lay the foundation upon which the film analyses will be developed and carried out in the later chapters.

Kosmack, with referral to the works of Rosen and Singer, writes that 'in Africa, where a substantial portion of the population lives in abject poverty, the advent of conflict poses particularly difficult and complex concerns. In a developing nation, children may be increasingly susceptible to becoming a child soldier as they are frequently subject to extreme poverty, a lack of education, a shortage of resources, and often a lack of parental or familial guidance.'<sup>232</sup>

These children can be recruited into militias / armed forces against their own will, whilst some enter the force 'voluntarily.' The term 'voluntary', however, is loosely used, and 'does not necessarily imply the child had other viable choices. Many young people are driven to join the forces because of poverty, alienation, propaganda or often, ironically, for safety reasons.'<sup>233</sup>

E.P Skinner writes that:

'Many of the youngsters who were abducted into the militias readily absorb guerrilla training just in order to survive. Nevertheless, research also discovered that many youthful combatants, lacking familial support, became brave and loyal fighters.'<sup>234</sup>

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<sup>232</sup> M. Kosmack, "Letting Children be Children: The Problem of Child Soldiers in Africa" (Bachelor of Arts Honours in International Development Studies, Dalhousie University), 3.

<sup>233</sup> *Ibid.*, 3-4.

<sup>234</sup> E. P. Skinner, "Child Soldiers in Africa: A Disaster for Future Families," *International Journal on World Peace* 16, no. 2 (1999), 9.

Militia life offered these youths disciplined training programmes and a livelihood / means to support themselves in poor countries where educational opportunities and jobs are scarce. 'Comrades-in-arms often provide a family substitute.' Also, confusing war and play, child combatants are often heedless of danger. Groups of youngsters in bush wars often operate on their own initiative for long periods in remote terrain, sometimes without even radio to convey commands and make their own rules.<sup>235</sup>

Another hard truth, as Skinner points out, is that 'since African civilian adults often bore the brunt of many unspeakable atrocities carried out by youth, they usually reacted in two ways: First they stigmatise the child soldiers as *evil bandits* and *vermin*, and *barbarians* - an attitude that urban elites have toward the poorly educated people from remote rural regions.'<sup>236</sup> The second reaction, however, is at the other side of the spectrum and is usually strongly advocated by members of church groups and various NGOs working with child soldiers – and that is to view these children as 'victims or tools of unpopular military regimes or brutally unscrupulous warlords.'<sup>237</sup>

In the aftermath of these conflicts the outer wounds of these young children become less visible over time, but 'a child's inner wounds, of the heart, mind, and soul, are just barely beginning to heal. This makes living in the present just as hard as living in the past.'<sup>238</sup> Young boys and girls who become child soldiers are often 'sexually exploited, badly treated, forced to kill and commit other atrocities, beaten when they try to escape, and have been filled with psychological fears, so when they are demobilised they have a lot of inner wounds that need to be healed.'<sup>239</sup>

Meyer writes that: '[child soldiers are] separated from their parents and family members, deprived of their structure and support, their childhood taken away from them, [and inevitably these children] come out of their combat experience confused, wounded, and full of pain. This suffering can last indefinitely if healing intervention [in the form of intensive (P)DDR programmes etcetera] does not take place.'<sup>240</sup>

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<sup>235</sup> Skinner, *Child Soldiers in Africa: A Disaster for Future Families*, 9.

<sup>236</sup> Ibid.

<sup>237</sup> Ibid.

<sup>238</sup> K. J. Meyer, "Child Soldiers: An End in Sight for Africa?" (Master of Arts, University of Minnesota), 52.

<sup>239</sup> Ibid.

<sup>240</sup> Ibid.

Although these aspects will be looked at thoroughly, it will not be extremely in-depth as it will only serve to broaden the basis upon which the core parts / chapters of this study, in which the three case study films will be analysed, will be structured. By gaining such insights as to the context of war, and child soldiering in Africa, it will stimulate debates surrounding the Afro-pessimistic / Afro-optimistic representations thereof in feature films to audiences across the globe.

As mentioned, in chapter three the case study films will be closely analysed against the theoretical and analytical backdrop that will be provided in the following chapter. Theories and analytical concepts and issues such as complex political victims, complex political perpetrators, forced and voluntary recruitment, warlords, *othered* children, social ecologies and (P)DDR programmes will be applied in the analyses of the case study films in order to identify and scrutinise the different representations of child soldiers that are available for public consumption.

### **3.1. HISTORICAL AND SOCIO-POLITICAL CONTEXTS**

#### **3.1.1. General Remarks**

'The child soldier has become the symbol of an African continent adrift, a 'heart of darkness' decidedly alien to Western modernity. It has become the object of a new 'humanitarian crusade' and a Western neo-interventionism with many moralistic similarities to the civilising missions of preceding centuries...'<sup>241</sup>

Over the past several decades, a new pattern of armed conflict has evolved, taking increasingly heavy tolls on communities and civilian populations. During the 1990s, a vast amount of armed conflicts were intrastate affairs which were fought with 'relatively low technology in and around communities.' Mostly civilians fell victim to these conflicts, and extensive psychological and social damage were inflicted, communities destroyed, and masses of people displaced. These 'intrastate conflicts' in turn then also serves to 'normalise violence and to plant seeds of future armed conflicts.'<sup>242</sup>

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<sup>241</sup> J. H. Jézéquel, "Child Soldiers in Africa: A Singular Phenomenon?: On the Necessity of a Historical Perspective," *Vingtième Siècle.Revue d'histoire* 89 (2006), 3.

<sup>242</sup> M. G. Wessells, "The Changing Nature of Armed Conflict and its Implications for Children: The Graça Machel/UN Study." *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology; Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology* 4, no. 4 (1998), 321.

It is essential to realise that child soldiering is not limited to Africa as is often portrayed by various institutions and the mainstream western media – albeit in print (via newspapers, magazines and other printed mediums) or on screen (via NGO-campaign videos, feature films and documentaries). The global dimensions of the involvement of children in armed conflict cannot be ignored. This realisation led to a study pioneered by the United Nations study on the *'Impact of Armed Conflict on Children.'* The study was led by Graça Machel, who strongly emphasised that 'child soldiering is a global problem that occurs more systematically than most analysts have previously suspected.'<sup>243</sup>

The facts and statistics themselves are revealing and evident of the global extent of this horrific phenomenon. Children have been used by both government, and opposition forces in armed conflicts various countries around the world – for example: Afghanistan, Bhutan, Burma, Cambodia, Chechnya, Columbia, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Iraq, Israel-Palestine, Lebanon, Turkey and the former Yugoslavia-to name but a few. And in 'the so-called West, the example of Northern Ireland, where children are used by paramilitaries, is also particularly noteworthy.'<sup>244</sup>

However, with that being said, the sad reality has to be acknowledged that a large percentage of child combatants are undeniably to be found in Africa countries today. Thus, it is necessary to further examine the reasons inciting and fostering this phenomenon. For the purposes of this particular study the ways in which this horrific phenomenon is taken to movie screens across the world under a cloud of Afro-pessimism / Afro-optimism is of great importance.

In his 1999 article entitled, *Child Soldiers in Africa: A Disaster for Future Families*, Elliot P. Skinner wrote that 'the thousands of young people who increasingly are the major participants in most African civil strife are caught up in conflicts stemming from the untidy decolonisation of the continent. The small group of westernised African elites who pressured their European masters for independence failed to realise that their centuries-long exploited societies did not have the cultural, economic, political and social infrastructures to stand alone. Conflict and competition for power and resources among the small elite led to coups by a dissatisfied military, and attempts at secessions by ethnic enclaves determined to control their own resources.'<sup>245</sup>

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<sup>243</sup> A. Twum-Danso, *Africa's Young Soldiers: The Co-Option of Childhood*, Vol. 82, Institute for Security Studies (ISS), 2003), 15-16.

<sup>244</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>245</sup> Skinner, *Child Soldiers in Africa: A Disaster for Future Families*, 7.

However, here exist numerous theories on what the concise features are which distinguishes those countries that employ child soldiers from those that do not. Samphansakul refers to Singer's theories on the matter. Singer proposes three broad underlying factors:

'Firstly, social disruption and failures of development caused by globalisation, war, and disease have led not only to greater global conflict and instability, but also to generation disconnections that create a new pool of potential recruits; secondly, technological improvement in small arms now permit these child recruits to be effective participants in warfare; and then thirdly, there has been a rise in a new type of conflict that is far more brutal and criminalised.'<sup>246</sup>

Samphansakul writes that some further light can [and must] be shed onto Singer's three core arguments. Firstly, as he points out, the failure of economic development and rise of social disruption are more likely to occur in a country where the government is incapable of improving the economy and resolving armed civil conflicts.<sup>247</sup> The [specific] government tries to develop the economy, but they are inefficient in utilising the human and material resources to enhance the development. Beside this, to be successful in developing the domestic economy, the government of a weak state has to attract the foreign investment into the country.<sup>248</sup>

These troubling issues are further strained when taking into account that due to the fact that 'the government of a weak state does not show strong [if any] credibility and accountability in providing the rule of law to protect the foreign investors and properties, the foreign investors consider the country as insecure and are disinclined to invest their capital in the country.'<sup>249</sup>

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<sup>246</sup> Samphansakul, *Child Soldiers and Intrastate Armed Conflicts: An Analysis of the Recruitments of Child Soldiers in Civil Wars between 2001 and 2003*, 1-2.

<sup>247</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>248</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>249</sup> *Ibid.*

In the interim, when the country gets involved in a political crisis and / or get caught up in a (civil) war, the government institutions are then in turn weakened even further, resulting in its citizens becoming increasingly vulnerable to external dangers such as infectious disease, transnational terrorist networks and other crimes.<sup>250</sup> Furthermore, because small arms are accessible and easily acquired at low cost from the illicit weapons market, armed groups can easily acquire large caches of these small arms. Ultimately, when a country fights in a civil war of long duration, and government and civil institutions are brought to their knees, government agencies (and militant / rebel groups) may recruit, train, and equip children with small arms to fight in combat.<sup>251</sup> Afua Twum-Danso writes that:

‘The African continent has been ravaged by internal conflicts and insurgencies in the past decade. Eighteen of the fifty-three countries on the continent are currently involved with, or emerging from, armed conflict. The outbreak of violence in Côte d’Ivoire in September 2002, has further exacerbated the political instability of the West African sub-region.’<sup>252</sup>

Recent African civil wars / unrests have indeed been particularly vicious and bloody. Violence against civilians, a distinctive characteristic of modern warfare, has been ‘excessive and extremely explicit.’ In Sierra Leone, for example as Twum-Danso points out, ‘villagers were forced to watch public beheadings in which ‘the victim’s neck was cut, working from back to front with a blunt blade.’<sup>253</sup> Civilians were also mutilated and maimed – [often by their own family members, neighbours and children.]

In most analyses and studies concerning armed conflicts [in Africa], ‘children are invisible and are typically regarded as passive, incidental victims or inconsequential actors.’<sup>254</sup> It must, however, be stated that in ‘current intrastate, ethno-political conflicts, children have come to play an increasing role both as soldiers and, along with other non-combatants, as targets and victims in fighting at the community level.’<sup>255</sup>

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<sup>250</sup> Samphansakul, *Child Soldiers and Intrastate Armed Conflicts: An Analysis of the Recruitments of Child Soldiers in Civil Wars between 2001 and 2003*, 2.

<sup>251</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>252</sup> Twum-Danso, *Africa's Young Soldiers: The Co-Option of Childhood*, 17.

<sup>253</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>254</sup> M. G. Wessells, "Children, Armed Conflict, and Peace," *Journal of Peace Research* 35, no. 5 (1998), 635.

<sup>255</sup> *Ibid.*

In 1996, noting all of these factors, Graça Machel, in an internationally important report for the United Nations on children and war, justly 'cautioned against viewing child soldiers solely as victims of war.'<sup>256</sup> In her extensive and ground-breaking report, she advised that sufficient attention should be paid to the agencies involved in the conflict, in order to understand the various realities faced by these young combatants.<sup>257</sup>

It thus becomes important for further discussions, to now briefly address other issues pertaining to child soldiers, such as: the definition of a *child*, recruitment, (P)DDR-programs, warlords, and international involvement. It is then crucial to, amidst of these new developments in warfare, to also re-examine definition(s), theories and perceptions of 'childhood' in Africa, and 'child soldiers' in particular. By giving notice to these complex issues will ensure that no stone will be left unturned in the aim to adequately research / analyse the Afro-pessimistic and / or Afro-optimistic ways in which predetermined and subjective debates on / views of child soldiering are being depicted in feature films.

### 3.1.2. What is a child?

The combination of *child* and *soldier* seems 'an unnatural conflation of two contradictory and incompatible terms.'<sup>258</sup> Wessells argue that 'the term 'offends most people's sensibilities and challenges cherished assumptions about children and he goes further to state that 'the term soldier may evoke images of uniformed people, mostly men, who use guns, answer to a particular commander, and travel with well-organised fighting units.'<sup>259</sup>

According to Ah-Jung Lee, there are three key elements of the global humanitarian discourse on child soldiering which can be identified. These include: "Firstly, that both the terms 'child' and a 'child soldier' refer to any youth under the age of eighteen years of age [...]"

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<sup>256</sup> Skinner, *Child Soldiers in Africa: A Disaster for Future Families*, 10.

<sup>257</sup> Ibid.

<sup>258</sup> Rosen, *Armies of the Young: Child Soldiers in War and Terrorism* ., 3.

<sup>259</sup> Wessells, *Child Soldiers: From Violence to Protection*, 1 & 5.

[...] [Secondly], that all forms of children's military involvement as *child soldiering*; [thirdly], that children as vulnerable and child soldiers as victims without socio-political agency; and [fourthly] that military recruitment is regarded to be an antithesis to a *childhood of innocence*; and [finally], that child soldiers as victims of so-called 'new' and barbaric wars."<sup>260</sup> These elements will be elaborated on later in this chapter.

Jessica Schafer in turn writes that the definition and understandings of childhood in the West, 'which inform the concepts used by development agencies, are essentially age based.'<sup>261</sup> These agencies assume that a child is someone under 18 years of age, and is vulnerable, dependent and innocent, and Schafer argues that implicit in this definition is 'the assumption that all those below 18 share these characteristics.'<sup>262</sup> However, consequently, there remains much contention with regards to the definition of the terms 'child' and 'childhood', with postmodernists such as Dasberg and Veerman leading the 'cultural relativist call' for acknowledging the differences between peoples and societies and the need to respect and maintain these differences.'<sup>263</sup>

R.E Howard acknowledges that human rights, although not universal in origin, are now, in principle, universally applicable. And an example of an 'international legal instrument renowned for its 'universality' is the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), which was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1989 and made binding to States Parties in September 1990.'<sup>264</sup>

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<sup>260</sup> A. J. Lee, "Understanding and Addressing the Phenomenon of 'Child Soldiers'" (Master of Science in Forced Migration, University of Oxford), 7.

<sup>261</sup> J. Schafer, "The use of Patriarchal Imagery in the Civil War in Mozambique and its Implications for the Reintegration of Child Soldiers," in *Children and Youth on the Frontline: Ethnography, Armed Conflict and Displacement*, ed. Boyden, J. & De Berry, J. (eds), First Edition ed., Vol. 13 (United States of America: Berghahn Books, 2004), 87.

<sup>262</sup> Ibid.

<sup>263</sup> Twum-Danso, *Africa's Young Soldiers: The Co-Option of Childhood*, 8-9.

<sup>264</sup> Ibid.

It reads:

'The Convention has now been ratified by all countries except two (the United States and Somalia), emphasising for many, its universality. According to the Convention, a child is "every human being below the age of 18 years unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier. Since the geographical focus of this monograph is Africa, it is necessary to note that the definition of a child stipulated by the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, produced by the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) is consistent with that of the UNCRC.'<sup>265</sup>

Secondly, as Jung argues, all forms of children's military involvement are regarded to be 'child soldiering.'<sup>266</sup> The working definition of the term 'child soldier' as used in this study can be found at the core of the Cape Town Principles - an agreement adopted by participants attending a symposium organised by UNICEF in Cape Town in April 1997. Here, a child soldier is regarded as:

'Any person under 18 years of age who is part of any kind of regular or irregular armed force in any capacity, including but not limited to spying, cooks, porters, messengers and those accompanying such groups, other than purely as family members. It includes girls [and boys] recruited for sexual purposes / slavery and forced marriage. It does not, therefore, only refer to a child who is carrying or has carried arms.'<sup>267</sup>

Jung argues that by listing 'spying' and 'sexual slavery' in a 'broad umbrella of *child soldiering*, this approach fails to differentiate the types and nature of work that children undertake in the military.'<sup>268</sup> As a result, a '*child soldier*' can be anything from a cook to a fierce fighter, and all of those who are identified as a 'child soldier' are assumed to share essentially the same characteristics or experiences. It is left unacknowledged or unexplored that *child soldiers* may perform various roles that have very different meanings in the local context.'<sup>269</sup>

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<sup>265</sup> Twum-Danso, *Africa's Young Soldiers: The Co-Option of Childhood*, 9.

<sup>266</sup> Lee, *Understanding and Addressing the Phenomenon of 'Child Soldiers'*, 8.

<sup>267</sup> Twum-Danso, *Africa's Young Soldiers: The Co-Option of Childhood*, 8.

<sup>268</sup> Lee, *Understanding and Addressing the Phenomenon of 'Child Soldiers'*, 8.

<sup>269</sup> *Ibid.*

Tucker notes, that other scholars argue that 'childhood can differ in different societies and, in fact, the dominant universal construction of childhood is an invention of the past three centuries.'<sup>270</sup> However, David J. Francis contends that the definition of a child as outlined in various international legal instruments is 'derived from a rather restrictive, western-centric [and humanitarian] perception of what a child is or what childhood is supposed to constitute.'<sup>271</sup> It is then within the 'parameters' of this particular universalised, and industrialised-worldview that a globally accepted definition of a child or childhood can be found.

Francis writes that become evidently clear that this 'Western definition and construction is largely influenced by the field and theories of developmental psychology and development... [and] this dominant perception is reflected in the *child-centred* nature of contemporary western societies.'<sup>272</sup>

Thirdly, children (as child soldiers) are regarded to be vulnerable and without having any political or social agency.<sup>273</sup> Based on this definition of a 'child', the global humanitarian discourse assumes that children are vulnerable / defenceless - that is, 'lacking moral, physical, and mental competence - and thereby conceptualise all child soldiers as victims. Based on this assumption of vulnerability, child soldiers are also believed to have no real agency in their military participation.'<sup>274</sup> For example, *Save the Children* (2001) calls for extreme caution and care when dealing with the question of voluntary recruitment of young children. They are that:

'Although children may come forward to join an armed group without conscription or press-ganging, this type of recruitment is rarely truly voluntary. Children may have no other option for survival in a conflict where they have lost family members or access to other forms of protection. Finally, children do not yet have the cognitive developmental skills to fully assess risks and choices that they may make under these conditions.'<sup>275</sup>

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<sup>270</sup> D. J. Francis, "'Paper protection' mechanisms: Child Soldiers and the International Protection of Children in Africa's Conflict Zones," *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 45, no. 02 (2007), 222.

<sup>271</sup> Francis, 'Paper protection' mechanisms: *Child Soldiers and the International Protection of Children in Africa's Conflict Zones*, 222.

<sup>272</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>273</sup> Lee, *Understanding and Addressing the Phenomenon of 'Child Soldiers'*, 9-10.

<sup>274</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>275</sup> *Ibid.*

Within this framework then, children are assumed to lack capacity to exercise any real social or political choice in their recruitment. As a result, child soldiering thus remains an abhorrent and violating example of children's victimisation in all situations and at all times. Furthermore, the humanitarian discourse takes child soldiers' assumed 'vulnerability to explain away the violence children commit during the war and abdicate their criminal responsibility.'<sup>276</sup> Yet again, age is taken as a universal indicator of a child's moral agency, and the supposed children's vulnerability is assumed to require fundamentally different needs and models of addressing the complex issue of culpability.

The assumption / theory of children's vulnerability have been ever so dominant in recent years, that it has even led some organisations to craft their own narrative in order to support / further fuel the theme of victimisation in the face of counter-evidence.<sup>277</sup> The needs and aims of humanitarian groups reinforced and built on the *victim narrative* and neglect to allude to young children taking agency in protecting their communities when they take-up arms.

Lee writes the following on what he calls the *Beah Phenomenon*:

'Ismael Beah, an ex-child soldier from Sierra Leone, has written his memoir (2007) and has since received a sponsorship from the Starbucks Company and spoken on behalf of 'child soldiers' at the UN as well as on the Jon Stewart Show in the US. Here, Beah's book actually shows an ample example of his bravery, agency, resilience, and active participation in the war, powerfully illustrating that he was not a 'vulnerable little child victim' but a war survivor.'<sup>278</sup>

However, as Lee points out, "Beah's book has been appropriated and held up as 'evidence' by UNICEF as the 'traumatised child soldier who reclaimed his humanity', while those parts of his book that actually counter a simplistic 'saved victim' narrative have been largely excluded from the media coverage and discussions of Beah."<sup>279</sup>

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<sup>276</sup> Lee, *Understanding and Addressing the Phenomenon of 'Child Soldiers'*, 10.

<sup>277</sup> Ibid.

<sup>278</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>279</sup> Ibid.

Fourthly, the universal humanitarian discourse on *child soldiers* accepts and represents a certain vision of a *normal childhood* and places 'military recruitment outside the domain of children.'<sup>280</sup> In these renderings, *childhood* is 'assumed as a period of innocence, education, and adult care. As a result, military recruitment conceptually becomes an antithesis to a *normal* or *ideal* childhood.'<sup>281</sup> This logic is undeniably apparent in many of the common titles of literature works, feature films and documentaries found in child soldier discourse. For example the books *Innocent Lost: When Child Soldiers Go to War* (2005); *Children: The Invisible Soldiers* (1996); *Young Soldiers: Why They Choose to Fight* (2004); *They Fight Like Soldiers, They Die Like Children* (2010) and the feature films *The Silent Army* (2008) and *Heart of Fire* (2008).

And then finally, child soldiers are immediately conceptualised as victims of the new modes of warfare, and their agency gets lost in the macro-context of political and social crisis.<sup>282</sup> Lee writes that:

"In addition, the global discourse of 'new wars' in relation to child soldiers tends to demonise the conflict in which children participate and thereby render their very participation as irrational and illegitimate. For instance, Graça Machel, whose 1997 UN report became the template for all humanitarian and human rights reporting on the child soldiers, defined modern warfare in post-colonial states in terms of the 'abandonment of all standards' and a 'sense of dislocation and chaos', and argued that the emergence of such new wars has led to unprecedented levels of human rights violations against women and children."<sup>283</sup>

When taking the aforementioned into account, it becomes clear that this *universal definition* of a child and childhood (in Africa) remains one that is inundated with controversy. It is undoubtedly challenging and bears limited 'relevance to the socio-cultural context of children and the social construction of childhood across much of Africa [due to the fact that] not much is known about the ethnographic and social construction of childhood in African societies.'<sup>284</sup>

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<sup>280</sup> Lee, *Understanding and Addressing the Phenomenon of 'Child Soldiers'*, 12.

<sup>281</sup> *Ibid.*, 12-13.

<sup>282</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>283</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>284</sup> Francis, '*Paper protection' mechanisms: Child Soldiers and the International Protection of Children in Africa's Conflict Zones*, 222.

Based on ethnographic and sociological studies of childhood in African societies, evidence suggests that:

‘Childhood in Africa is varied and context-specific, and to a very large extent, socially constructed. The African social construction of childhood does not correspond to the globally accepted age limit of under-18 years, but is largely influenced by traditional socio-cultural and even economic contexts.’<sup>285</sup>

According to Adebayo Olukoshi ‘as can be imagined, there is no consensus on the most appropriate approach for interpreting the changes that are taking place in the structure, content and dynamics of African politics; indeed, efforts at conceptualizing the changes have produced a veritable Tower of Babel, with commentators not only speaking in different tongues but frequently past one another.’<sup>286</sup>

The muddled sense of confusion which is prevalent in previous studies and existing literature is indicative of not only ‘the complexity of the changes themselves but also of the crisis of theory in the study of Africa.’<sup>287</sup> Olukoshi writes that:

‘The contradictoriness of the changes, at once inspiring hope and generating despair, has polarized the scholarly and policy communities into Afro-optimist and Afro-pessimist camps. But for all the insights which they may offer into the problems and prospects of progressive change in Africa, both the Afro-pessimist and Afro-optimist frames are far too simplistic and subjective to serve as an enduring basis for capturing the dialectics of socio-political change and transformation.’<sup>288</sup>

These political transformations do not only influence international relations, but it also inevitably lead to civil / intrastate disagreements / unrests, which in turn have far-reaching effects on civil communities. The changes that have taken place on the African political landscape over the last decade and a half have been multidimensional.

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<sup>285</sup> Francis, ‘Paper protection’ mechanisms: *Child Soldiers and the International Protection of Children in Africa's Conflict Zones*, 223.

<sup>286</sup> A. Olukoshi, *Changing Patterns of Politics in Africa*. (Dakar: Council for the Development of Economic and Social Research in Africa,[2003]), 177.

<sup>287</sup> Ibid.

<sup>288</sup> Ibid.

They have occurred as much at the level of formal politics as in the arena of the informal processes that underpin the political system. They have been generated by factors internal to the political system and those external to it, necessitating a close attention to the contexts within which the changes are occurring.<sup>289</sup>

Children's participation in wars is not a phenomenon specific to our times, but pre-dates the wars fought in recent decades and in the earliest of times, but it is of considerable importance to note and acknowledge that this problem has gained new proportions in modern-day war torn countries. The prevalence of child soldiering is evident in many countries around the world where defenceless children are exploited as soldiers.

The global scope, however, should not, according to Wessells, 'obscure the regional and country-specific variations of child soldiering.'<sup>290</sup> The variations and depth of the problems faced by children in these situations are best contextualized and comprehended within the framework of specific conflicts and regions. However, for the present study, attention will firstly now be given to some of the aforementioned (overarching) socio-economic, traditional, cultural and political contexts, as well as some background statistics to child soldiering in Africa in general. The international laws and preventative regulations that have been put in place and enforced by governments and NOG's will also come under discussion in the rest of this chapter.

By giving attention to these background issues will ensure that a good foundation, for in-depth interpretations and filmic analyses, is put in place in order to later address specific context(s) within individual countries that gave rise to, and which continue to fuel and stimulate the recruitment and use of child soldiers in armed conflicts – provided the fact a specific case study film identifies and make particular region(s) and / or militias part of their narratives.

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<sup>289</sup> Olukoshi, *Changing Patterns of Politics in Africa*, 177.

<sup>290</sup> Wessells, *Child Soldiers: From Violence to Protection*, 32-39.

### 3.1.3. Background and Statistics

'In international opinion, the heavy use of child soldiers constitutes one of the principal characteristics of these post-Cold War African crises. Indeed, the image of the African child bearing a Kalashnikov bigger than himself has come to symbolise a typically African brand of violence, to Western eyes a barbaric violence beyond the bounds of the acceptable and the rational.'<sup>291</sup>

The end of the Cold War, which had dominated both regional and world politics from the 1950s to the early 1990s, ushered in a new era of hope for an (subsequent) end to so-called 'super power conflicts' and its attendant proxy wars in various parts of the world. However, in reality, the end of the Cold War 'signified the intensification of the modern conception of civil wars, which tend to be fought internally, within the boundaries of a state and between one or more insurgent groups and the ruling government.'<sup>292</sup>

Samphanskul points to Rosen's work, *Armies of the young: Child Soldiers in War and Terrorism*, where he argues that the "changes in the nature of warfare have influenced the recruitment of child soldiers. [He] distinguishes the characteristics of *old wars* and *new wars*. The *old wars* were fought under a set of battle rules with clear political objectives, well defined standards of victory and defeat, boundaries to battlefields, and a distinction between civilians and combatants. [These so-called] *new wars*, [according to Rosen and other scholars], are 'aimless, formless, and without real political purposes' and have no rules of warfare."<sup>293</sup>

As the statistics unmistakably illustrate, unfortunately, in these new hostile and extremely volatile environments it becomes an all too familiar feature that civilians / non-combatants bear the brunt of these new form(s) of violence.

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<sup>291</sup> Jézéquel, *Child Soldiers in Africa: A Singular Phenomenon?: On the Necessity of a Historical Perspective*, 1.

<sup>292</sup> Twum-Danso, *Africa's Young Soldiers: The Co-Option of Childhood*, 8.

<sup>293</sup> Samphanskul, *Child Soldiers and Intrastate Armed Conflicts: An Analysis of the Recruitments of Child Soldiers in Civil Wars between 2001 and 2003*, 8.

Twum-Danso writes that:

'[Nearly] 90% of victims are non-combatants - mainly women and children. During the 1990s more than two million children died as a result of war and more than 3 times that number were permanently disabled or seriously injured. Additionally, 20 million children are among the refugees and internally displaced scattered around the world. The main sphere of violence now tends to be the village or the town centre rather than a far-flung battlefield typical of conventional warfare.'<sup>294</sup>

As a result, entire communities are drawn into the conflict either as aggressors, victims or both at different periods during times of conflict. Twum-Danso argues that 'the horrors of the atrocities carried out in modern wars are emphasised by the fact that very often, they are committed by former neighbours, friends or fellow village members.' New developments in weaponry and technology are a prominent feature of the post-Cold War era / conflicts. Consequently, the use of small arms and light weapons such as the Soviet AK47 and the G-3 transform internal / civil unrests into a bloody carnage and ultimately, this, in turn, 'facilitates the incorporation of children into the so-called adult wars' of modern times.<sup>295</sup>

During the 1980s the phenomenon of child soldiers started to first attract widespread international attention. Over the ensuing 20 years it has been estimated that at any given time there are around 300,000 children under the age of eighteen years (both male and female) currently participating in conflicts in more than 30 countries globally - either as active combatants and fighters or as auxiliaries. Consequently, the cumulative total is shocking and overwhelming.<sup>296</sup>

However, due to the inadequacy and scarcity of reliable and up-to-date documentation and 'the fact that most armed groups, including government forces, deny their [child soldiers'] existence, the exact number of child soldiers is difficult to assess and thus, they remain *invisible*.'<sup>297</sup>

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<sup>294</sup> Twum-Danso, *Africa's Young Soldiers: The Co-Option of Childhood*, 8.

<sup>295</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>296</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>297</sup> *Ibid.*, 8-9.

Twum-Danso also notes that of the estimated 300,000 child soldiers in the world, a staggering 120,000 can be found on the African continent alone. This fact then becomes a particularly distressing concern because 'Africa is not only the world's poorest region, but it also consists of its youngest populations.

According to Peters and Richards, whilst five to twenty-five year olds account for only 25% of the population in Europe and North America and for 35% in Asia, in Africa they comprise an overwhelming 45% of the population. This deadly cocktail of violence, poverty and large numbers of disaffected youth does not bode well for the welfare and development of children, their communities, nations and the future.<sup>298</sup>

The 1996-Machel report found (and stipulated that) young children who become separated from their families and communities during times of unrest are 'one of the most at-risk categories of becoming child soldiers.'<sup>299</sup> Lischer writes that these 'unaccompanied minors' (as international organisations term them) include 'children orphaned by war or disease, as well as those who are separated from their families in the chaos of conflict.'<sup>300</sup>

Even in situations where the children remain with their parents and extended families, forced displacement can also severely disrupt family and social networks. Consequently, the UN General Assembly repeatedly recognises and maintains that 'displaced and unaccompanied minors are vulnerable to neglect, violence, forced [and voluntary] military recruitment, and sexual exploitation.'<sup>301</sup>

P.W Singer cites three main factors that contribute to the increasing use of child soldiers in armed conflicts. These are:

'[Firstly], social disruptions and failures of development caused by globalisation and war; [secondly] the proliferation of lightweight small arms; and [lastly] the increase in economic motivations for civil war.'<sup>302</sup>

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<sup>298</sup> Twum-Danso, *Africa's Young Soldiers: The Co-Option of Childhood*, 8-9.

<sup>299</sup> Lischer, *War, Displacement, and the Recruitment of Child Soldiers in the Democratic Republic of Congo*, 143.

<sup>300</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>301</sup> *Ibid.*, 144.

<sup>302</sup> *Ibid.*

Lischer notes that 'children have become [easy] targets of recruitment when the displaced population is militarised or when the population lacks security [and] international law mandates respect for the civilian and humanitarian character of refugee camps and prohibits participation in military activity.'<sup>303</sup> Consequently, in recent decades, humanitarian campaigns have encouraged and supported the 'international community's adoption of conventions restricting the recruitment of minors in wartime and more generally (re)-affirming the rights associated with childhood.'<sup>304</sup>

The focus will now briefly turn to these measures, statutes and international laws because the relevance of these international laws become clear when it is deployed as part of cinematic narratives when dealing with child soldiers. Here, the film *Blood Diamond* serves as a good example where the Kimberley Process (KP), a joint initiative formed by governments, industry and civil society in order to stem the flow of conflict diamonds, is signed and enforced at the end of the film. Often, like in the film *Blood Diamond*, rough diamonds (as well as other valuable natural resources) are used by warlords and rebel movements to finance wars against legitimate governments and the narrative of conflict diamonds / other valuable natural resources become the core of representations of child soldiers.

#### **3.1.4. International Relations and Laws**

'The question of children and armed conflict is an integral part of the United Nations' core responsibilities for the maintenance of international peace and security, for the advancement of human rights and for sustainable human development.'<sup>305</sup>

- Secretary-General, Kofi Annan

On an international level, the gap between standards regarding children's rights and reality is enormous. In many countries around the world, forced child labour, child prostitution and sexual exploitation, family violence, ethnic unrests, extreme poverty, and a host of other social, ethnic and economic

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<sup>303</sup> Lischer, *War, Displacement, and the Recruitment of Child Soldiers in the Democratic Republic of Congo*, 143.

<sup>304</sup> Ibid.

<sup>305</sup> UNICEF, *Child Soldiers. Vital Statistics - Life on the Front Line*, Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, 2009, 1.

problems are infringing on children's rights. Following an ancient theme - the most vulnerable are most exploited.<sup>306</sup>

'The phenomenon of children fighting wars has drawn the attention of the media, international policymakers and advocates of child rights in recent years. 2000 saw the entry into force of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict. Of an estimated 300,000 children thought to be fighting wars around the world, nearly half are found in Africa. The cumulative total of children who have been co-opted into fighting in the past decades is subject to only rough estimation.'<sup>307</sup>

The international legal standards on the minimum age for military recruitment and enlistment have been developed through a series of international treaties and civil agreements. In 1977, the "Additional Protocol to the Geneva Conventions of 1949 stipulated that both governmental and non-governmental parties 'shall take all feasible measure 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.'<sup>308</sup> According to Samphansakul, the second important development setting a minimum age for military recruitment is the Convention on the Rights of the Child adopted in 1989.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child seeks [as written in paragraph two]:

"To ensure that person who have not attained the age of fifteen years do not take a direct part in hostilities.'<sup>309</sup> [In paragraph three it elaborates by stating that] 'states parties shall refrain from recruiting any person who has not attained the age of fifteen years into their armed forces. In recruiting among those persons who have attained the age of fifteen years but who have not attained the age of eighteen years, States Parties shall endeavour to give priority to those who are oldest...'<sup>310</sup>

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<sup>306</sup> Wessells, *The Changing Nature of Armed Conflict and its Implications for Children: The Graça Machel / UN Study.*, 322.

<sup>307</sup> Twum-Danso, *Africa's Young Soldiers: The Co-Option of Childhood*, 5.

<sup>308</sup> Samphansakul, *Child Soldiers and Intrastate Armed Conflicts: An Analysis of the Recruitments of Child Soldiers in Civil Wars between 2001 and 2003*, 6-7.

<sup>309</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>310</sup> *Ibid.*

Adopted in 1990, the African Charter of the Rights and Welfare of the Child, serves as a regional charter that defines a child as anyone below 18 years of age. It states that:

‘Parties to the present Charter shall take all necessary measure to ensure that no child shall take a direct part in hostilities and refrain in particular from recruiting any child.’<sup>311</sup>

In turn, the ‘Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of Children in Armed Conflict (2000) sets the minimum age for military recruitment and direct participation in hostilities at 18 years old but allows the states to have voluntary recruitment under the age of 18.’<sup>312</sup> A child soldier, therefore, refers to anyone less than eighteen years of age who participates in direct and/or indirect armed conflict and military activities, voluntarily or involuntarily recruited into armed forces and armed groups of the government or non-government organisations, such as paramilitaries and rebel organisations.<sup>313</sup>

There were also, prior to the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict (2000), various other statutes and charters that were put in place to raise awareness of child soldiering in Africa as well as to aim to curb / eradicate the use of children in armed conflicts altogether.

These included the ‘1998 Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court defines ‘the conscription, enlistment or use in hostilities of children under 15 by national armed forces or armed groups, intentional attacks on civilian populations, humanitarian assistance personnel and vehicles, hospitals and educational buildings as war crimes.’<sup>314</sup>

The 1999 ILO Convention on the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour which ‘prohibits the forced or compulsory recruitment of children under 18 for use in armed conflict.’<sup>315</sup> The African Charter

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<sup>311</sup> Samphansakul, *Child Soldiers and Intrastate Armed Conflicts: An Analysis of the Recruitments of Child Soldiers in Civil Wars between 2001 and 2003*, 7-8.

<sup>312</sup> Ibid.

<sup>313</sup> Ibid.

<sup>314</sup> UNICEF, *Child Soldiers. Vital Statistics - Life on the Front Line*, 3.

<sup>315</sup> Ibid., 4.

on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (1999), in turn is at aim to prohibit the 'recruitment or direct participation in hostilities or internal strife of anyone under the age of 18.'<sup>316</sup>

Other crucial agendas and strategic plans were adopted by various regional organisations to advocate the non-use of child soldiers and to criminalise those individuals or agencies that do indeed recruit and / or use child soldiers to fight their battles. These include: 'the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe, (OSCE), the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), the European Commission, the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly, the G-8 meeting in Miyazaki, the Heads of Government of Commonwealth, the Organisation of American States (OAS), and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).'<sup>317</sup>

Although the realities and prospects of Africa's child soldiers and the efforts to adequately protect them seem dire, there are however signs of progress. In 1994, Graça Machel, former Minister of Education of Mozambique, was appointed by the UN Secretary-General, to study the impact of armed conflict on children. After two years of extensive research, consultations and field visits, Machel submitted her report, entitled *Impact of Armed Conflict on Children* to the UN General Assembly at their 55st session in 1996.<sup>318</sup> Machel wrote that:

'The wounds inflicted by armed conflict on children are affronts to every impulse that inspired the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.'<sup>319</sup>

In reaction to the Machel report, the UN General Assembly recommended 'the appointment of a Special Representative on the impact of armed conflict on children. [Consequently], in September 1997, well known peace activist and diplomat Olara Otunnu became the Secretary- General's first Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict.'<sup>320</sup>

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<sup>316</sup> UNICEF, *Child Soldiers. Vital Statistics - Life on the Front Line*, 4.

<sup>317</sup> Ibid.

<sup>318</sup> Ibid.

<sup>319</sup> Ibid.

<sup>320</sup> Ibid., 4-5.

Following Otunnu's appointment, in August 2000, the 'UN Security Council in a resolution reaffirmed that it was the responsibility of Governments, rebel groups and the private sector to ensure that the fundamental rights of children are protected in times of war, as well as in peacetime.'<sup>321</sup>

As a result of the efforts of the United Nations, the world now knows far more about child soldiers and the plight of children in armed conflict. The UN and regional organisations have also created a legal framework aimed at protecting children in armed conflicts.<sup>322</sup> In July 2000, the then Secretary-General Kofi Annan, in a detailed report to the United Nations Security Council, recommended the following steps that Member States should take.<sup>323</sup> They include:

- 'Ratification of those Conventions and protocols that protect children in situations of armed conflict;
- Adjusting national laws to define as national crimes those egregious violations of the rights of children in the context of armed conflict and ensuring that national courts can exercise "universal jurisdiction" in accordance with such crimes as defined by the International Criminal Court;
- Excluding genocide, war crimes and other egregious crimes against children from amnesty provisions during peace negotiations;
- Concrete steps to prosecute individuals and corporations involved in illegal trafficking of currency, arms and natural resources that fuel conflicts and lead to the abuse of children;
- Making any political, diplomatic, financial and military assistance for countries or armed groups contingent on compliance with international child protection standards;
- Addressing the root causes of children's recruitment and participation in conflict and giving support to local communities trying to provide protection for their children in times of war;
- Financial support for sustained education for all children both during and after conflict, particularly for former child soldiers and others;
- Including children's concerns in peace negotiations;

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<sup>321</sup> UNICEF, *Child Soldiers. Vital Statistics - Life on the Front Line*, 5.

<sup>322</sup> Ibid.

<sup>323</sup> Ibid., 5-6.

- Systematic training all UN peacekeeping personnel in the rights and protection of children and women...;
- Making the concern of children central in national priority setting, resource allocation and national policy making during the reconstruction of war-ravaged societies; and
- Commitment of armed groups to child protection standards of the Convention on the Rights of the child and its Optional Protocol and to cooperation in monitoring their adherence to those standards.<sup>324</sup>

Though the United Nations has created a legal framework to protect children from armed conflicts, its actual implementation is painfully slow. Olara Otunnu states that '[we] must also reinforce the other pillar of protection -- local standards that say that the abuse of children as a routine part of war is simply unacceptable.'<sup>325</sup> Jean-Hervé Jézéquel, in his article entitled, *Child Soldiers in Africa: A Singular Phenomenon? On the Necessity of a Historical Perspective*, writes that 'these humanitarian campaigns [and legal frameworks] have encouraged and supported the international community's adoption of conventions restricting the recruitment of minors in wartime and more generally (re-)affirming the rights associated with childhood.'<sup>326</sup>

In the pursuit to shed light on and raise awareness on the use of child soldiers, as well as to advocate for the abolition of child soldiers in both civil and cross-border conflicts in Africa, the international film community has in recent years also thrown their weight behind this cause. By representing and (re)telling their stories and bringing their 'realities' to the television and movies screens of audiences far-removed from it, filmmakers hope / aim to engage with the topic in a certain manner, elicit certain responses and to (in some cases) appeal for action on behalf of their audience(s).

However, the visual representations that audiences may encounter on their movie screens – especially the ways in which African child soldiers are depicted – raises some urgent questions. Herein then, lies the core purpose of this study.

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<sup>324</sup> UNICEF, *Child Soldiers. Vital Statistics - Life on the Front Line*, 5-6.

<sup>325</sup> Ibid.

<sup>326</sup> Jézéquel, *Child Soldiers in Africa: A Singular Phenomenon?: On the Necessity of a Historical Perspective*, 1.

By closely examining the three case study films the aim will be to illustrate how Afro-pessimism (as well as in some cases Afro-optimism) as modalities of thinking, about the Africa continent, features in discourses about the Africa's child soldiers (especially in visual representations). By firstly engaging with the theories, causal factors and other contributing elements and aspects with regards to child soldiering in Africa, the sections and chapters that will follow will investigate, pay closer attention to, and ask questions as to whether these three case study films deem Africa and her child soldiers as just another unfixable aspect of Africa's reality, or are there some on-screen depictions that portray stories of optimism / hope for social reconciliation and reintegration.

### 3.2. AFRICAN WARLORDS

"Global instability; broad pools of children available for recruitment; continuing, often multigenerational, conflict; the proliferation of cheap, easy-to-use weapons; and weakened state structures fuel the trend of child military labour... *Warlordism* and 'lawless zones' that fuel conflict allow warlords and terrorists to exploit disaffiliated children as low-cost, expendable troops. As a result, endless supplies of hungry, gullible, and malleable child warriors replace ideology and traditional military leadership."<sup>327</sup>

John MacKinlay writes that the term '*warlord*' refers to the leader of an armed band, possibly numbering up to several thousand fighters, who can hold territory locally and at the same time act financially and politically in the international system without interference from the state in which he is based.<sup>328</sup> MacKinlay goes further to state that 'in crisis zones [or 'lawless zones'] around the world where civil war(s) and humanitarian disasters accompany the struggles of societies in transition, the warlord is the key actor. [Warlords] confront national governments, plunder their resources, moves and exterminate uncooperative populations, ban / sanction international relief and development [efforts] and [renders peace processes unsustainable]. With only a few exceptions the modern warlord lives successfully beyond the reach and jurisdiction of civil society. [The warlords'] capability to seek refuge in the crisis zone, and the lack of international commitment to take effective action together, ensure his survival.'<sup>329</sup>

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<sup>327</sup> J. P. Sullivan, "Child Soldiers: Despair, Barbarization, and Conflict," *Air and Space Power Journal* (2008), 2-3.

<sup>328</sup> J. Mackinlay, "Defining Warlords," *International Peacekeeping* 7, no. 1 (2000), 48.

<sup>329</sup> Ibid.

Alice Hills writes that a key 'characteristic of many fragmenting states (whether juridical or *de facto*) is a devolution of power from the centre to the periphery in which statist coercive agents (such as the military or the police) cease to provide security and instead act on their own behalf.<sup>330</sup>

Alice Hills further notes that:

'As physical security decreases dramatically, some form of localised protection becomes necessary because physical force (rather than moral authority) provides the only possible basis for creating limited stability in conditions of societal breakdown. It is in these conditions that the patronage of a powerful individual or 'big man' [or father figure] becomes essential. The regular police are unable or unwilling to act in such situations, and what policing there is exists as an activity, rather than as an organisation.'<sup>331</sup>

These images of a powerful individual or 'big man' or father figure become clear in numerous of the case study films that are being analysed for this specific study. However, Hills further contends that 'it is the use and application of the term [warlord] that has changed in recent years in that it is now applied to prominent clan and faction leaders using armed civilian followers to impose their policies and ambitions. It is normally used in a derogatory sense because it is assumed that their power is neither traditional nor legitimate but has been gained through intrigue and intimidation.'<sup>332</sup>

According to William DeMars, during the 1970s and 1980s 'the strategic face-off between rebel insurgents and government counterinsurgents produced [a set of] distinctive features of war [unique to the African continent, namely]: a rural locus of violence, large-scale famine, and massive population movement. [And notably], both sides used the rural civilian population [both] as weapons and targets.'<sup>333</sup>

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<sup>330</sup> Hills, *Warlords, Militia and Conflict in Contemporary Africa: A Re-Examination of Terms*, 35.

<sup>331</sup> *Ibid.*, 35-36.

<sup>332</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>333</sup> W. DeMars, "War and Mercy in Africa," *World Policy Journal* 17, no. 2 (2000), 3.

Important to also note is that 'outside powers indeed amplified / [intensified as well as] financed African internal conflicts by providing weapons, training, and finance to favoured proxies.'<sup>334</sup> However, as DeMars points out, these benefactors did not dictate / steer such specific strategies. These 'outside powers' are visible in feature films such as: *Blood Diamond* (conflict diamonds); *The Silent Army* (illegal weapons) and *Ezra* (conflict diamonds). These external factors are often placed centrally to the film narrative in order to underscore the dangerous situations / conditions, and severity thereof, caused by these 'outside powers' and how they indeed do fuel and intensify both civil and cross-border conflicts in Africa.

However, in recent decades, the new face of violence in Africa is, according to DeMars is *privatised war*, which centrally features the figure of the *warlord*. He writes that:

'[A] warlord military strategy eschews any ideological claim to serve the goals of the people, frankly using violence for profit. Whether stealing from the people and the humanitarians, mining precious metals and gems, or smuggling illicit materials, a warlord political economy requires no political bargaining for the population's support.'<sup>335</sup>

The violence indicative of such new *privatised wars* is directed toward no broad political purpose, and instead, warlord -politics and state collapse are two sides of the same coin. 'State collapse means that the government no longer provides basic security and economic infrastructure as public goods.'<sup>336</sup> Behind this is a political economy shaped and driven by *warlordism* in which 'rival politicians fund private patronage networks through access to international commercial ventures, and provide their own security either by fielding their own militias or hiring international mercenaries.'<sup>337</sup>

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<sup>334</sup> DeMars, *War and Mercy in Africa*, 5.

<sup>335</sup> *Ibid*,

<sup>336</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>337</sup> *Ibid*.

The line of political, economic and social attack launched by warlords is made possible by a 'convergence of internal and international factors', [and according to DeMars]:

'Internally, the cost of running a war in Africa has plummeted. The continent is flooded with cheap small arms from the arsenals of Cold War clients, supplemented by discounted exports from the former Soviet bloc.'<sup>338</sup>

In environments of extreme poverty, any group (rebel or government) that offers regular meals can recruit men or kidnap children as fighters without difficulty – and in the international arena of war and conflict, 'warlords can thrive with little military discipline, using drugged child soldiers, and committing random violence, only because they have little reason to fear ever facing an organised military force.'<sup>339</sup>

Crucial to note is that both *war* and *civil unrests* have resulted from, and contributed to, the instability (and disintegration) of the *state*, and thus 'ensuing the political and economic crises that have often been preceded or matched by those in ecology, all of which compound the effects (and affects) of conflict.'<sup>340</sup>

Hills writes that:

'The practical result of such crises is that personal, family and group security is at a premium. Any insecurity will have extensive effects because 'political life in Africa is conducted through a complex web of social forces, institutional settings, and interpersonal relationships. If government structures furnish the context for official interactions in the public domain, social groups constitute the fundamental building blocks of political action and interchange. The desideratum is *small-scale security*.'<sup>341</sup>

It is a clear fact that warlords and militia need (political, social and economic) insecurity in order to flourish. And, as Hills point out, 'insecurity breeds insecurity.'<sup>342</sup> For example, the planting and harvesting of crops, comes to a halt in response to conflict. And 'enforced movement prevents the use

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<sup>338</sup> DeMars, *War and Mercy in Africa*, 5.

<sup>339</sup> Ibid.

<sup>340</sup> Hills, *Warlords, Militia and Conflict in Contemporary Africa: A Re-Examination of Terms*, 43.

<sup>341</sup> Ibid.

<sup>342</sup> Ibid.

of traditional coping mechanisms, and those living on the edges of a war zone attract attacks from armed looters or passing militiamen and soldiers.<sup>343</sup> Consequently, in these dire, hostile / volatile circumstances, guns and the support / patronage of a powerful and commanding individual may provide the only likely form of security.<sup>344</sup> Subsequently, Hills writes the following:

‘Although the terms *warlord* and *militia* have descriptive, rather than analytic, value, the phenomena they represent can be used to examine trends in conflict, order enforcement, and social and political change. Both are manifestations of the fragility characteristic of African states, but militia is the more useful of the two.’<sup>345</sup>

The severe effects and ramifications of the developments in, and extremely violent trends which epitomise *warlords* and *militia*, are fourfold, according to Hills. Firstly, they emphasise that the ‘redefinition of national security undertaken since the end of the Cold War is incomplete because it has concentrated on military and environmental threats at the expense of civil order and policing, even though many contemporary conflicts have no conventional armies, front lines or rules of war acceptable to international bodies.’<sup>346</sup>

Secondly, the phenomena focus attention on the limitations inherent in the notion of civil society because warlords and militia put extreme emphasis on the ‘relationship of survival strategies to the mafia-capitalism resulting from state fragmentation.’<sup>347</sup> Thirdly, granting the fact that this disturbing phenomena represents an adaptive process, ‘the activities of the various groups so labelled do not have significant implications for the function or role of existing regular armies or the police.’<sup>348</sup>

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<sup>343</sup> Hills, *Warlords, Militia and Conflict in Contemporary Africa: A Re-Examination of Terms*, 48-49.

<sup>344</sup> Ibid.

<sup>345</sup> Ibid.

<sup>346</sup> Ibid.

<sup>347</sup> Ibid.

<sup>348</sup> Ibid.

Finally, in the short terms, *warlords* and *militia* represent the greatest obstacle to the establishment of legitimate security forces in conflict-ridden states. In the long term, however, their impact on civil order is significantly less than that of corruption and existing social divisions.<sup>349</sup>

In light of the aforementioned discussion on African warlords, the various *pull* and *push factors* that drive Africa's young children into the arms and barracks of warlords and armed militias (in search of security, a place to 'belong' and shelter) will now be discussed as it will prove valuable to the analyses of all three case studies as each one represents certain aspects thereof.

### **3.3. 'PUSH' AND 'PULL' FACTORS: RECRUITMENT OF, AND CAUSES AND MOTIVATIONS FOR CHILD SOLDIERING**

'A variety of reasons have been advanced to explain the motivations for child soldiering. The reasons range from socio-political and economic environment / context, including poverty, marginalisation, [ideological reasoning], personal family circumstances, and socio-political exclusion, to the environment of perpetual wars and armed conflicts and the militarisation of society.'<sup>350</sup>

In modern-day Africa the on-going wars / conflict situations create an environment wherein the horrific phenomenon and use of child soldiering flourish and take shape in different forms. Firstly, according to Brett and Specht, war rapidly becomes the normal everyday practice and background to their lives.<sup>351</sup> Secondly, the war comes to them, rather than them going looking for it. War conflicts thus become an escapable part of their existence. Thirdly, living in such violent situations creates the need for self-protection and to use violence as a means to an end.<sup>352</sup> Last but not least, the fourth consequence of war is that on-going conflicts in turn affect many other parts of life - schools are closed down and buildings destroyed, exacerbated social tensions, families are driven apart and increased poverty.<sup>353</sup>

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<sup>349</sup> Hills, *Warlords, Militia and Conflict in Contemporary Africa: A Re-Examination of Terms*, 49.

<sup>350</sup> Francis, 'Paper protection' mechanisms: *Child Soldiers and the International Protection of Children in Africa's Conflict Zones*, 211.

<sup>351</sup> Brett and Specht, *Young Soldiers: Why they Choose to Fight*, 10.

<sup>352</sup> Ibid.

<sup>353</sup> Ibid.

When questioning the motivations for child participation in armed conflicts in Africa, those working in the field usually answer that poverty is one of the main reasons, but even though the impoverished living environments of so many African communities play a key role, many fervently contend that it can in no way be the sole factor influencing and steering the continuous forced recruitment and / or decision to voluntarily join political struggles and war(s).

Setting aside the overtly economic and political climates that drive children into the grips of rebel groups and armed conflicts, there is another level of the factors, however. These factors are relating to the personal histories of those individual youths, which predispose certain young people to join the army or take part in the conflicts that are threatening their societies.

As Dr W.Q. Morales argues:

‘Both very young girls and boys can perform essential support functions and free up more seasoned, adult male warriors. Consequently, girl soldiers, no less than boy soldiers, have become the disposable cannon fodder in the front lines of Third World armies, terrorist groups, and guerrilla insurgencies.’<sup>354</sup>

The victim narrative continues to go from strength to strength due to the fact that young girls [and boys] who are abducted or recruited into armed forces continue to almost always be represented (both in written and film narratives) as victims of sexual slavery, manual labour and other forms of exploitation. The film, *War Witch*, is a fitting example to a narrative that portrays girls that fall victim to these types of wartime atrocities. However, there exists strong evidence that this is not always the case. Many girls indeed are not always abducted / recruited and do undeniably engage in active combat and carry guns just like their male youth counterparts. Another suitable example of this can also be found one of the case study films, *Ezra* (2007).

The aim of this section of the chapter at hand is, however, to discuss the aspects of recruitment (forced and / or voluntary) that renders Africa’s young children helpless in adult wars being fought in their countries and communities.

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<sup>354</sup> W. Q. Morales, "Girl Child Soldiers: The Other Face of Sexual Exploitation and Gender Violence," *Air and Space Power Journal* First Quarter 2008 (20 March, 2008), 2.

According to Jens Chr. Andvig:

'[The] existing evidence suggests that that not only the number of child soldiers is determined from the violent organisations' side, but also the child welfare may vary systematically with the kind of organisation they participate in.<sup>355</sup> For example, profit-oriented violent organisations appear on average to be more harmful. The moral panic the phenomenon of child soldiers has given rise to, may have overshadowed perception and analysis of the variation in the welfare of the children involved.<sup>356</sup>

Children who are forcibly recruited are usually from special *risk groups* such as street children, the rural poor, refugees, physically and emotionally abused children, and others that are displaced and part of IDP-camps.<sup>357</sup>

Those who choose to enlist / fight, on the other hand, are often from the very same groups, driven to do so by poverty, propaganda, and alienation. The combination, according to Singer, of unimaginable misery many of Africa's young children face and the subsequent 'normalisation of violence in their lives can lead them to search for a sense of control over their chaotic and unpredictable situations.'<sup>358</sup> Amy Beth Abbot writes that:

'The most serious aberration from international humanitarian ideals, however, stems from the recruitment and utilisation of young boys and girls as child soldiers. Child units currently serve both state and non-state forces in international and internal conflicts around the world. Military groups utilise child soldiers because they consider children expendable, less demanding and easier to manipulate than adult soldiers.'<sup>359</sup>

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<sup>355</sup> J. Andvig, "Child Soldiers: Reasons for Variation in their Rate of Recruitment and Standards of Welfare," No. 704 (2006), 7-8.

<sup>356</sup> Ibid.

<sup>357</sup> P. W. Singer, "The Enablers of War: Causal Factors Behind the Child Soldiers Phenomenon," in *Child Soldiers in the Age of Fractured States*, eds. S. Gates and S. Reich (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2010), 99.

<sup>358</sup> Ibid.

<sup>359</sup> A. B. Abbott, "Child Soldiers - The use of Children as Instruments of War," *Suffolk Transnational Law Review* 23 (2000), 507.

Most people think that all child soldiers have been abducted by rebels, but Michael Wessells stresses in his book *Child Soldiers: From Violence to Protection* that these children can also be conscious actors who deliberately choose to participate in the armed conflict. These child soldiers are then not passive pawns in armed conflict since they can find meaning and identity in the struggle in which they are involved.<sup>360</sup>

Evi Anthonissen points to the fact that Wessells, amongst other academics, researchers and advocates for the rights of children caught-up in conflict situations, distinguishes between two types of recruitment, namely, *forced* and *unforced / volunteer recruitment*.<sup>361</sup> There is a further breakdown and consequently three forms of forced recruitment or coercion. These are: 'abduction; press ganging; and recruitment by quota. Press ganging is a form of group abduction that consists of soldiers rounding up all the youths in marketplaces, in schools, and in other places. If soldiers use the tactic of recruitment by quota, they threaten to attack a village if they are not given a particular number of children to join their armed force. The village leaders are then faced with - the impossible choice of sacrificing children or sacrificing the entire village and they usually decide on the first option.'<sup>362</sup>

Lischer contends that the *militarisation* of displaced communities is a causal factor of child soldier recruitment that is crucial to investigate. Militarisation can occur 'due to the presence of soldiers or militant exiles (including war criminals) who live in / or near the refugee population and have close interaction with displaced persons.'<sup>363</sup> For example, as Lischer argues, 'refugees or exiles who store arms and train outside the camp, yet return to the camp for food, shelter, medical assistance, and family visits, create a militarised refugee population.'<sup>364</sup>

Therefore, the militarisation explanation for the recruitment of young child refugees (both boys and girls) suggests that in such a generally mobilised population, it will be no difficult task for armed rebels to recruit children. *Militarisation* also point toward the fact that the refugee population lacks the 'protection mandated by international law and has lost its civilian character.

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<sup>360</sup> Anthonissen, *Representing the Trauma of Child Soldiers: Ishmael Beah's A Long Way Gone and Uzodinma Iweala's Beasts of no Nation*, 41.

<sup>361</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>362</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>363</sup> Lischer, *War, Displacement, and the Recruitment of Child Soldiers in the Democratic Republic of Congo*, 145-146.

<sup>364</sup> *Ibid.*, 146.

As militants are able to operate freely, perhaps even with the support of the refugee population, children will become vulnerable to recruitment.<sup>365</sup> Forced recruitment and the so-called *militarisation pattern* parallels the broader literature on Africa's child soldiers that emphasises life in any war zone as a high risk factor for recruitment.

Referring to Singer, Lischer notes that children in a civil war environment are described as surrounded by violence, which is usually combined with conditions of extreme poverty. Consequently, rather than 'functioning as the safe haven intended by international law, a militarised refugee camp approximates conditions of a conflict zone.'<sup>366</sup> Another possible explanation for child recruitment, according to Lischer, is to examine the physical security of the displaced population. This suggests that, regardless of the political or military motivations of the refugees, poorly protected camps are vulnerable to raids in which the attackers abduct children for military purposes.<sup>367</sup> Achvarina and Reich argue that:

"Child soldiers will constitute a larger percentage of belligerent forces where camps are relatively vulnerable to infiltration or raiding [and it can thus be argued that these distressing circumstances / living conditions in which these children have to survive daily, might 'push them to volunteer' for armed service in these militant groups.]"<sup>368</sup>

Then again, by bearing in mind that every child, as Wessells rightly points out, responds differently to the same situation, it becomes crucial to also identify and address the various reasons for unforced recruitment and emphasises that these motives often interact in the child's decision to join. The reasons why children voluntarily join armed forces can frequently be associated with their social, family and community situation.

Anthonissen points out that these factors include: that these children 'are from a poor or abusive family, they are separated from their parents or they are orphaned and seek a surrogate family, they are lured with the promise that they will receive money to support their family (which often proves to be a lie).'<sup>369</sup>

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<sup>365</sup> Lischer, *War, Displacement, and the Recruitment of Child Soldiers in the Democratic Republic of Congo*, 146.

<sup>366</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>367</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>368</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>369</sup> Anthonissen, *Representing the Trauma of Child Soldiers: Ishmael Beah's A Long Way Gone and Uzodinma Iweala's Beasts of no Nation*, 41.

Numerous young boys (and girls) also enlist in an armed group because they want to avenge the death of family / or community members or even because they agree with and support the [socio-political] ideology the group defends. However, for example, in the film *Ezra*, Mariam (Mamusu Kallon) is a young rebel soldier with whom Ezra falls in love. Out of all the young soldiers in the film that audiences are introduced to, Mariam is the only one who chooses to fight because of her ideals. She explains that she has been fighting ever since after her journalist father and mother are killed for not keeping quiet on the wrongs of their government, and significantly, Mariam is also the only young soldier to openly criticise the brutality of the rebel army.<sup>370</sup>

Also, having been powerless all their lives a large number of children join because the war experience promises excitement and power (and offers them a chance to gain some social agency amongst their peers).<sup>371</sup> Thus, when these children carry guns, they feel that they have power and that they receive respect from adults - a feeling they have never felt before. An unremitting state of conflict and warfare also destroys the whole social infrastructure of communities, such as schools and hospitals, which causes a lack of basic provisions within the community. As a result, children opt to join a militia group because the armed group provides 'the only hope of food, medical support, or protection from further attack.'<sup>372</sup>

The influential study by Rachel Brett and Irma Specht is very informative and helpful in understanding the reasons why children and adolescents opt / choose to fight or join situations of armed conflict. They maintain that:<sup>373</sup>

'Indeed the precise combination of factors that lead in each individual case to this decision is unique. Even then it is not decisive. In each individual story there is a third level: there is a trigger for the specific decision to join up. [The question that remains in search of answering, however], is what tips

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<sup>370</sup> B. Korman, "African Cinema: A Comparative Look at Blood Diamond and Ezra. Nigeria versus Hollywood." *Offscreen.Com*, 30 June, 2007, 3.

<sup>371</sup> Anthonissen, *Representing the Trauma of Child Soldiers: Ishmael Beah's A Long Way Gone and Uzodinma Iweala's Beasts of no Nation*, 41-42.

<sup>372</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>373</sup> Francis, *'Paper protection' mechanisms: Child Soldiers and the International Protection of Children in Africa's Conflict Zones*, 211.

the [delicate] balance from thinking about it to [actively] taking the decision and acting on it. Some young people think about joining for years before actually doing so.<sup>374</sup>

By contrast, as mentioned before, some youths have not considered volunteering to fight until their own world / family life disintegrates and they see no other option or outcome. Several of the same causal factors that set the scene (or are part of the more specific situation of the young person) are frequently the ones that develop into and manifest itself at a particular moment of decision.<sup>375</sup> During the course of the research for this study, the extreme poverty faced by many child in African communities, has repeatedly been alluded to as one of the biggest driving forces and reasons and motivations for their voluntary participation and / or making these children vulnerable to recruitment.

According to Francis, 'poverty and the context of depressing socio-economic conditions, impoverished social amenities are certainly *pull factors* motivating children to participate in armed conflicts -- as a simple survival necessity.'<sup>376</sup> However, the impetus or *pull factor* of poverty is not a simple story. The very context of war and armed conflicts provide an assortment of motivations and reasoning factors that ultimately also *push* children to join up. Easy access to AK47 rifles and being part of an armed group provides economic opportunities / prospects by means of looting and pillage at the war front. Consequently, war becomes a 'source of personal enrichment and a means of empowerment through the barrel of the gun. Boys are converted into commanders, with power and influence.'<sup>377</sup>

For the majority of these children (both boys and girls), the reality remains that they were born into war, and lived and grew up in situations of war and armed violence. Consequently, they harboured little or no hope of being liberated from the culture of violence. As a result, these children accept war and the use of deadly weapons as a 'normal way of life.'<sup>378</sup>

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<sup>374</sup> Francis, 'Paper protection' mechanisms: *Child Soldiers and the International Protection of Children in Africa's Conflict Zones*, 212.

<sup>375</sup> Ibid.

<sup>376</sup> Ibid., 212.

<sup>377</sup> Ibid.

<sup>378</sup> Ibid.

Francis writes that:

“The power of the AK47 assault rifle transforms these youths from mere children into adults with power and a ‘authority’ that can dictate when to kill or not. War / civil unrests also cause schools to close; it disrupts normal activities and totally destroys social / public amenities. Joining or being recruited in an armed faction therefore provides opportunities for protection of family members or ‘self-protection’ or the means to settle old family feuds.”<sup>379</sup>

In addition, the environment of war provides young children with the opportunity to play out or dramatise scenes from violent Hollywood movies such as *Rambo*, *Terminator*, *Commando* and *Missing in Action*. War becomes a real-life ‘playground’ to act out adventure and misplaced heroism.<sup>380</sup> For example, during training, (as portrayed in films such as) *War Witch*, these young child soldiers were made to watch combat films such as *Rambo* to prepare them for fighting. Prestholdt argues that both the film and the character of ‘*Rambo*’ offered practical instruction in guerrilla warfare and provided inspiration to young combatants.<sup>381</sup>

Moreover, as Paul Richards has demonstrated, ‘the image of one man fighting a superior force and living by his wits in the forest resonated with combatant experiences and aspirations.’<sup>382</sup> Ishmael Beah recalled of his time with the Sierra Leone Army (SLA) - ‘*We all wanted to be like Rambo; we couldn’t wait to implement his techniques*’<sup>383</sup> *Rambo* [and other violent, action / combat films] seemed to accord well with the worldviews of combatants because the underlying and causal tensions of these films were extremely volatile.

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<sup>379</sup> Francis, ‘*Paper protection’ mechanisms: Child Soldiers and the International Protection of Children in Africa’s Conflict Zones*, 212.

<sup>380</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>381</sup> J. Prestholdt, “The Afterlives of 2Pac: Imagery and Alienation in Sierra Leone and Beyond,” *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 21, no. 2 (2009), 208.

<sup>382</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>383</sup> I. Beah, *A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Child Soldier*. (Sarah Crichton Books, 2008), 121.

Thus, similar to the character of *Rambo*, young combatants in Africa's militias rationalised their actions as a 'response to the figurative first blood drawn by systemic oppression or, for SLA conscripts, rebel attacks.'<sup>384</sup> Also, as Anthonissen argues, the 'longer these children remain with an armed force, the more they start to - internalise the values and behaviours of the armed group. They actively shed their civilian identity by breaking with their previous civilian lives and redefining themselves as soldiers. Child combatants often actively construct these new soldier identities by assuming - a 'combat name' based on the qualities they exhibit in combat and which often refers to Western war films.'<sup>385</sup>

In a similar manner the 2008 film, *Johnny Mad Dog*, serves as a fitting example of *combat names* chosen by / for young child soldiers. These names are also often based on qualities they exhibit in combat In the film audiences follow child soldiers / characters named Mad Dog and his crew - No Good Advice, Butterfly, Chicken Hair, and others - as they kill, pillage, rape, interrogate, and terrorise on their march to the capital.

Anthonissen points to Wessells' argument that strategies used by warlords and militia groups 'to make child soldiers even more dependent upon the [specific] armed group, these [children become] completely isolated from their family and their former lives. And due to the fact that some of these children are forced to commit atrocities towards family and community when they are recruited militia groups ensure that these youths have nowhere to go if they try to escape and / or are rescued / rehabilitated.'<sup>386</sup>

Anthonissen further argues that these young boys and children consequently (as a coping / survival mechanism) accept the morals of the armed group and some even - learn to enjoy killing. For some of these children, the army even becomes their surrogate family. They are completely dependent upon it and often do not want to leave it when they have an opportunity to return to civilian life.'<sup>387</sup>

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<sup>384</sup> Prestholdt, *The Afterlives of 2Pac: Imagery and Alienation in Sierra Leone and Beyond*, 208.

<sup>385</sup> Anthonissen, *Representing the Trauma of Child Soldiers: Ishmael Beah's A Long Way Gone and Uzodinma Iweala's Beasts of no Nation*, 43.

<sup>386</sup> Ibid.

<sup>387</sup> Ibid.

Wessells argues that as people, in this case, child soldiers, create and embrace different self-narratives and assume new [combat] roles, 'they construct new identities, negotiating them with the group(s) with whom they interact.'<sup>388</sup> Many child soldiers, particularly abductees, never fully embrace soldiers' identities, however, [warlords] and armed groups deliberately set out to change [the identities of these young child soldiers] as a means of cutting them off from their previous lives and reducing attempts to escape.'<sup>389</sup> Often these rebel groups succeed in doing this by saying 'You are now soldiers' and 'You are now rebels. Respect your guns. They are now your mother and father' - convincing child soldiers that they 'belong' with the armed militias by wearing uniforms and embracing other symbols of their new identities.

Through political / ideological education, these warlords and rebel groups also shape children's beliefs and values, enabling them to view the armed group's struggle as 'legitimate and to invest personally in it.'<sup>390</sup> Furthermore, Goodwin-Gill and Cohn use the phrase *social ecologies* to 'describe how a society or family interprets or values a conflict and how these interpretations influence children to enlist.'<sup>391</sup> These *social ecologies* may include:

'Perceptions of how minority groups, ethnic communities, households and families have been marginalised or the need to redress long-running family feuds and historical disputes. It is therefore important to understand the insidious manipulation of impressionable children by their communities.'<sup>392</sup>

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<sup>388</sup> Wessells, *Child Soldiers: From Violence to Protection*, 82.

<sup>389</sup> Ibid.

<sup>390</sup> Ibid.

<sup>391</sup> Francis, 'Paper protection' mechanisms: *Child Soldiers and the International Protection of Children in Africa's Conflict Zones*, 213.

<sup>392</sup> D. J. Francis, W. A. Knight and et al., "Children and War: Impact, Protection and Rehabilitation. Phase II - Protection" (USC Gould School of Law - University of Southern California, University of Alberta, 14-15 January, 2006), 12.

As a result one begins to see the development of a complex situation comprising of a combination of factors that motivate and / or force young children to join belligerent factions caught-up in civil unrests. Francis contends that in addition to the role played by peer pressure children are:

‘Also intentionally manipulated and deceived into joining armed groups with the promise of substantial financial payment or the opportunity to travel abroad, only to find themselves in rebel camps and forced to fight. Agents of warring factions also frequent refugee and displaced persons camps recruiting children through promises of financial rewards and travel abroad.’<sup>393</sup>

Amy Beth Abbott argues that ‘the longer the conflicts persist, the greater the probability guerrilla forces will recruit child soldiers. As time passes, increasing casualties and escalating conflicts lead to a desperate search for new recruits.’<sup>394</sup> For example, as in Angola, ‘civil wars can span over thirty years, making volunteers difficult to find especially after witnessing the effects of war on their predecessors. To alleviate the manpower shortage, rebel and governmental forces look to the nation's youth to fill their army's ranks.’<sup>395</sup>

However, as Abbott points out, ‘the *laws of war* and international humanitarian laws govern the conduct of armed conflict and impose restrictions based on moral, legal, philosophical, religious and political considerations. International humanitarian law affords children, as members of the civilian population, protection against inhumane treatment and directed attacks during international and domestic armed conflicts.’<sup>396</sup>

Consequently, in the light of these building on the prior discussion of the international humanitarian laws, legal statutes and regulations, attention will now be given to (P)DDR programmes that aim to actively and successfully disarm, rehabilitate and reintegrate these traumatised youths into society. These issues, also then, become very relevant in terms of the analysis of especially the case study film, *Ezra*, where much of the narrative is built around Ezra’s redemption, rehabilitation and reintegration.

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<sup>393</sup> Francis, Knight and et al., *Children and War: Impact, Protection and Rehabilitation. Phase II - Protection*, 12.

<sup>394</sup> Abbott, *Child Soldiers - The use of Children as Instruments of War*, 511.

<sup>395</sup> Ibid.

<sup>396</sup> Ibid., 518-520.

### 3.4. LOOKING FORWARD: POST-WAR REALITIES OF CHILD SOLDIERS

Walt Kilroy in his article, *Disarmament, Demobilisation, and Reintegration: The Co-Evolution of Concepts, Practices, and Understanding*, argues that:

'The conceptualisation and practice of peace-building and post-conflict recovery since the early 1990s have continued to evolve and become more sophisticated. In parallel with that has come the development of a set of interventions for dealing with ex-combatants and others associated with fighting forces, in the context of a peace process, known as Disarmament, Demobilisation, and Reintegration (DDR). They are significant stakeholders in the process, with the potential to contribute to recovery, or to act as spoilers and worsen insecurity.'<sup>397</sup>

Singer, however, when paraphrasing UNICEF, describes three overlapping phases of 'turning a child soldier back into a child.'<sup>398</sup> The first is '*disarmament* and *demobilisation*, which involves identifying child soldiers and taking them physically out of the military environment. The second phase is both physical and psychological *rehabilitation*. Former child soldiers are frequently in poor physical condition and have sustained massive psychological trauma as a result of their military service and age.'<sup>399</sup> The third and final phase is *reintegration* with families and the community. Successful reintegration, Singer argues, must include sustained follow-up support. This refers to programs for building self-capacity and extended counselling.'<sup>400</sup>

Some scholars and advocacy groups feel that due to the seriousness of the problem of child soldiering in African countries, the concept of *prevention* must also be included in the framework of these aiding programmes. Prevention points to the active restriction / limitation of both first time recruitment and (re)recruitment practices that draw young children into armed militias. Thus, the working description of these peace-building programmes for this study will be (P)DDR – *Prevention, Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration*.

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<sup>397</sup> Kilroy, *Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration: The Co-Evolution of Concepts, Practices, and Understanding*, 1.

<sup>398</sup> A. Young, "Preventing, Demobilizing, Rehabilitating, and Reintegrating Child Soldiers in African Conflicts," *The Journal of International Policy Solutions* 7 (2007), 20.

<sup>399</sup> Ibid.

<sup>400</sup> Ibid.

Beth Verhey in her case study of Angola, writes that although acute 'awareness and attention to recruitment as a violation of child rights is strong, but practical prevention measures remain elusive.'<sup>401</sup> The experience during 1997 and 1998 [in Angola], when security was already deteriorating, demonstrates that family reunification offers some measure of prevention during on-going conflict. But the main prevention measure seems to be for youth to move to urban areas considered more secure.'<sup>402</sup> The overall objective of (P)DDR programmes is the prevention of both first-time recruitment as well as the re-recruitment of young boys and girls. This is accomplished by 'voluntary disarmament and discharge of combatants from armed groups, and to facilitate them in starting a new life, making a living for themselves, and finding a place in society.'<sup>403</sup>

Lee, in accordance to Rosen, argues that based on the global definition of *child soldiers* and the subsequent understanding of these youth combatants as a 'special group of vulnerable children and victims of forced military recruitment, international humanitarian agencies have campaigned for prioritising the demobilisation and disarmament of combatants under the age of 18 as well as for legally punishing the armed groups and military leaders that recruit children.'<sup>404</sup>

Lee writes that:

'In their field operations for child soldiers, agencies have implemented programmes aimed at securing the release of under-age combatants in detention centres, providing special rehabilitation programmes at care facilities, offering education and training, reuniting them with their families, and finally helping ex-child soldiers to be reintegrated into their communities through the provision of material assistance and child rights education to the wider community.'<sup>405</sup>

A number of agencies administer (P)DDR programmes. The United Nations adopts a lead role in most single-country (P)DDR programmes in Africa, but various non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and aid groups, are also typically involved.

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<sup>401</sup> B. Verhey, "The Prevention, Demobilization and Reintegration of Child Soldiers: Angola Case Study," *World Bank Working Paper Series*, no. 23 (2001), 58.

<sup>402</sup> Ibid.

<sup>403</sup> Kilroy, *Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration: The Co-Evolution of Concepts, Practices, and Understanding*, 1.

<sup>404</sup> Lee, *Understanding and Addressing the Phenomenon of 'Child Soldiers'*, 26.

<sup>405</sup> Ibid.

UNICEF in particular has been closely working together with national and / or UN authorities in post-conflict conditions in order to provide separate prevention, disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration programmes for 'underage combatants in the capacity of its Child Protection units.'<sup>406</sup>

Zafiris notes that in Sierra Leone, for example, extensive emphasis was placed on the 'importance of limited prosecution of juvenile offenders, pointing to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) as an alternative to prosecution of juveniles in order to promote the child's rehabilitation and social reintegration.'<sup>407</sup> According to Article 39 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) countries need to take all appropriate measures to support and facilitate physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration of a child victim of armed conflict. As a result, humanitarian aid groups and international NGOs strongly supported the recording of child perpetrators' accounts through the TRC in Sierra Leone (SLTRC), as opposed to criminal prosecution because the TRC fosters the children's total rehabilitation and social reintegration.<sup>408</sup>

The child combatant's unique position of [complex political victims] - first victim and then victimiser - requires a special accountability mechanism such as the TRC.<sup>409</sup> Consequently, the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission (SLTRC) was established as an 'accountability mechanism, and tasked with investigating and reporting on the causes, context and conduct of the war and with offering both victims and perpetrators a public forum in which to relate their experiences.'<sup>410</sup> This can be seen in the film, *Ezra*, where Ezra, as an ex-child combatant is called to testify in-front of the SLTRC. He must come to terms with the fact that one night he 'unknowingly raided his own village and was accomplice to the murder of his family. His story is set against the reality of how children are turned into combatants.'<sup>411</sup>

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<sup>406</sup> Lee, *Understanding and Addressing the Phenomenon of 'Child Soldiers'*, 26.

<sup>407</sup> I. Zarifis, "Sierra Leone's Search for Justice and Accountability of Child Soldiers," *Human Rights Brief* 9, no. 3 (2002), 20-21.

<sup>408</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>409</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>410</sup> B. K. Dougherty, "Searching for Answers: Sierra Leone's Truth and Reconciliation Commission," *African Studies Quarterly* 8, no. 1 (2004), 39.

<sup>411</sup> Korman, *African Cinema: A Comparative Look at Blood Diamond and Ezra. Nigeria versus Hollywood.*, 2.

The role of the illegal diamond trade in fuelling the civil war is involved but is not the focus of the story, 'rather it is Ezra's downfall and final redemption that is deeply explored. However, while the film differs greatly from other films like *Blood Diamond*, it does share the related themes of redemption, family values, and the life of child soldiers.'<sup>412</sup>

Beth Dougherty noted that close-to 7,000 child combatants went through (P)DDR programmes, and Sierra Leoneans largely exhibited a forgiving attitude towards them. As part of the (P)DDR process, children were reintegrated into their societies, 'sometimes accompanied by a traditional cleansing ceremony or a re-initiation into a secret society, and UNICEF tracked them afterwards.'<sup>413</sup> Dougherty further writes that 'Sierra Leoneans as a society are very forgiving, and many saw child combatants as being simultaneously perpetrators and victims. For example, the Special Court for Sierra Leone's (SCSL) decision not to prosecute child soldiers despite possessing the jurisdiction to do so was greeted with much relief. A pragmatic calculation that the children had to be reintegrated to ensure peace and stability undoubtedly contributed to the acceptance of ex-child soldiers.'<sup>414</sup>

Overall, humanitarian organisations have sought to restore a 'normal childhood' to child soldiers, as commissioned by the CRC, which declared that children 'should grow up in a family environment, in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding.'<sup>415</sup> These (P)DDR-programmes have been designed to help those categorised as 'child soldiers' and contribute to the reconstruction and healing of their war-torn countries.<sup>416</sup> Dr. D. Francis contends that:

'In spite of past and recent attempts to safeguard the rights of the child and to strengthen the protection regime for children caught in the midst of armed conflicts, children are disproportionately affected – as both targets and perpetrators of violence. Armed conflict traumatises children, strips them of their innocence, and denies them the protection needed to develop physically,

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<sup>412</sup> Korman, *African Cinema: A Comparative Look at Blood Diamond and Ezra. Nigeria versus Hollywood.*, 2.

<sup>413</sup> Dougherty, *Searching for Answers: Sierra Leone's Truth and Reconciliation Commission*, 50.

<sup>414</sup> Ibid.

<sup>415</sup> Lee, *Understanding and Addressing the Phenomenon of 'Child Soldiers'*, 26.

<sup>416</sup> Ibid.

intellectually, spiritually and socially. Today's war-affected child may become a considerable problem for tomorrow's generation.<sup>417</sup>

The exposure of young children to the carnage and violence of armed violence can have long lasting, detrimental consequences for future generations, fuelling a persistent cycle of societal violence. Separated from their families and communities, and forced into the trauma and distress of war, child soldiers need special care and support if they are to have any hope of living normal lives as adults when and if the conflicts that they are involved in finally comes to an end.

When addressing the rehabilitation and reintegration of these children means one has to in essence rebuild their lives, and deal head on with their psycho-social problems that they are facing at the moment. It is then extremely difficult to successfully reintegrate demobilised children after a peace settlement is reached. Many of these children have been physically and / or sexually abused by the very forces for which they have been fighting.

Countless children have seen their parents, siblings and community members killed, sometimes in the most brutal manner, in front of their eyes (and even at their own hands or one of their close friends). Most have also been led into participating in murder, rape and other atrocities – often in their own communities. Consequently, these children are alienated, ostracised and will ultimately have limited / no skills for life in peacetime and they are accustomed to getting their way through violence.

Accordingly, the Machel-report, urges that 'all future peace agreements include specific measures pertaining to the demobilisation and reintegration of child soldiers, ranging from job creation and the rebuilding of schools, to the training of teachers who are sensitive to the special needs of child victims of war.'<sup>418</sup> The Machel-report also strongly calls on governments to standardise recruitment procedures for their armed forces and to take legal action against any violators to guarantee that under-age recruitment does not take place.<sup>419</sup>

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<sup>417</sup> Francis, Knight and et al., *Children and War: Impact, Protection and Rehabilitation. Phase II - Protection*, 5.

<sup>418</sup> UNICEF, "Children at both End of the Gun," <http://www.unicef.org/graca/kidsoldi.htm> (Accessed 22 February, 2013)

<sup>419</sup> Ibid.

The reintegration of ex-child soldiers into families and communities has in essence been a process of psychological and social transformation and requires both local and international efforts to assist these child combatants reintegrate into their broken communities and shattered family structures. However, as Lee asserts, when implemented at the local levels, these reintegration and rehabilitation programmes often lead to some unintended consequences. Firstly, a separate demobilisation and community reintegration programme for 'child soldiers' ultimately denies the young combatants the economic benefits and social respect that they believed they rightfully deserved.<sup>420</sup> Secondly, demobilisation programmes based on the global discourse on child soldiers helps to strengthen the young combatants' reliance on the 'big men' in the military and in their villages and thereby contributes to their social and political disempowerment.<sup>421</sup>

Thirdly, the assumption of *vulnerable children* that underpins the community-reintegration programmes only anticipates the 'challenges of *community acceptance* (whereby the agency is on the part of the adult community members). Thus, it fails to address the enormous challenges of giving up power and influence which many ex-child combatants faced.<sup>422</sup> And in response to such 'social, economic, and political predicaments following their demobilisation, which humanitarian agencies only helped to exacerbate, many ex-child combatants have chosen to become *regional warriors*.'<sup>423</sup>

Various studies have shown that the 'demobilised ex-child soldiers chose *military re-recruitment* predominantly for socio-economic reasons, arising from their on-going unemployment and destitution after the war and demobilisation.<sup>424</sup> To be sure, humanitarian agencies have continued to offer vocational training programmes (for example: carpentry, construction, hairdressing, soap making) to aid, stimulate and support the growth of the economic independence of these young children.

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<sup>420</sup> Lee, *Understanding and Addressing the Phenomenon of 'Child Soldiers'*, 27.

<sup>421</sup> Ibid.

<sup>422</sup> Ibid., 28-29.

<sup>423</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>424</sup> Ibid.

Yet, based on the global discourse of *child soldiers as victims* without agency, they often did so as part of the psychosocial programmes (for example: 'giving them something to do so as to forget about the past') and did not actually seek to create their socio-economic empowerment in their society. As a result, most ex-child combatants remained socio-economically destitute after the war.<sup>425</sup>

Kilroy claims that like many aspects of the peace-building process, the fact that it is a long term endeavour, and commitment which 'attempts to bridge security and development is its great strength, as well as being a significant challenge when it comes to implementation.'<sup>426</sup> It is described in the principal United Nations document on the process as often being 'at the nexus of peacekeeping, post-conflict peace-building and development'<sup>427</sup>

The 2005 UNDP *Practice Note*, which forms part of a growing body of guides, manuals, and best practice on (P)DDR that has been developed in recent years, describes it as 'a complex process, with political, military, security, humanitarian and socioeconomic dimensions.'<sup>428</sup> It states that while much of it concentrates on ex-combatants, 'the main beneficiaries of the programme should ultimately be the wider community. [Therefore, (P)DDR programmes must therefore be] conceptualised, designed, planned and implemented within a wider recovery and development framework.'<sup>429</sup>

However, Hanson contends that the aforementioned is not a simple task / plan to implement. He writes:

"As recently as Sierra Leone's DDR programme in 2003, in which only seven thousand of an estimated 48, 000 child soldiers were demobilised, DDR interventions practiced a 'one man, one gun' policy focused on disarming adult male combatants. Women and children associated with the fighting groups were often excluded from the process. Newer DDR programmes have worked to include special groups, but some say these expanded mandates have sacrificed efficacy by trying to include too many people."<sup>430</sup>

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<sup>425</sup> Lee, *Understanding and Addressing the Phenomenon of 'Child Soldiers'*, 27.

<sup>426</sup> Kilroy, *Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration: The Co-Evolution of Concepts, Practices, and Understanding*, 1.

<sup>427</sup> Ibid.

<sup>428</sup> W. Kilroy, "Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) as a Participatory Process: Involving Communities and Beneficiaries in Post-Conflict Disarmament Programmes," (2008), 3.

<sup>429</sup> Ibid.

<sup>430</sup> S. Hanson, "Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) in Africa," *Backgrounder* (2007), 5.

The inclusion of women and children in newer (P)DDR programmes indicates the 'willingness among international groups to adopt lessons learned from earlier DDR programs and develop more effective interventions. [And] consensus also exists among agencies and researchers that a DDR programme is only as good as a country's peace agreement and overall reconstruction efforts.'<sup>431</sup> Although efforts by advocacy groups aiming to enforce international law will contribute to preventing future involvement of children in armed conflict, prevention must be considered more broadly. For example, education and other youth activities, food security and ensuring the security of refugee camps can help to prevent the recruitment of child soldiers.<sup>432</sup>

Children growing up within the context of conflict, and their families, feel they have no choice about participating. Preventing recruitment requires that awareness of child rights be expanded. Best practice now recognises the importance of incorporating child rights into humanitarian advocacy, [but] preventing re-recruitment should also be a concern.<sup>433</sup>

Following the aforementioned discussions, it is then safe to conclude that on the one hand (P)DDR programmes are not simple endeavours, and do not automatically have a positive impact on the communities in which they are deployed. These programmes should be undertaken as an integral component of a country's broad conflict resolution and development strategy (as well as cross-border conflict management programmes).

However, even then, the benefits do not come easy. As Kigma points out, demobilisation and efforts to support reintegration are highly complex and extremely costly, and there are several risks that could derail the whole process.<sup>434</sup>

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<sup>431</sup> Hanson, *Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) in Africa*, 7.

<sup>432</sup> B. Verhey, *Child Soldiers: Prevention, Demobilization, and Reintegration - Dissemination Notes Number 3*, The World Bank, 2002, 1.

<sup>433</sup> Ibid.

<sup>434</sup> K. Kingma, "Post-War Demobilization and the Reintegration of Ex-Combatants into Civilian Life," (1997), 15.

Colletta et al state the following on reintegration:

‘Successful long-term reintegration can make a major contribution to national conflict resolution and to restoration of social capital. Conversely, failure to achieve reintegration can lead to considerable insecurity at the societal and individual levels, including rent-seeking behaviour through the barrel of a gun.’<sup>435</sup>

Kilroy also points to a specific Mozambican case study of 1997, where Kingma found that (P)DDR programmes contributed to peace-building and human security – and indeed had been ‘critical in making the peace hold’ in Mozambique. Kingma is among several authors to ‘emphasise that demobilisation on its own cannot guarantee the success of a peace process. It is a political enterprise, and ultimately depends on the political will to reach and implement a settlement.’<sup>436</sup>

### 3.5. CLOSING REMARKS

Although child soldiering is not in any way a new phenomenon common to modern times and / or African conflicts, it must be stated that it has never been as widespread and as serious as is currently the case in many countries. Jézéquel writes that ‘children, whether agents of [and / or] victims of violence, seem to play a more central role in the conflicts of post-Cold War sub-Saharan Africa than in others. If the existence of child soldiers is not a new event, it holds a more significant place in Africa than elsewhere.’<sup>437</sup>

Rosen confirms that for several young child combatants, the taking-up of arms is not only a safer option, but is also more economically secure than remaining in the unarmed, and he cites a photograph on the Human Rights Watch website that shows a child soldier holding up a rifle on which he has written ‘*War is my food...*’<sup>438</sup>

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<sup>435</sup> Kilroy, *Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration: The Co-Evolution of Concepts, Practices, and Understanding*, 3.

<sup>436</sup> Ibid.

<sup>437</sup> Jézéquel, *Child Soldiers in Africa: A Singular Phenomenon?: On the Necessity of a Historical Perspective*, 103.

<sup>438</sup> Moynagh, *Human Rights, Child-Soldier Narratives, and the Problem of Form*, 49.

Thus, what the accounts of child soldiers dramatize [whether in print or in visual representations as pertaining to this current study] quite clearly [is both] that the phenomenon is extremely complicated.<sup>439</sup>

Meyer writes that:

‘Child soldiering is not only a violation of human rights; it is also a threat to national survival. Once a given political conflict subsides, a nation of brainwashed children can impede the recovery and development of a nation. Child soldiers are sometimes even forced to fight against their own families. These children are forced to kill or be killed, and to carry out mutilations, while they themselves are being abused, beaten, tortured, and forced to use addictive drugs.’<sup>440</sup>

These children endure not only physical abuse but also psychological and sexual abuse, and when the conflicts are over, the children cannot just go on with their lives and pick up where they left off before the war. They are given the label of *child soldier*, which may stay with them for the rest of their lives. They are indoctrinated / drugged / brainwashed children have been trained to leave their customs and cultures behind.

Once they return back to that same society that they left behind these children do not know how to pick-up the pieces and live ‘normally’ except through aggression and violence due to post-traumatic stress (PTSD) and lack of socialisation. Coming back to their communities / a society devoid of the support and care of family or friends these young ex-combatants find it hard to move out of / break free of the destructive / violent ways they have come to know. They lost their precious childhoods and are ‘now stigmatised, traumatised, and uneducated.’ Thus, these young children are both victims of violence and at the same time forced offenders.<sup>441</sup>

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<sup>439</sup> Moynagh, *Human Rights, Child-Soldier Narratives, and the Problem of Form*, 49.

<sup>440</sup> Meyer, *Child Soldiers: An End in Sight for Africa?*, 2.

<sup>441</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

Meyer further notes the harsh realities of former child soldiers after the civil war is over and peace settlements are being made, by stating that:

[When the dust of the conflict has settled], 'child soldiers are often disregarded and treated as a generation lost. They are viewed by society as permanently damaged, with the attitude that they can never be salvaged back to normal society. Recovering countries usually put little effort into the reintegration and rehabilitation of children soldiers. Countries participating in peace talks are more preoccupied with demobilisation and disarmament. They think of the child soldiering issue as a lost cause: hopeless and a waste of time.'<sup>442</sup>

However, the aforementioned view is very pessimistic and child soldiers have proven to be able to reintegrate back into society if given the opportunity and resources. The reintegration and rehabilitation efforts that have been launched by international and local NGOs, government institutions and church groups to help these youths to adjust to a non-violent environment face immense challenges when confronted with situations where child soldiers have committed atrocities or war crimes - frequently to / in their own villages and communities. Consequently, the children's reintegration faces an intricate and difficult course of action in equilibrium with the longing (and demand) for justice in many communities trying to rebuild their lives after the conflicts are ceased.

The socio-economic conditions that exist in African states which continue to recruit child soldiers create a chilling breeding ground for children to be abducted or to volunteer as soldiers. Magdaleen van Niekerk writes that 'poverty is endemic; famine is widespread; medical and health conditions are deplorable; schools are closed or burnt down; and thousands of people displaced.'<sup>443</sup>

In 2000, based on extensive interviews with child soldiers and underage combatants, Krijn Peters and Paul Richards undertook a case study of the situation of child soldiering in Sierra Leone. They found and argued that the incentives and motivations for voluntary enlistment in militia groups were 'mainly driven by economic opportunities provided by the civil war and the 'empowerment' of the gun for young people who were marginalised and excluded by patrimonial politics.'<sup>444</sup>

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<sup>442</sup> Meyer, *Child Soldiers: An End in Sight for Africa?*, 2.

<sup>443</sup> M. Van Niekerk, "Weak States and Child Soldiering in Africa: Contextual Factors." (MMil, University of Stellenbosch), 75.

<sup>444</sup> Francis, Knight and et al., *Children and War: Impact, Protection and Rehabilitation. Phase II - Protection*, 12.

They concluded their study by stating that ‘rather than [only] perceiving child soldiers as *traumatised victims*, one should [also] view them as rational and conscious in their decision to replace guns with lack of educational opportunities / resources. These children see war as the only ‘way out’ of a hopeless situation.’<sup>445</sup>

From the prior discussion it becomes clear that children are easily lured into taking up arms and joining militias in reaction to the deplorable conditions that they have been exposed to. Reasons for joining are far-ranging and extremely complex - firstly, these already traumatised youths that are often separated from their loved-ones believe that armed groups may be the only way to ensure regular meals, clothing and, if needed, medical attention; and secondly, enlisting and joining these groups acts as a safety net in the already turbulent and violent environment that they grew up in. The implications and consequences of both are immense and alarming.

Van Niekerk points to Stavrou who writes that, ‘one may reflect on the issue of ‘child soldiers’ based on two main factors. The first is the underlying cause of conflict, as opposed to the impact and end result of the conflict. There is little point in pouring resources and effort into damage control when the cause of the problem itself continues unabated, as is the current approach [by both local and international authorities and aid-organisations].’<sup>446</sup>

The second, as Stavrou advocates, is to address both the social and the economic issues that face these families and communities in the struggle for survival and in their attempts to integrate abducted [and recruited] children back into their broken societies. Addressing only one side of the same coin, as Stavrou argues, will result in partial solutions that are inherently flawed. While those involved in the counselling program(s) are to be commended, the complete a sense of preventative measures is to be lamented.’<sup>447</sup>

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<sup>445</sup> Francis, Knight and et al., *Children and War: Impact, Protection and Rehabilitation. Phase II - Protection*, 12.

<sup>446</sup> Van Niekerk, *Weak States and Child Soldiering in Africa: Contextual Factors.*, 86.

<sup>447</sup> Ibid.

Myriam Denov writes that:

'Over the past decade, child soldiers have inundated the popular western media. Whether adorning the pages of magazines or newspapers, or flashing briefly before us in news reports, images of boys armed with AK47s appear ubiquitous, providing a cautionary tale of innocent childhood gone [askew].<sup>448</sup>

While these representations turn commonly held assumptions of a protected and innocuous childhood on its head, what they mask is as 'provocative as what they reveal.'<sup>449</sup> Well-known and widespread news broadcasts (both written and visual) tell us extremely little about the young children behind the guns or the 'complexity of their wartime and post-war experiences... In the shadows of powerful [moving visual images]; [still] photographs and [the] accompanying figurative language lay profound silences and empty spaces.'<sup>450</sup>

In an attempt to move beyond and away from the narrow representation(s) of child soldiers in the media, this study consequently will aim to explore the realities (as depicted on screen) of a child soldiers within different cohorts of African armed forces, rebel groups and militias. Denov argues that 'while these children are frequently constructed within a framework of extremes (as either extreme victims; extreme perpetrators or extreme heroes), in reality, the lives of these children fall within the grey, ambiguous and paradoxical zones of each.'<sup>451</sup>

In conclusion then, when one has to place the aforementioned discussions of the different and severely complex facets of child soldiering in Africa into the context of this specific study, the link has to be drawn to the ways in which these militarised young children are visually represented to those audiences who are far-removed from these dire realities.

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<sup>448</sup> M. Denov, "Child Soldiers and Iconography: Portrayals and (Mis)Representations," *Children & Society* 26, no. 4 (2012), 1-2.

<sup>449</sup> Ibid.

<sup>450</sup> Ibid.

<sup>451</sup> Ibid., 2.

Rosen & Rosen rightly notes that child soldiers, or *child warriors*, figure prominently in both contemporary fiction and film (for both children and adults). And they also contend that the 'humanitarian discourse about the nature and proper role of children [in economic, social and cultural realities] has 'significantly shaped contemporary literary conventions.'<sup>452</sup> They write that:

"Similar to contemporary humanitarian accounts of child soldiers, much of contemporary literature and film is dominated by 'representations of these children as abused victims of war.' Less well known, however, is that this modern picture of the child soldier reverses virtually all the images of children under arms that pervaded nineteenth- and twentieth-century literature for both adults and children."<sup>453</sup>

Donna Sharkey argues that 'with images [both moving and still] of child soldiers [that are] in the public domain, the questions of how these images are seen, read, interpreted, and how they evoke emotional responses are important as they relate to the impact [these moving and still] images can have on the framing of [this horrific] issue for [those audiences that are far-removed for the harsh realities of these child combatants].'<sup>454</sup>

Some of the films that will be analysed as case studies for this particular study 'provide powerful, transgressive narratives that fly directly in the face of the dominant social narrative of the helpless, vulnerable victim-child. The representation of the child at war / child soldier is at best a terrible tragedy and, more profoundly, a threat to any sense of morality and social justice.'<sup>455</sup> Indeed, in films such as *Ezra*, *The Silent Army*, and *War Witch*, 'contemporary child soldiers [both boy and girl soldiers] appear to subvert not just the social order but the natural order as well.'<sup>456</sup>

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<sup>452</sup> S. M. Rosen and D. M. Rosen, "Representing Child Soldiers in Fiction and Film," *Peace Review* 24, no. 3 (2012), 305-306.

<sup>453</sup> Ibid.

<sup>454</sup> Sharkey, *Picture the Child Soldier*, 262.

<sup>455</sup> Ibid.

<sup>456</sup> Rosen and Rosen, *Representing Child Soldiers in Fiction and Film*, 307-308.

As an entree into understanding how people read / view and respond to images of child soldiers, interpret the lives of child soldiers through photographs, and the potential effect that especially the cinematic image(s) of child soldiers can have on both local and foreign audiences, the following two chapters will be devoted to a close analysis of how African conflicts (and in particular child soldiers) are represented on screen.<sup>457</sup>

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<sup>457</sup> Sharkey, *Picture the Child Soldier*, 262.

## CHAPTER FOUR: SCREENING AFRICAN CONFLICTS

'When [one] examines the present-day aesthetic signifiers and depictions of the real, of the realities of the darker *other* as still perpetuated by the centre *white*, one is left with variegated concepts of the white man's burden. [And] when [one] specifically moves toward a cinematic lens, the visual field recodes, reifies, and makes even more obvious the need for the white man's rationality, stability, strength, intelligence, and dignity in the face of the ruthlessness, violence, chaos, irrationality, ignorance, and ineptitude of the darker [continent].'<sup>458</sup>

In the introduction of the book, *Narrating War and Peace in Africa*, editors, Falola and Ter Haar, argue that far too many Western representations tend to reduce Africa and its inhabitants to negative, generalised stereotypes. And these stereotypes can be found everywhere: in philosophy, in historiography, as well as popular culture. In the twentieth century and up to present day, post-colonial imagery of the Third World is presented / represented as a *spectacle*.<sup>459</sup>

Falolo, citing Jan Nederveen Pieterse, writes that 'next to Bacardi-rum beaches, images of suffering, starvation and bloodshed circulate through the media networks of the world's electronic Colosseum.'<sup>460</sup> And if, therefore, it is clear that general representations of Africa are problematic and Afro-pessimistic in nature, then the same can undeniably be said about the representations of wars and conflicts that ravage the continent and displace its inhabitants.<sup>461</sup>

Duncanson and McMillan argue that in recent years, fictional / feature films 'based on factual events have become a central means for the West to learn about the violence, crime and human rights abuses experienced by others.'<sup>462</sup> Often set in Africa, these films 'afford Western audiences a way of engaging with violence beyond their national borders.'<sup>463</sup>

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<sup>458</sup> Sterling, *Visions of War, Testaments of Peace: The "Burden" of Sierra Leone*, 195-196.

<sup>459</sup> T. Falola and H. Ter Haar, "Introduction: Narrating War and Peace in Africa," in *Narrating War and Peace in Africa*, eds. T. Falola and H. Ter Haar (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2010), 1.

<sup>460</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>461</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>462</sup> K. Duncanson and N. McMillan, "'This is Africa': Filmic Negotiations of Crime, Justice and Global Responsibility," (2011), 1.

<sup>463</sup> *Ibid.*

Given the role of films as significant sites of knowledge creation it is crucial to acknowledge that various films (like the three case study films) 'offer notably divergent understandings of the nature of violent conflict [situations and especially then the trauma and fate endured by young child soldiers] in post-colonial Africa, and of who is capable of bearing the responsibility to address its causes and legacy.'<sup>464</sup>

In this chapter the focus will be turned to issues pertaining to the crisis of representation; Afro-pessimistic / Afro-optimistic depictions of Africa and the challenging of stereotypes; notions of the African Gaze and representation of the *Other*. The aim is to establish the way in which feature films such as *The Silent Army*, *War Witch*, and *Ezra* make it possible for audiences to know and understand contemporary crime and violence in Africa. This chapter will also aim to 'provide critique of the paternalistic, problematic vision of Africa [and its child soldiers] inherited through the discourse of the white man's burden, [reflected in the various case study films that will be examined], by debunking its representational myths about the continent.'<sup>465</sup>

By 'cross-examining the histories of Africa and the West permits us first to deconstruct the discourse that makes the child soldier a foreign category, exclusively the product of contemporary African crises. [And] by considering more deeply the entire span of the continent's history, [one] can seek [and aim] to understand the characteristics of the recourse to children in contemporary conflicts. It is an opportunity to call for a historical enquiry that will re-establish continuities between times of peace and those of war.'<sup>466</sup>

The purpose of this chapter is to further strengthen the basis before an in-depth analysis of the three case study films can be conducted in Chapter Five. This chapter will therefore draw on the work of expert theorists and scholars from various fields, including African studies and Film studies, in order to address these issues as thoroughly as possible. Consequently, this chapter is aimed at providing insight into the possible Afro-pessimistic / Afro-optimistic discourse(s) and the ways in which Africa (and its child soldiers) are depicted in feature films rather than singling out and / or pointing a single out any specific representation of it for its triumphs and shortcomings.

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<sup>464</sup> Duncanson and McMillan, "This is Africa": *Filmic Negotiations of Crime, Justice and Global Responsibility*, 1.

<sup>465</sup> Sterling, *Visions of War, Testaments of Peace: The "Burden" of Sierra Leone*, 196.

<sup>466</sup> Jézéquel, *Child Soldiers in Africa: A Singular Phenomenon?: On the Necessity of a Historical Perspective*, 3-4.

The chapter will aim to revitalise academic considerations with regards to film studies by foregrounding ethical and representational dimensions of the cinematic (or more simply the moving) image, and create dialogues between ostensibly incomparable philosophical, humanitarian and socio-political trends of thought, without seeking to lay bare or reconcile their (in)differences.

#### 4.1. TIA – THIS IS AFRICA: IMAGES OF AFRICAN ON SCREEN

There will be no dispute over the fact that cross-border wars and civil and / or ethnic conflicts appear to typify the African continent (both pre- and post-independence), but one must also however acknowledge that ‘the whole of human history includes wars, massacres, and every kind of torture and cruelty.’<sup>467</sup> Therefore, as Falola argues in the book, *Nationalism and African Intellectuals* (2004), ‘in the post-independence era the pain is what a new generation knows – the agony is what the intellectuals talk, [write and make films] about, and the crisis is what Afro-pessimists and the Western media [writers and filmmakers] are happy to report.’<sup>468</sup>

The modern-day Africa represented to audiences around the world in films is much more brutal than anything seen in earlier renderings of especially wars and conflicts. However, as Evans and Glenn allude to, it is more difficult to ‘attribute this ignorance / [racism and / or Afro-pessimism] on the part of the filmmakers [and this due to the fact that films such as *Blood Diamond*, *Ezra*, and *War Witch*], have been far better researched, especially in the attention paid to realist details.’<sup>469</sup>

However, reactions to for example to the aforementioned films that deals with child soldiering in Africa, ‘show the intriguing tension in contemporary thinking’ about the African continent. Evans and Glenn argue that:

‘Although refreshing in their attempt to look at the continent from different perspectives, like the photojournalism coming out of third-world countries, these films effectively create an image of Africa as “other to the ‘economically developed,’ safe west” and equate the continent with famine,

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<sup>467</sup> Falola and Ter Haar, *Introduction: Narrating War and Peace in Africa*, 1.

<sup>468</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>469</sup> Evans and Glenn, “TIA - This is Africa”: *Afro-pessimism in Twenty-First-Century Narrative Film*, 14.

disease, violence, and political turmoil, even if this was never the journalists' - or filmmakers' – intention.<sup>470</sup>

They argue that many of these films are at times compromised by 'commercial imperatives as well as cinema's highly inter-textual nature, which links them to earlier stereotypes and draws on familiar genres and narratives.'<sup>471</sup> More generally, what earlier post-colonial critiques suggest is that the portrayal of Africans as incapable of self-rule (a central tenet of Afro-pessimism) can be seen as part of a hegemonic strategy or western mind-set to justify colonialism and maintain economic and political power on the continent. So far as these views form part of current discourse (both filmic and written), many reviewers and scholars alike expect that the subconscious political and economic interests of the developed world, rather than African realities, [continue to] shape on-going negative stereotypes / Afro-pessimistic views of Africa.

The reason for this is that modern media, especially film (and other forms of visual media), have been greatly influenced by photojournalism and similar to journalists that capture images to tell / strengthen their news stories, so too do many of the modern-day films appear to aim to bring about change, or at least to inform the west of the enormity of events on the continent. Yet, scholars have strongly contended that recent, 21<sup>st</sup> century films, have to acknowledge that, as pointed out by S.D. Moeller, donor or *compassion fatigue* has replaced the first mesmerised guilty western reaction to the suffering of others. Carolyn J. Dean writes that:

Political scientist Clifford Orwin notes: "The final pitfall of the new abundance of televised suffering is also the most ironic. It is the danger that constant exposure to such suffering will not sensitise but inure us to it. Some scholars have defined a new problem in trauma studies they term *empathy fatigue* or *compassion fatigue*, in which numbness is explicitly conceived as a form of self-protective disassociation. And even those responsible for fundraising in international humanitarian organisations, including Amnesty International and the French Doctors without Borders, have claimed that they face a 'numb' public."<sup>472</sup>

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<sup>470</sup> Evans and Glenn, "TIA - This is Africa": *Afro-pessimism in Twenty-First-Century Narrative Film*, 15.

<sup>471</sup> Ibid.

<sup>472</sup> C. J. Dean, "Empathy, Pornography, and Suffering," *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 14, no. 1 (2003), 88.

Dean then goes further by stating that 'such pessimistic commentary is [certainly] now commonplace. Yet, [as she contends], it is very repetition, pervasiveness, forcefulness, and tendency to 'hearken wistfully back to the very humane ideals it insists we can no longer live up to bears investigation. [For this Afro-pessimism] takes specific forms and expresses new historical restraints on imagination and feeling. Discourses about various impediments to empathic feeling have of course existed since the eighteenth century, when sympathy was first deemed a crucial component of the enlightened self, the feeling individual, and the new social order.'<sup>473</sup>

In a review on Susan D. Moeller's book, *Compassion Fatigue: How the Media Sells Disease, Famine, War and Death*, B.T Gray writes the following: 'Moeller concentrates on the image rather than the written word: how the image, once in its own cultural and social context, is Americanised and made palatable to the formulas of broadcasters [and in this particular case, filmmakers], if only to be assimilated, digested, and then finally forgotten.'<sup>474</sup> Rather than liberating the image, Moeller's cross-cultural study argues that:

'The colonisation [and mediatisation] of international disasters is little more than a global McDonaldisation. The *compassion fatigue* that the [Western / non-African] media [and film industry] both suffer from and reproduce, in other words, leads to a homogenisation of meaning and the apathy of the international viewership / public. Capitalism and the post-modern image are combined, it seems, in order to reduce the viewer to little more than an apathetic and unconscious spectator of world events.'<sup>475</sup>

Gray ends his review by writing that 'the vitality and catharsis that sustains Moeller's approach, in essence, informs us [as the audience] of the very real possibility of a stifling and bureaucratic [film and media sector] as well as [actively] challenging [readers and audiences] to begin to ask their own questions on the ethics of representation and the (in)difference of gazes of the *Other*.'<sup>476</sup>

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<sup>473</sup> Dean, *Empathy, Pornography, and Suffering*, 88.

<sup>474</sup> B. T. Gray, "A Review: 'Susan D. Moeller, *Compassion Fatigue: How the Media Sells Disease, Famine, War and Death*,'" *Journal of American Studies* 33, no. 3 (1999), 547.

<sup>475</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>476</sup> Gray, 'A Review: *Susan D. Moeller, Compassion Fatigue: How the Media Sells Disease, Famine, War and Death*, 547.

#### 4.2. POLITICS OF THE AFRICAN GAZE IN FEATURE FILMS

Saxton and Downing argue that 'ethical meaning does not reside purely in the flow of [cinematic] images but [rather] emerges more urgently in the course of the reception, circulation [and repetition] of these [cinematic] images – in the multifarious encounters between audiences and [feature] films – raises questions about the ethics of the [gaze] and act of viewing [an *Other*.]'<sup>477</sup>

This section will explore the theme(s) of 'representing (in)difference' / *gazes*, and how '*other(ed)* cultures' are given meaning by the cinematic discourses and practices of modern feature films concerning the African continent - with particular emphasis on how these themes pertain to the representation of child soldiers as an *Other*.

Sakota-Kokot contends that as a result of the Gulf War, audiences began to understand war-terminology such as collateral damage, genocide, ethnic cleansing and suicide bombers. Due to the fact that these representations originated in mass media, they are easily 'understood by audiences when the same terminology weaves its way into fiction film.'<sup>478</sup> The mass media thus assists in creating associations, which mainstream / feature film continues. Pointing to Simon Cottle, who writes about the general media, Sakota-Kokot notes that his argument(s) can also be applied to feature films. Cottle argues that 'the media does not have a reflective or representational role in conflict; in contrast, he claims that the media serves a more active *performative* and constitutive role.

This position implies that the media does not merely report events; it also plays a complex and active role in disseminating ideas and images and positioning the audience quite specifically, which is then continued and reinstated via the film medium.'<sup>479</sup>

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<sup>477</sup> L. Downing and L. Saxton, "Introduction to Section One. Representation and Spectatorship," in *Film and Ethics. Foreclosed Encounters.*, eds. L. Downing and L. Saxton (New York: Routledge, 2010), 20.

<sup>478</sup> Sakota-Kokot, *My War, Your War: Understanding Conflict in Africa and the Middle East through Fiction Film: Hotel Rwanda and the Kingdom*, 23.

<sup>479</sup> *Ibid.*

In addition, Kim Deep writes that:

'Films, being a powerful and popular form of mass communication, invariably transmit social and political messages ... Films have a large, substantial impact on viewers whose frame of reference does not expose them to other cultures, as well as people who depend on the media for information about the larger world in which they live in.'<sup>480</sup>

It is therefore clear that feature films have an impact on their audience(s) vis-à-vis to whom / what they represent and how they construct and implement that particular representation. *Representation*, according to Stuart Hall is:

'A complex business and, especially when dealing with 'difference', it engages feelings, attitudes and emotions and it mobilizes fears and anxieties in the viewer, at deeper levels than we can explain in a simple, common-sense way.'<sup>481</sup>

In an article, *Child Soldiers in Africa: A Singular Phenomenon?*, on the necessity of a historical perspective, Jean-Hervé Jézéquel identifies an interesting and noteworthy difference between the public perceptions / gazes surrounding child soldiers in times of war. He states that although notions exist that child soldiering in Africa holds a more significant place than any other place in the world, there are a hand-full of authors 'who justly point out that the phenomenon of child soldiers is not unique to Africa. What changes instead is the discourse surrounding the children.'<sup>482</sup>

During the American Civil War or the First World War, the participation of child soldiers, as argued by Jézéquel, was:

'Promoted and perceived through a very specific discursive register, that of the child hero. The actions of these children were *heroicised* and their eventual deaths seen as sacrifices in the name of a greater good, often the nation's. Conversely, the participation of child combatants in the African wars is always perceived in a negative manner, through the registers of the victimised child and the stolen childhood.'<sup>483</sup>

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<sup>480</sup> Sakota-Kokot, *My War, Your War: Understanding Conflict in Africa and the Middle East through Fiction Film: Hotel Rwanda and the Kingdom*, 23-24.

<sup>481</sup> Hall, *The Spectacle of the 'Other'*, 226.

<sup>482</sup> Jézéquel, *Child Soldiers in Africa: A Singular Phenomenon?: On the Necessity of a Historical Perspective*, 103.

<sup>483</sup> *Ibid.*

He goes further to note that 'when reintegrated into the long history of the Western gaze on the [African] continent, [the aforementioned] kind of discourse contributes to rekindling the image of a [brutal] Africa, the dark reflection whose image reassures Western societies in their conviction of representing a more advanced civilisation.'<sup>484</sup>

Lastly, it must be noted that the concept of *distance* is important in order to address the notions of both *gazes*, as well as *othering*, because it is not merely a geographical phenomenon. Conflict that occurs on a different continent or in some remote inaccessible place creates differences on three levels: 'the first (the simplest), geographically: the second, on emotional level because it creates an *Other*.'<sup>485</sup>

Then, thirdly, on a social level, according to Sakota-Kokot, a link can be found, 'particularly with reference to Africa and the Middle East, as there are already established relationships with these areas due to Colonialism, race conflict, as well as cultural integration.'<sup>486</sup> It is thus, now relevant to examine and problematize the perspectives of *othering* because these aspects provide insight into the different ways in which the cinematic medium functions in creating visual representations of an *Other*.

#### **4.2.1. Difficulties of Documenting / Representing an *Other* on the Silver Screen**

In order to address and adequately discuss the difficulties of documenting / representing an *Other* on the silver screen, one first has to understand the socio-historical context of the moving image's arrival in Africa. Film as an art-form in itself is a very recent concept with the Lumière brothers, inventing cinema in an era when Europe (and the entire Western world), was consolidating its colonial expansion, a process that continues even today. Alexie Tcheuyap writes that:

'The cinema of that [specific] era emerged in the context of a lasting monochromatic (white) and Eurocentric philosophical discourse that viewed non-whites, especially Africans and their lands, as animals and empty spaces to be conquered. De Gobineau's theory on race is well known, and Hegel's contempt towards Africa will not be emphasised here. In any case, the birth of the moving image

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<sup>484</sup> Jézéquel, *Child Soldiers in Africa: A Singular Phenomenon?: On the Necessity of a Historical Perspective*, 103.

<sup>485</sup> Sakota-Kokot, *My War, Your War: Understanding Conflict in Africa and the Middle East through Fiction Film: Hotel Rwanda and the Kingdom*, 42.

<sup>486</sup> *Ibid.*

occurs in philosophical and literary contexts that consider Africans, at the very best, as inferior human beings and cannibals to be rescued from savagery.<sup>487</sup>

In these notions, all Africans labelled as 'fanatical and superstitious *others*', became subject to gross and shocking misrepresentations. The power of film could then be found in (and can still be attributed to) its power to narrate. Tcheuyap argues that 'the Africa produced by 'colonial cameras' was exactly the kind of Africa invented and crafted by a racist / Afro-pessimistic rhetoric and philosophical tradition. The problem that the first representation of Africans in films raises is not really that of the legitimacy of a representation, but of the discourse behind it.'<sup>488</sup> Mudimbe in turn contends that the continent and people "'represented' in these early, Western-centric films were in fact 'imagined and invented.'<sup>489</sup>

As Nwachuku Frank Ukadike rightly put it:

'It is within this context of problematic representations of African and cultural alienation that the problem / difficulties of film adaptations [and the representations of the *Other*] should be raised.'<sup>490</sup>

Dunn argues the notion that one must acknowledge that 'images of *otherness* are constantly in flux. The images of Africa and Africans in the 1990s, for instance, are different from the images presented in the 1930s. Such changes in imagery have more to do with changes of the 'self' than of the *Other*.'<sup>491</sup> What is in flux, according to Dunn, firstly, 'the dynamics within the labelling group [self]; and secondly, the relationship between the labelling group [self] and the group being labelled [*other*].'<sup>492</sup>

The moving images in feature films succeed in conveying what written texts struggle to do. They bring foreign settings alive in images, sound, characters, and story. Multiple aspects of politics, society, and culture that tend to be sorted into different groups when it comes to academic writing are brought to life in the traits of individual characters, and they endow abstract concepts with readily accessible meaning.

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<sup>487</sup> Tcheuyap, *African Cinema and the Politics of Adaptation* (1), 2.

<sup>488</sup> Ibid.

<sup>489</sup> Ibid.

<sup>490</sup> Ibid.

<sup>491</sup> K. Dunn, "Lights... Camera... Africa: Images of Africa and Africans in Western Popular Films of the 1930s," *African Studies Review* 39, no. 1 (1996), 150.

<sup>492</sup> Ibid.

The dramatic stories told in the narratives of feature films elicit emotional responses; their individual characters inspire empathy for people / cultures far-removed from that of audiences, and often urge audiences to take action. According to Gugler, 'such intimate portraits of people who belong to [other cultures and who have experienced a different history], and who live in quite different economic and political circumstances today, are particularly important with audiences that start out with negative views of the *Other*.'<sup>493</sup> Cinema - and the ability of its 'images, sounds, and settings to block out all other stimuli - provides an immediacy of experience that the written word cannot match.'<sup>494</sup>

Shohat and Stam write that:

'Post-structuralist theory reminds us that we live and dwell within language and representations, and have no direct access to the real. However, the constructed, coded nature of artistic discourse [and more specifically with relation to this study then cinematic discourse] hardly precludes all references to a common [socio-political / cultural environment].'<sup>495</sup>

Feature film fictions inevitably bring into play real-life assumptions not only about space and time, but also about [socio-political, ethical and cultural] relationships. Films which represent marginalised groups and groups that stray from the norm and preconceived Western notions (like child soldiers) in a realistic mode, even when they do not claim to do so, still implicitly make factual claims.'<sup>496</sup>

It then becomes evident that 'the constant and consistent bombardment of these [Afro-pessimistic] images [of an *Other* – in this particular case, child soldiers], without any significant alternatives, undoubtedly had a shaping effect on how Western societies thought of Africa and Africans.'<sup>497</sup> Subsequently, the continuation of these representations in later popular films, even today, in for example, the feature films analysed for this study, it is clear that such images have placed audiences in a specific frame of mind when watching representations of child soldiers on screen.

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<sup>493</sup> Gugler, *African Films in the Classroom*, 2.

<sup>494</sup> Ibid.

<sup>495</sup> Shohat and Stam, *Stereotype, Realism and the Struggle Over Representation*, 179.

<sup>496</sup> Ibid.

<sup>497</sup> Dunn, *Lights... Camera... Africa: Images of Africa and Africans in Western Popular Films of the 1930s*, 170.

This also then ultimately ties-in with Saïd's position on *Orientalism* which 'proposes a discussion around who one classifies as *other* and how one constructs this classification through Western eyes.'<sup>498</sup> This is of relevance as it opens a debate about the representation of events [and phenomena like child soldiering in Africa], specifically with reference to how Western feature films represent its *Other(s)* according to Western ideals and notions of Afro-pessimism / Afro-optimism. These issues and features will now be discussed.

#### 4.2.2. Afro-pessimism / Afro-optimism in Feature Films about Africa

In Lindiwe Dovey's work, *African Film and Literature: Adapting Violence to the Screen*, she turned her attention to 'African screen media, mimicry and violence, and as the key interest Dovey set out to explore how African filmmakers represent and critique contemporary examples of violence such as rape, war, murder and genocide.'<sup>499</sup> Writing on Dovey's work, Cantone notes the following:

'Dovey addresses the relationship of violence with colonial Africa in order to contextualise contemporary African representations of violence on screen. Recalling the role of mimicry in the context of the coloniser's savagery towards the 'savage' Africans, and inspired by Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* (1967), and Homi Bhabha's notion on the ambivalence of the stereotype of the black African in the Western psyche.'<sup>500</sup>

It should be noted that the authorities of the early European colonising period essentially used 'cinema and ethnographic filmmaking early on to perpetuate the idea that Africans were an inferior race, essentially violent, in need of civilising and taming.'<sup>501</sup> Black Africans were made to identify with white heroes, while other films were specifically made for propaganda and termed 'educational' to control and establish law and order.<sup>502</sup>

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<sup>498</sup> Sakota-Kokot, *My War, Your War: Understanding Conflict in Africa and the Middle East through Fiction Film: Hotel Rwanda and the Kingdom*, 168.

<sup>499</sup> H. Cantone, "Review: Lindiwe Dovey (2009) *African Film and Literature: Adapting Violence to the Screen*," *Film-Philosophy* 14, no. 2 (2010), 142.

<sup>500</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>501</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>502</sup> *Ibid.*

The Malian film critic, Moussa Bolly, argues that “contemporary filmmakers from Chad, Nigeria, Senegal and Tunisia ‘are exploring ways of breaking cycles of violence in which Africa is plunged. A violence which, [according to them], can never be the solution to the problems of Africans.’”<sup>503</sup>

Denov, in turn, points to the notion that it has been argued that media producers (and filmmakers alike) ‘configure the awareness and experience of each of us and moreover, these media have been considered the consummate ideological tool, shaping and reflecting particular worldviews.’<sup>504</sup> As Kellner argues:

‘Media / [cinematic] images help shape our view of the world and our deepest values: what we consider good or bad, moral or evil; who has power and who is powerless; who is allowed to exercise force and violence and who is not.’<sup>505</sup>

Within this in mind, it is of interest to explore the common verbal depictions / narratives in the global discourse on child soldiers, as well as the cinematic representations of child soldiers in feature films. Dovey further argues that provided the ‘imbrication of visual technologies in the exercise of violence, film as technology [and information bearer] cannot be simply claimed as a means for working against the perpetuation of violence.’<sup>506</sup> This is way particular emphasis should be placed on, and attention given to, the particular ways in which violence and civil unrests are represented in feature films.

For that reason, similar as to what Dovey concludes it can be said that ‘by historicising / [contextualising] violence through the adaptation process, [modern] African [as well as Western] filmmakers are problematizing [Afro-pessimistic] representations of Africa as inherently violent’, while creating [Afro-optimistic discourses] with an opportunity for hope.’<sup>507</sup>

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<sup>503</sup> Cantone, "Review: Lindiwe Dovey (2009) *African Film and Literature: Adapting Violence to the Screen*", 142-143.

<sup>504</sup> Denov, *Child Soldiers and Iconography: Portrayals and (Mis)Representations*, 2.

<sup>505</sup> Ibid.

<sup>506</sup> Singer and Dovey, *Representations of African Childhood in Conflict and Post-Conflict Contexts: Johnny Mad Dog, Ezra, and Sleepwalking Land*, 153.

<sup>507</sup> Cantone, *Review: Lindiwe Dovey (2009) African Film and Literature: Adapting Violence to the Screen*, 143.

Achille Mbembe suggests that the “imaginary significations of Africa are both an imbrication of Western invention of self and its ‘apologetic concerns and exclusionary and brutal practices towards others.’”<sup>508</sup> Representations of African conflicts generate discourse of self-deception or perversion as it is rarely about Africa but rather about the subjectivity and subconscious of the Western interpellator.<sup>509</sup> Cheryl Sterling argues that ‘such myth making spawns the dialectic that entraps the African subject in a constant counterhegemonic stance, rather than as an *agentative* subject constructing one’s own discourse and lived worldview.’<sup>510</sup>

For example in the film, *Ezra*, as Korman notes, uses a substantial amount of ‘hand-held camera work [and] in terms of art design, [the film] takes place in Sierra Leone but was [filmed] in cities and jungles in other parts of Africa.’<sup>511</sup> Thus reaffirming, as Mafe rightfully points out, the ‘Western preference for exotic and, more important, accessible tourist locations where a cinematic Africa is concerned.’<sup>512</sup> In addition Korman further notes that:

‘The rich natural colours –brown, green and red– are emphasized, bringing the locations to life. Ezra never ventures into the city but remains within the villages and the jungle of Sierra Leone. [The filmmaker] works within his means by creating very few elaborate lighting set-ups and using mainly natural light. The natural landscape of Rwanda, where the film was shot, was an adequate representation of the jungles of Sierra Leone. The film makes use of various techniques to portray different parts of the same country in a way that is believable and enables the viewer to become engaged in the story.’<sup>513</sup>

As Sterling argues when one examines the ways in which Hollywood and its pundits fetishize Africa and African conflicts, one is subjected to another form of what she considers to be an ‘ethnographic spectacle.’<sup>514</sup>

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<sup>508</sup> Sterling, *Visions of War, Testaments of Peace: The “Burden” of Sierra Leone*, 196.

<sup>509</sup> Ibid.

<sup>510</sup> Ibid.

<sup>511</sup> Korman, *African Cinema: A Comparative Look at Blood Diamond and Ezra. Nigeria versus Hollywood.*, 1.

<sup>512</sup> Mafe, *(Mis)Imagining Africa in the New Millennium: The Constant Gardener and Blood Diamond*, 85.

<sup>513</sup> Korman, *African Cinema: A Comparative Look at Blood Diamond and Ezra. Nigeria versus Hollywood.*, 1.

<sup>514</sup> Sterling, *Visions of War, Testaments of Peace: The “Burden” of Sierra Leone*, 196.

According to her:

'Hollywood films become cinematic trauma, as they are built on the foundation of empire building, the causative narrative of the civilising mission – they presuppose and reaffirm an understanding of the African world / [reality] as a world of chaos, as world in perpetual need that only Western intervention can save.'<sup>515</sup>

The abovementioned quotes are illustrative of the fact that such 'gazes' of an *Other* – of Africa and its conflicts - can be found in numerous films such as *Machine Gun Preacher*, and then also in one of the case study films, *The Silent Army*. In this way then it becomes clear that such a discourse contributes to the broader, long-standing racist and Afro-pessimistic characterisation of Africa (and in particular then young child combatants) as 'inherently childlike and incapable of self-determination without Western aid and intervention.'<sup>516</sup>

Mafe, writing on the (mis)representation of Africa in the films *Blood Diamond* and *The Constant Gardener*, points to Flory notions of *black noir* and *Atlantic noir*, when arguing that:

'As an ideologically ambiguous aesthetic, noir may certainly be employed to affirm stereotypic presumptions rather than transform them. Both black noir and noir Atlantic films explore race, gender, and class conflicts in disadvantaged populations. Simply by focusing a cinematic lens on such populations, these [feature] films risk reinforcing [Afro-pessimistic] stereotypes about those [indigenous African] populations already in place.'<sup>517</sup>

Flory argues that one of the most efficient methods to 'avoid endorsing stereotypes is to *humanise* the morally ambiguous figures [the *Other*] at the centre of these neo-noir [cinematic] dramas / [films] and to invite the viewer to [assess and] critique the broader systems that initiated the cycle of oppression / [Afro-pessimistic representations].<sup>518</sup> Mafe further contends that since neither Meirelles nor Zwick are black directors, their respective films cannot be regarded to be strictly 'noir by noirs.'<sup>519</sup>

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<sup>515</sup> Sterling, *Visions of War, Testaments of Peace: The "Burden" of Sierra Leone*, 196-197.

<sup>516</sup> Singer and Dovey, *Representations of African Childhood in Conflict and Post-Conflict Contexts: Johnny Mad Dog, Ezra, and Sleepwalking Land*, 153.

<sup>517</sup> Mafe, *(Mis)Imagining Africa in the New Millennium: The Constant Gardener and Blood Diamond*, 71.

<sup>518</sup> Ibid.

<sup>519</sup> Ibid.

Consequently, Flory's description of *The Constant Gardener* and *Blood Diamond* as noir Atlantic is, however, a useful starting point — one can acknowledge the subversive potential of these films while theorising and analysing other films such as *The Silent Army* and *The Machine Gun Preacher*. Although only *The Silent Army* will be used as a case study film for this dissertation, both the two aforementioned films are comparable to black noir [films] in that these films attempt to 'bring to light' the Western exploitation of black people (and then in particular child soldiers caught-up in the illegal diamond and weapon smuggling industries which fuel the conflicts) in post-colonial Africa through the noir genre.<sup>520</sup>

Although modern films such as the aforementioned, give the impression that it has surpassed / risen above 'old colonial stereotypes, a new set of features and themes which, as Evans and Glenn argue, are all Afro-pessimist in nature, links them, suggesting 'the West's negative influence on perceptions of the continent. Although the films show more commitment to realism and historical accuracy than previous cinematic treatments of Africa, they still struggle to represent the real challenges and complexities associated with the continent.'<sup>521</sup>

To conclude, Evans and Glenn argue that:

'The discourse, inspired by photojournalism and television reporting, particularly from the time of the Ethiopian famine in 1984, has come to dominate representations of post-colonial Africa. It is evident in a number of the films' themes, including the warped economic arrangements of the criminal state; the 'resource curse-hypothesis' [visible in films such as *The Silent Army* and *The Machine Gun Preacher*]; genocide; a new sympathy for white colonizers after independence; and kleptocracy and the 'big man-syndrome'; [and then in particular] the phenomenon of the child soldier (with the monstrous child as the perfect embodiment of a doomed future).<sup>522</sup>

These aforementioned theoretical concerns and issues with regards to Afro-pessimistic / Afro-optimistic representations of Africa's child soldiers also then boils down to notions concerning spectatorship, audience perceptions and expectations of a certain cinematic narrative.

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<sup>520</sup> Mafe, *(Mis)Imagining Africa in the New Millennium: The Constant Gardener and Blood Diamond*, 71.

<sup>521</sup> Evans and Glenn, "TIA - This is Africa": *Afro-pessimism in Twenty-First-Century Narrative Film*, 14.

<sup>522</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

Libby Saxton in, *Ethics, Spectatorship and the Spectacle of Suffering*, notes that over the past few decades 'the concurrent proliferation of image technologies [photojournalism] and mediatised atrocities have given rise to an interdisciplinary body of writing on spectatorship of suffering taking place elsewhere.'<sup>523</sup> For the current study attention will not only fall on the expectations of audiences when they engage with the topic of child soldiers in feature films, but also the responses these representations (of child soldiers) elicit from Western audiences 'far removed from the danger, but not necessarily from responsibility.'<sup>524</sup>

#### 4.2.3. Spectatorship, Audience Perceptions, Expectations and Audience Reception(s)

'[Feature] films allows us [as viewers] to witness [and acutely observe] others' actual and / or simulated pain [and suffering] from a distance in space and time.'<sup>525</sup>

In recent years filmmakers have come to turn their cameras more toward the spectacle of Africa. Films such as *The Constant Gardner*, *Hotel Rwanda*, *The Silent Army*, *Shooting Dogs*, and *Blood Diamond* – that have their narratives pan-out in civil wars, refugee camps, slums and UN relief-hospitals rather than out on safari- have introduced large audiences to a wider range of specific conflicts and violent, socio-political problems faced by the continent. These filmmakers have pictured / filmed these African conflicts and socio-political problems, given them meaning and asked for reactions. These films ultimately, as Anna Leander argues, 'want things from their audiences - in particular they want to shape the way we understand the problem they are dealing with.'<sup>526</sup>

According to Shohat and Stam, 'when cinema is consumed in *communitas*, spectatorship can take on a national or imperial thrust [and the aforementioned notion raises the question of to what extent] observing the suffering of others position viewers as 'tourists amid their landscapes of anguish.'<sup>527</sup>

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<sup>523</sup> L. Saxton, 'Ethics, Spectatorship and the Spectacle of Suffering,' in *Film and Ethics: Foreclosed Encounters*, eds. L. Downing and L. Saxton (New York: Routledge, 2010), 63.

<sup>524</sup> Ibid.

<sup>525</sup> Saxton, *Ethics, Spectatorship and the Spectacle of Suffering*, 63-64.

<sup>526</sup> Leander, *Sign Wars: Hollywood Documentaries Branding Politics*, 3.

<sup>527</sup> Sterling, *Visions of War, Testaments of Peace: The "Burden" of Sierra Leone*, 200.

In the case of the case study film, *The Silent Army*, there exists a ‘combination of narrative and spectacle – where the human rights objective seemingly is to allow viewers to become voyeurs.’<sup>528</sup> For example, Sterling points to the poignant opening scene of the film, *Blood Diamond*, where there are constant flashes between a brutal attack on a rural village in Sierra Leone by the RUF and international speakers at the G8 Conference in Antwerp, Belgium.

This specific scene flashes between the conference room, emblematic of the apparent logic and rationality of the West, and the desecration and death of a village under attack by rebel soldiers – further accentuating African irrationality and ‘the *inferno* of life on the continent.’<sup>529</sup> A similar scene from one of the case study films, *The Silent Army*, is when Eduard Zuiderwijk goes in search of Abu and enters the UN refugee-camp. In the camp there is a sense of peace and hope for a better (and rehabilitated) future for the young ex-combatants that found their way there. This is juxtaposed with the violent and chaotic scenes of Abu’s training and the tasks they had to perform under General Obeke’s instructions.

Sterling goes further to write that such examples of inter-changeability between Africa’s chaos and the sanity and calm of the West ‘points to the limits of empathetic identification, for it does not foreground the trauma suffered by the victims of war.’<sup>530</sup>

Sterling further writes that:

‘It is not a bearing of witness to atrocious acts, but a witnessing, a spectacle even, that only confirms the audience’s conditioning that Africa is a horrific place, where human life is devalued, and that African people are by their nature savage or are victims of savagery and [one] must help them to become better people, develop stabilised governments, and introduce rational forms of discourse that bypass the obscene cruelty.’<sup>531</sup>

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<sup>528</sup> Sterling, *Visions of War, Testaments of Peace: The “Burden” of Sierra Leone*, 200.

<sup>529</sup> Ibid.

<sup>530</sup> Ibid.

<sup>531</sup> Ibid.

Current debates about spectatorship revolve around the 'spectatorial differences (of gender, race, ethnicity, [and conflict]) that disrupt fixity of earlier models of viewing relations.'<sup>532</sup> According to Michelle Aaron, film spectatorship is inherently 'hooked on the real' or imagined suffering of the *Other*. Aaron argues that spectatorship depends upon 'the [audience's] inter-subjective alignment with the prospective suffering of others.'<sup>533</sup>

Saxton and Downing argue that in accordance with post-colonial theories, film theorists have questioned whether "viewing positions (and the ideologies they presuppose) are determined in advance by perspectives already inscribed in the [cinematic] image, or whether they can instead be subverted by resistant viewing practices which refuse to see 'straight' and instead 'look awry.'"<sup>534</sup>

Alongside issues of spectatorship, audience perceptions and expectations, the notion of audience reception(s) must also be discussed. Robert A. White argues that reception theory has developed in recent years 'largely within the cultural studies tradition of media [and filmic] research and reflects debates and differing schools of thought of that tradition. [However], common to all the different approaches is the premise that media [and film in particular] use and effects are to be interpreted in terms of the subjective constructions of meaning placed on media [depictions].'<sup>535</sup> Consequently, it can be argued that some form of 'audience ethnography' comes into play and 'demands that the researcher reconstruct the meaning of media from the subject's position.'<sup>536</sup>

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<sup>532</sup> Downing and Saxton, *Introduction to Section One. Representation and Spectatorship*, 20.

<sup>533</sup> M. Aaron, *Spectatorship: The Power of Looking on* (London: Wallflower Press, 2007), 112.

<sup>534</sup> Downing and Saxton, *Introduction to Section One. Representation and Spectatorship*, 20.

<sup>535</sup> R.A. White, 'Media Reception Theory: Emerging Perspectives,' Paper presented in *Le Programme Plurianuel en Sciences Humaines Rhone-Alpes: Societe et Communication* (Lyon, France: 1991), 9.

<sup>536</sup> White, 'Media Reception Theory: Emerging Perspectives', 9.

Sonia M. Livingston notes Eco's use of the concept of code to analyse the 'role of the [viewer]', arguing that the existence of this role itself undermines structuralist theories of what he terms the 'crystalline text.'<sup>537</sup>

"The existence of various codes and sub-codes, the variety of socio-cultural circumstances in which a [cinematic] message is emitted (where the codes of the addressee can be different from those of the sender) and the rate of initiative displayed by the addressee in making presuppositions and abductions--all result in making a [cinematic] message...an empty form to which various possible senses can be attributed.'<sup>538</sup>

Thus, the roles of cinematic visuals in the process of constructing difference are profound and can be traced back to older cinematic eras where images were used to document / represent *others* to audiences around the world. Sterling argues that 'when the visibility privileges Western culture and values, it often casts a derogatory gaze. The [cinematic] camera, as an extension of the imperial eye, becomes an instrument of power and control over the representations of the *other*...'<sup>539</sup>

The global discursive order that inform visual representations of African child soldiers in feature films will now be discussed as these narratives shape audiences' ideas and perspectives, and stimulate and strengthen specific interpretations thereof.

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<sup>537</sup> S.M. Livingston, *Audience reception: The role of the viewer in retelling romantic drama*. (London: LSE Research Online, 2011: 4) – Available at <http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/999> Accessed: 14 November 2013.

<sup>538</sup> Livingston, *Audience reception: The role of the viewer in retelling romantic drama*., 4.

<sup>539</sup> Sterling, *Visions of War, Testaments of Peace: The "Burden" of Sierra Leone*, 221.

### 4.3. VISUAL REPRESENTATION OF CHILD SOLDIERS IN RELATION TO THE GLOBAL DISCURSIVE ORDER

Over the past few decades, young children caught-up in civil (and cross-border) wars, in particular 'child soldiers', have featured prominently in the international media coverage and cinematic landscape of Africa - especially when journalists (and filmmakers) wish to portray a chaotic continent plunging into anarchy. Even if such media accounts, images and films often 'sensationalise and *exoticise* Africa, they not only play on the anxieties and suspicions of their readers and audiences but, also, echo the ambivalence of many Africans toward the liminal category of youth.'<sup>540</sup> West argues that 'if we are to deepen our understanding of the broader issue of youth in Africa, we must better understand the place of Africa's youth in war.'<sup>541</sup>

Particularly since the mid-twentieth century, there has been a noticeable increase in the number of cinematic works that depict childhood as a period of knowingness, despair, death and madness; however scholars have started to challenge notions of the innocent child through the in-depth exploration of the darker side of childhood in contemporary cinema. Within a global perspective, and in particular within Africa, this study seeks to explore the multitude of conditions of marginalised childhood as cinematically imagined within political, geographical, sociological, and cultural contexts.

For example, both the feature films *The Silent Army* and *Machine Gun Preacher* questions Africa's socio-political and cultural position in relation to the West and how the West perceives the African continent and her child soldiers.

Similar to the two aforementioned films, the three case study films, *Ezra*, *The Silent Army*, and *War Witch*, offer very specific encoded messages with regards to child soldiering in Africa, however, the formation of 'meaning' only 'happens once an audience decodes the message and constructs a reading according to the postmodernist perspective.'<sup>542</sup>

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<sup>540</sup> West, *Girls with Guns: Narrating the Experience of War of Frelimo's Female Detachment*, 180.

<sup>541</sup> Ibid.

<sup>542</sup> Sakota-Kokot, *My War, Your War: Understanding Conflict in Africa and the Middle East through Fiction Film: Hotel Rwanda and the Kingdom*, 213.

Sakota-Kokot notes that to Stuart Hall this entails ‘an encoding / decoding process which acknowledges that a viewer may disagree with a text but because of the way the messages within the text are encoded / edited / positioned, a film may ‘negotiate’ a viewer into accepting the reading of the text / [film narrative].’<sup>543</sup> All of the case study films focus on the individual / personal journey of one (or more) central protagonist(s) like Ezra (*Ezra*, 2007); Komona (*War Witch*, 2012); and Abu (*The Silent Army*, 2008). By personalising their struggles and journeys, the cinematic narrative invests its audience from an emotional point of view.<sup>544</sup> This association ultimately allows the audience to sympathise with the protagonist’s ‘quest on an emotional level and draws the audience into the reading of the text, and thereby promotes a very specific understanding of the events [and in this case of the phenomenon of child soldiering in Africa].’<sup>545</sup>

Jacqueline Rose refers to childhood as a ‘site of impossibility’ wherein the dictates of normative childhood create a fiction that is always endangered or lost. However, as Olson and Scahill write, ‘as childhood is so often haunted by the spectre of its own failure or incompleteness, the [current study] seeks to explore the margins of child *representability* – asking what the lost and / or *othered* youth can reveal about [one’s] collective investment [and understandings] of childhood.’<sup>546</sup>

There is an emerging consensus that child soldiers are a source of threat to national security and to the stability of post-war political order. The years of brutal wars have indoctrinated children into a culture of aggression and cycle of violence. In addition, and the brutalisation and militarisation of childhood has led to disrespect for constituted authority and elders, and even the sanctity of human life.<sup>547</sup> The inclination to use violence and aggression, in other words, the ‘gun mentality’, has become the norm for dispute settlement by these former young soldiers. The majority of the child soldiers lack family support and have come to perceive the armed factions as their only family link (surrogate family) and support network.

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<sup>543</sup> Sakota-Kokot, *My War, Your War: Understanding Conflict in Africa and the Middle East through Fiction Film: Hotel Rwanda and the Kingdom*, 213.

<sup>544</sup> Ibid.

<sup>545</sup> Ibid.

<sup>546</sup> Olson and Scahill, *Introduction*, ix.

<sup>547</sup> Francis, Knight and et al., *Children and War: Impact, Protection and Rehabilitation. Phase II - Protection*, 8.

They are seriously traumatised, with their normal educational, social and moral development disrupted and retarded. In these conflicts, children have become both victims and perpetrators of brutality, including killing and rape of parents.<sup>548</sup> Furthermore, with the end of war through civil war peace settlement, there has been a markedly lukewarm approach to the rehabilitation and reintegration of former child soldiers. Not much commitment and sustained effort is devoted to the social and psychological reintegration of ex-child combatants beyond the immediate pre-occupation with disarmament and demobilisation. In these countries, the former child soldiers are largely overlooked, abandoned and treated as a forgotten generation.

These perceptions of child soldiers (both active and de-militarised) further threaten the fragile peace in these war-torn societies. Therefore, it is not surprising, that the international media [and some sections of the academic and policy community] have painted (and continue to do so) child soldiers and ex-child combatants as a lost generation; as evil sociopaths; bandits; vermin; and barbarians.

Consequently, Francis writes that:

“This media stigmatisation has even portrayed ex-child combatants and young fighters as trapped in a vicious cycle of irrational and unrelenting violence, and they are ‘pathological’ and permanently damaged. In particular, the popular view is that they are ‘fluent in the language of violence, but ignorant to the rudiments of living in a civil society...it’s often too late to salvage their lives.’<sup>549</sup>

The film, *Johnny Mad Dog*, for example, as Sadai notes, ‘depicts the [African] child soldier as a grotesque and dehumanised figure. These young children are shown with made-up faces, as transvestites in wedding dress or ball gown, with coloured wigs and skull-shaped earrings, with shoulder-belts carrying a doll and ammunition, wearing tons of plastic rosaries and golden crucifixes with hanging protective amulets, not to mention the ghetto blaster carried on the back - a surreal vision of fighters. The macabre carnival barely hides a new order of terror established by thirteen-year-old rebels renamed Small Devil, Nasty Major Young, and then Mad Dog.’<sup>550</sup>

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<sup>548</sup> Francis, Knight and et al., *Children and War: Impact, Protection and Rehabilitation. Phase II - Protection*, 8.

<sup>549</sup> Ibid.

<sup>550</sup> C. Sadai, "The Cinematic Representation of Child Soldiers in Liberia," *Peace Review* 24, no. 3 (Jul, 2012), 313-319.

Consequently, one can infer that such negative and exaggerated renderings of child combatants and the subsequent challenges faced during the rehabilitation and reintegration of ex-child soldiers all allude to the fact that these young combatants are beyond the point of no return / redemption and that there is little or no hope to fully reintegrate ex-child soldiers into normal society on any level.

Singer and Dovey explore notions of lost and *othered* children in their article, 'Representations of African Childhood in Conflict and Post-Conflict Contexts: *Johnny Mad Dog*, *Ezra*, and *Sleepwalking Land*.' They strongly challenge the commonly held Western notions of childhood and instead argue that in many different African cultures the 'boundaries between adult and child are fluid and unclear.'<sup>551</sup> Through their research they found that 'some African films offer an alternate conception of childhood – one that embraces all its intricacies and complexities.'<sup>552</sup>

In an article entitled, *Kony 2012 and the Mediatization of Child Soldiers*, Karling writes about the focus of the humanitarian group, Invisible Children (IC), and the films that they produce. She argues the following:

'The reason they [the IC] are telling the story of child soldiers [in Sierra Leone] so well is because it is a story about themselves as well; it is a story of Americans opening our eyes to what is going on in Africa. The filmmakers are not experts chastising us; they are our peers taking us on a journey with them. Not only do the IC films reduce psychological distance, they manage to do something that few, if any, other films about child soldiers have done - they make us feel good. [Invisible Children] is careful to not [frame these conflict situations or] tell stories just of despair and problems, but also of hope and solutions [when considering the reality and fate of child soldiers in Sierra Leone].'<sup>553</sup>

In Karling's view the concept of framing now becomes crucial. To her, framing refers to the 'process of selecting specific details of a message and increasing their salience. It is an area where filmmakers have great control over the message they are sending. One form of framing in film is to engage a specific emotional response. Film has many unique ways of eliciting emotions - through narrative, visual imagery as well as sound and camera editing.

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<sup>551</sup> Olson and Scahill, *Introduction*, xii.

<sup>552</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>553</sup> Karlin and Matthew, *Kony 2012 and the Mediatization of Child Soldiers*, 259.

Not only can the story itself elicit emotion, but the film can also present scenes in artistic and meaningful ways, playing music to lighten mood or using handheld cameras to enhance suspense.<sup>554</sup> Entman suggests four primary functional frames in film: 'firstly, defining problems; secondly, diagnosing causes; thirdly, making moral judgments; and fourthly, suggesting remedies.'<sup>555</sup> It is crucial to present, not only a compelling problem, but an array of solutions viewers can realistically act upon.

Attention will now be given to the Afro-pessimistic / Afro-optimistic discourse(s) and cinematic narratives which are most common when young African child soldiers at war are represented on cinematic screens, and how these issues tie-up to the global discursive orders / narratives that stimulate and promote a specific interpretation of child soldiering will be examined.

#### **4.3.1. Child Soldier Narratives that Promote a Specific Interpretation**

Sakota-Kokot reasons that questions arise as to the truthfulness of (and claims thereof in) fiction / feature film 'representations that base themselves on actual events / [on-going situations of civil unrest and cross-border conflict] because the fiction narrative itself is so bound by the codes and conventions dictated by its genre.'<sup>556</sup> An audience will watch a specific type of film, with a clear expectation of the type of narrative they can expect.

The 'real' events have to fit within this expected narrative framework and once this occurs, one is forced to question the degree of accuracy' and to what extent these particular narratives promote certain expectations and / or interpretations by audiences.<sup>557</sup> Feature films, as Sakota-Kokot allude, 'support and mimic the way one views and interprets conflict today.'<sup>558</sup>

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<sup>554</sup> Karlin and Matthew, *Kony 2012 and the Mediatization of Child Soldiers*, 259.

<sup>555</sup> Ibid.

<sup>556</sup> Sakota-Kokot, *My War, Your War: Understanding Conflict in Africa and the Middle East through Fiction Film: Hotel Rwanda and the Kingdom*, 204.

<sup>557</sup> Ibid.

<sup>558</sup> Ibid., 207.

She writes that:

[Audience members do not] only understand conflict through factual material but rather once an audience can associate events with fictional characters who are based on 'real' people, only then does the audience start to understand the build-up and sequence of events, of the actual, historic incident. This becomes particularly relevant when the events that are depicted occur in remote and faraway places which, the audience is not necessarily familiar with.'

In accordance with Richard Dyer's notions on stereotypes and signifying processes, it can be argued that readers and audiences are always 'making sense' of things in terms of some wider categories. Thus, for example, film audiences come to 'know' [or understand] something about a person by thinking of the roles which he or she performs: [and in the case of this particular study] - is he / she a parent, a child, a humanitarian worker, a lover, warlord, or and weapons dealer?<sup>559</sup>

Audiences make sense of the phenomenon of child soldiers by what is represented to them on screen. All too often audiences are confronted with child soldiers that are represented / branded as 'victims', but never considered that they are perpetrators as well – making them complex political victims whom carry guns and commit atrocities.

Apart from the constraints of human rights discourse itself, there is another horizon of reading for the memoirs and novels, and viewing of feature films alike, and that is Africa's locus in the Western imagination as 'a place of violence.'<sup>560</sup>

According to Maureen Moynagh:

"War machines operate around the globe, and child soldiers have been found serving in Colombia, in Sri Lanka, in Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as in several countries in Africa. The figure that features most commonly in documentaries, films, on talk shows, and in published memoirs and works of fiction, however, is the African child soldier. There is, it seems, a place already prepared in the Western imagination for the African child soldier as a subject of violence in need of human rights intervention and rehabilitation - intervention that threatens to mimic colonial infantilising of Africans as needing the 'protection' of European powers."<sup>561</sup>

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<sup>559</sup> Hall, *The Spectacle of the 'Other'*, 257.

<sup>560</sup> Moynagh, *Human Rights, Child-Soldier Narratives, and the Problem of Form.*, 41.

<sup>561</sup> *Ibid.*

Representations of child soldiers have endured biased aesthetic treatment, and consequently this has resulted in the dissemination of a narrow, archetypal portrait of the child soldier exploited by violent adults. The predominant image in contemporary literature and film is that of child soldiers as abused victims of war. The portrayal of the child soldier as the unambiguous victim of adult abuse has been strongly influenced by a Western humanitarian discourse. When child soldiers are presented purely as victims, this evacuates any possibility of moral agency in child soldiers, thus providing an oversimplified account of events.

At the core of human rights discourses lies a strong divide between victim and perpetrator. Moynagh gives notice to Kay Schaffer and Sidonie Smith argument that ‘certain generic conventions constrain the narration of human rights abuses and provide a kind of barrier between audiences and claimants / [film characters].<sup>562</sup> They further contend that:

“Storytellers in the context of human rights campaigns are expected to take up the subject position of ‘innocent’ victims; they are expected to be able to occupy that position unambiguously. Such a lack of ambiguity in occupying the role of victim is difficult, not to say impossible for the child soldier. There is, consequently, a marked tension between the human rights discourse that both frames the reception of child-soldier memoirs, memoir-style novels, [and cinematic narratives] and is invoked by them, and the necessarily compromised status of the child soldier that the narratives foreground.”<sup>563</sup>

Building on the aforementioned notions, Moynagh argues that ‘the extent [to which] that sentiment requires that the *object of pity* be innocent of blame, [humanitarian discourses] are constrained to offer this sort of sanitised victim, but at the expense of addressing the complex and necessarily compromised figure of the child soldier.’<sup>564</sup> She argues the following:

‘One of the difficulties that child-soldier narratives pose for sentimental social codes is that the child-soldier figure is only with some difficulty made into this virtuous protagonist suffering injustice. To effect this construction, writers have to bracket out the violence committed by child soldiers. This

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<sup>562</sup> Moynagh, *Human Rights, Child-Soldier Narratives, and the Problem of Form.*, 42.

<sup>563</sup> K. Schaffer and S. Smith, *Human Rights and Narrated Lives : The Ethics of Recognition*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 161.

<sup>564</sup> Moynagh, *Human Rights, Child-Soldier Narratives, and the Problem of Form.*, 44.

bracketing of violence is easier to accomplish in the third-person accounts (through a narrator or the white protagonists in the films).<sup>565</sup>

The visual representations of ex-child combatants (such as in the film, *Ezra*) challenge the way humanitarian testimony, however unwittingly, reasserts inequality between witness, perpetrator, and victim by making the victims unfortunate, and frequently faceless objects. However, in many visual discourse, once again, there exists a distance that needs to be bridged through readers' (and viewers') emotional connections with the child soldiers (as well as ex-combatants).

The cinematic narratives bring audiences close enough, not merely to shed their own tears, but also to taste the tears of the suffering victims.<sup>566</sup> Moynagh then rightfully notes that 'once again, it is the child-as-victim that [audiences] are meant to connect with, not the child-as-soldier. While some of the child soldiers cited in these texts do narrate acts of violence, we understand even these acts as thrust upon the child, who fearfully and with revulsion carries out orders he or she cannot refuse.'<sup>567</sup>

The child / child combatant thus appears to signify the 'ideal sentimental protagonist.'<sup>568</sup> The contradiction, however, can be found in 'the child soldier is precisely not this reassuringly pure and innocent child, but a child who also commits terrifying acts of brutality - who has entered, under whatever coercive circumstances, the social world associated with adult life.'<sup>569</sup>

To the extent that the aforementioned is acknowledged and accepted, the child-combatant narratives that viewers are confronted with, actually call into question the 'conception of the child enshrined in and guarded by human rights law. Human rights activists concerned with child soldiers nonetheless, quite understandably, hold onto the vision of the child in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), a child not only innocent but peculiarly lacking in agency, to solicit funds and argue for changes in international law.'<sup>570</sup>

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<sup>565</sup> Moynagh, *Human Rights, Child-Soldier Narratives, and the Problem of Form.*, 44.

<sup>566</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>567</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>568</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

<sup>569</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>570</sup> *Ibid.*

Both visual and written child soldier narratives, then, can be understood as a 'kind of textual battle ground for this ideal of purity and innocence that must be protected, accorded special care and assistance.'<sup>571</sup> On the one hand, as Denov notes, within the construction and portrayal of child soldiers as victims these children "are associated with fighting forces are frequently depicted as the pawns of deceitful yet powerful warlords, as well as broader undemocratic regimes and social forces. Such children have been referred to in the print media as 'permanently scarred' and 'lost young souls.'<sup>572</sup>

Such representations draw heavily from the romanticised contemporary western conceptions of childhood and its association with innocence and vulnerability. Children are, consequently, cast as dependent, helpless, victimised and incapable of rational decision-making.<sup>573</sup>

However, on the other end of the spectrum and in stark contrast to the construction of child soldiers as victims, lies the portrayal of these young combatants as "largely threatening, and uncivilised, the bulk of international news reporting, and much of academic and policy-oriented discourse, has tended to 'pathologise' children in armed conflict."<sup>574</sup>

According to Denov, "the images of child soldiers have been used to convey the horror of childhood perverted from its 'natural' course of innocence, fragility and purity. Such depictions also act as fodder for those who seek to present warfare in the developing world as inexplicable, brutal and disconnected from the 'civilised' world order."<sup>575</sup> She writes that:

"Highly racialised and imbued with stereotypes, depictions of child soldiers as 'dangerous' and 'disorderly' work to underscore the perceived moral superiority of the North as compared to the 'savage' South. Such representations also cement linkages of race, perversity and barbarism, dehumanise child soldiers and their societies, and ultimately present a site where colonial themes are played out."<sup>576</sup>

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<sup>571</sup> Moynagh, *Human Rights, Child-Soldier Narratives, and the Problem of Form.*, 47-48.

<sup>572</sup> Denov, *Child Soldiers and Iconography: Portrayals and (Mis)Representations*, 2.

<sup>573</sup> Ibid.

<sup>574</sup> Ibid.

<sup>575</sup> Ibid.

<sup>576</sup> Ibid.

Taking the broad and international reach of the western media and modern feature films into account, it can be argued that audience perspectives, public consumption and acceptance of cinematic representations and narrative discourse of child soldiers as 'violent', 'dangerous' and 'disorderly' may potentially worsen the social, cultural and political rejection and stigmatisation of these children. It creates and stimulates the on-going fear and uncertainty among individuals, families, communities and ultimately, prevents long-term reintegration and appeasement.<sup>577</sup>

Correspondingly, portrayals of a perpetual state of *victimhood* are also unsuccessful in accounting 'for post-conflict agency and the ability of former child soldiers.'<sup>578</sup> And as a result, the notions of complex political victims and / or complex political perpetrators are born.

#### 4.3.2. Complex Political Victims and / or Complex Political Perpetrators

'The child soldier presents a particularly challenging case for understanding a complex political victim.'<sup>579</sup>

The aforementioned section raises the issue of *complex political victims*. What has come to be known as the *New Wars* of the post-cold war period, the understanding of 'victimization' is carries with it a lot of complexity and is, according to Leatherman, it is problematical in at least two ways. Firstly, regardless of a charity structure which governs much of the humanitarian response field [to child soldiering in Africa], all too often refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) are in fact treated as 'the problem' themselves.<sup>580</sup> He points to Harrel-Bond who argues that:

"While images of the 'good' refugee who is starving and helpless may motivate people to become helpers, there is an alternative stereotype of 'bad' refugees as thankless, ungrateful, cheating, conniving, aggressive, demanding, manipulative, and even dangerous persons who are out to subvert the aid system."<sup>581</sup>

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<sup>577</sup> Denov, *Child Soldiers and Iconography: Portrayals and (Mis)Representations*, 2.

<sup>578</sup> Ibid.

<sup>579</sup> Leatherman and Griffin, *Runaway Norms and Complex Political Victimhood: Child Soldier and Challenges for Peace Processes*, 1.

<sup>580</sup> Ibid, 4.

<sup>581</sup> Ibid.

Negative framing such as the aforementioned ultimately arises, at least in some part, out of the 'great power differentials, and paternalistic and authoritarian structures that govern the humanitarian community's relationship to the clients they serve.'<sup>582</sup>

Eventually, Afro-pessimistic (as well as Afro-optimistic) assumptions and 'predefinitions of innocence are transposed with those of the perpetrators, producing the image of a complex political victim.'<sup>583</sup> Secondly, the phenomenon of the child combatant, to a significant extent complicates notions of 'guilt and innocence in the context of (civil) war and sexual violence.'<sup>584</sup>

Child soldiers who are forcefully abducted or 'voluntarily' recruited into governmental or rebel forces – especially those living in unsafe refugee and IDP camps – show the immense vulnerability of these young children in the face of conflict situations. According to Leatherman:

'Such vulnerability among children raises many disturbing and difficult questions – [for example]: Should all child soldiers be considered complex political victims? And if there is no intervention and they grow up into the military / rebel forces, do they as adults stop being victims? Are they then to be simply treated as perpetrators? Or, are all child soldiers internally displaced persons (IDPs) and merit the protections that that status entails? When do they become child soldiers—when they are abducted or when they take up arms? And do they then lose the status of an IDP? How should they be treated in the aftermath of conflict?'<sup>585</sup>

Understanding *victimisation* within the context of civil unrests / conflict is vital not only for ethical reasons, but also for justifying and strategizing / organising intermediations in and transformation of conflicts. Also giving mention to the book, *Complex Political Victims*, by Bouris, Leatherman makes the point that "images of the political victim are powerful, gripping, and integral in helping us make sense of conflict, particularly in making moral calculations, determining who is 'good' and who is 'evil.'"<sup>586</sup>

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<sup>582</sup> Leatherman and Griffin, *Runaway Norms and Complex Political Victimhood: Child Soldier and Challenges for Peace Processes.*, 4.

<sup>583</sup> Ibid.

<sup>584</sup> Ibid., 4-5.

<sup>585</sup> Ibid.

<sup>586</sup> Ibid., 5-6.

The prevalence of these images in the (western) media, along with the perpetual Afro-pessimistic discourse of victimisation that surrounds Africa's young child soldiers, consequently 'informs the international community when deciding to recognise certain individuals as victims and play a role in shaping response policies.

These policies in turn contribute to the potential for long-term stable peace after episodes of political victimisation.<sup>587</sup> One of Bouris' main aims is to ultimately and successfully:

'Problematize the traditional dyad of victim / perpetrator, and deconstruct the stereotypical images of victims as innocent of wrongdoing, pure, unpolluted, un-debased, free from guilt or evil, and devoid of responsibility or culpability for what has happened to them.'<sup>588</sup>

As Bouris argues young children are held-up as universal models of such guiltlessness and incorruptibility – viewed by many as being 'too young to be responsible for their actions or situations in any way.'<sup>589</sup> Consequently,

'These assumptions colour public consciousness through graphic depictions of the new wars. Journalists and humanitarian actors frame the context of innocence when they use photographs of children in conflict on their websites and in field reports or television advertisements for advocacy, awareness raising or solicitation of funds.'<sup>590</sup>

More recently, however, the written and visual of Africa's young children that are affected by conflict, which are presented to readers / audiences in western literature and media / film, 'go beyond the representation of suffering endured by these children.'<sup>591</sup> Bouris then fervidly cautions (both readers and cinematic audiences) about the complexities of victimhood (especially in modern-day conflicts /

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<sup>587</sup> Leatherman and Griffin, *Runaway Norms and Complex Political Victimhood: Child Soldier and Challenges for Peace Processes.*, 4-5.

<sup>588</sup> Ibid.

<sup>589</sup> Bouris, *Complex Political Victims*, 45.

<sup>590</sup> Leatherman and Griffin, *Runaway Norms and Complex Political Victimhood: Child Soldier and Challenges for Peace Processes.*, 6.

<sup>591</sup> Ibid.

new wars) echo and warn against simplistic understandings of victim – in particular in the case young child combatants.<sup>592</sup> Leatherman contends that an:

‘Oversimplification of the realities of victimhood may lead to the failure of policymakers to develop appropriate intervention and support systems to assist victims to promote their healing and reintegration into society.’<sup>593</sup>

Bouris builds her argument on the ‘work of Arendt, who raised questions of responsibility concerning both perpetrator and victim in the Holocaust and on Borer’s analysis of complex responsibility in the South African case, where Borer found victims could be perpetrators and the other way around, too.’<sup>594</sup> She consequently advocates that complex political victims never possess a stable / fixed identity. Instead she maintains that the identity of the complex political victim can always be regarded to be in a constant flux. As a result:

“The complex political victim can be understood as a victim who knowingly and purposefully supports certain discourses that contribute to the space of [his or her] political victimization. This is neither because she wants to be victimized, nor because [he or she] has ‘given up hope’ and resorted to supporting these discourses because of a lack of better options, nor because [he or she] has made a ‘rational choice’ to support this discourse. Rather, the complex political victim supports these propitious discourses because they construct [his or her] identity in other ways beyond the identity of the victim.”<sup>595</sup>

While some child soldiers may voluntarily join an army or rebel force before the age of 18, a much larger percentage of young child soldiers are abducted from their villages and schools, and drove into armed conflict and forced into participation. Rebel groups, such as the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) operating in North Uganda, are well-known for their systematic and deliberate abduction of children during their raids on local villages. Young boys are trained to be fighters and young girls are turned into army wives.<sup>596</sup>

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<sup>592</sup> Bouris, *Complex Political Victims*, 46.

<sup>593</sup> Leatherman and Griffin, *Runaway Norms and Complex Political Victimhood: Child Soldier and Challenges for Peace Processes.*, 6.

<sup>594</sup> *Ibid.*, 10-11.

<sup>595</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>596</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

Furthermore, Achvarina and Reich explain that armed factions infiltrate refugee and IDP camps and ‘often become indistinct from the civilian population so that they can recruit the camps’ occupants.’<sup>597</sup> By deploying a systematic system of coercion / propaganda, also referred to as ‘refugee manipulation and militarization’ – these rebel groups enlist or seize inhabitants (including young, vulnerable children) through these methods from within the camps. Leatherman notes that:

‘While many international [humanitarian] organizations organize activities for children and youth in refugee / IDP camps, they often face the risk of creating organized and well-connected groups of children and youth who can be collectively recruited by the military groups later. Finally, multiple accounts of community members and refugees / IDPs regarding sexual violence perpetrated by UN, AU, and NGO-workers suggest that even those who are supposed to provide protection to the complex political victims may in reality victimize them even more.’<sup>598</sup>

The tragic journey of the child soldier ultimately begins with the ‘breakdown of social order, especially the development of *runaway norms*, the collapse of safe space as the above examples illustrate, and the closely related psychology of abduction.’<sup>599</sup> These so-called runaway norms are a special class of norms: they legitimise rape, torture, and other atrocities; and instead of prohibiting such unacceptable practices or putting controls and limits on conflict, runaway norms, instead, justify the escalation and intensification thereof.<sup>600</sup>

These so-called ‘runaway norms reinforce solidarity within [a specific] group, while justifying dominance over the out-group(s).’<sup>601</sup> Norms, according to Leatherman, also “tend to be self-perpetuating, and this is true of runaway norms. Social pressure helps sustain them, so ‘that people who challenge a norm tend to be punished by the group. Others who doubt the validity of a norm remain silent for fear of being labelled deviates or, in the case of intergroup conflict, traitors.’”<sup>602</sup>

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<sup>597</sup> Leatherman and Griffin, *Runaway Norms and Complex Political Victimhood: Child Soldier and Challenges for Peace Processes.*, 14-15.

<sup>598</sup> Ibid.

<sup>599</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>600</sup> Ibid.

<sup>601</sup> Ibid.

<sup>602</sup> Ibid.

Runaway norms, then, have several effects on the escalation of a particular conflict. Firstly, these norms 'justify actions by a group that cross cultural or traditional limits or thresholds on violence, and other prohibitions on abuse and torture.'<sup>603</sup> Runaway norms:

'Cross thresholds in terms of the type of violence (for example: rape, torture, mutilation, forced cannibalism); the intended targets of the violence (sexual violence against pregnant women and mutilation of the unborn child); and also in terms of the agency of violence (forcing child soldiers to commit rape, even of their own family members).'<sup>604</sup>

Secondly, these norms "violate traditional methods of signalling neutrality (for non-combatants, women, children, elderly, infirm, disabled, and the like), [and thirdly], runaway norms erase safe spaces, or 'peace zones' in society where refuge from violence is often sought (churches, schools, refugee and IDP camps, hospitals, safe havens, UN compounds, and the bush in many African conflicts)."<sup>605</sup> As seen at the beginning of the film, *Ezra*, schools are then particularly vulnerable when an entire group of young children are forcefully abducted from their rural school.

As mentioned earlier, it must be acknowledged that child soldiers are made to fulfil many different functions within armed conflict, and this ranges from cooking food, to working as a porter, carrying messages, spying versus fighting, killing, raping, and torturing. As a result, these young child combatants simultaneously become complex political perpetrators as well as complex political victims. These child soldiers, therefore, carry with them an equivocal status of both victim and perpetrator. As Bouris explains, 'recognizing these perpetrators as victims is quite critical, because if we do not see them as victims, we are unlikely to understand the true horror of [the war-context, and vice versa]'.<sup>606</sup>

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<sup>603</sup> Leatherman and Griffin, *Runaway Norms and Complex Political Victimhood: Child Soldier and Challenges for Peace Processes.*, 17.

<sup>604</sup> Ibid.

<sup>605</sup> Leatherman and Griffin, *Runaway Norms and Complex Political Victimhood: Child Soldier and Challenges for Peace Processes.*, 17.

<sup>606</sup> Baines, *Complex Political Perpetrators: Reflections on Dominic Ongwen*, 181.

#### 4.4. CLOSING REMARKS

'Imagery significations of Africa are both an imbrication of Western invention of self and it apologetic concerns and exclusionary and brutal practices towards others.'<sup>607</sup>

Representations of African conflicts (and then in particular child combatants) inevitably generate (and sustain) a discourse of self-deception or perversion as it is rarely about Africa, but rather about the bias and subconscious of the Western interposition. This notion links to the child soldiers that audiences are confronted with in feature films, because it 'entraps the African subject in a constant counterhegemonic stance, rather than as an agentive subject constructing one's own discourse and lived worldview.'<sup>608</sup>

Denov writes that the various visual representations of Africa's child soldiers that are available in the media hold important elements in common:

'In almost all of the portrayals, child soldiers are exoticised, de-contextualised and essentialised. The complexity of their wartime and post-war lives is lost. Moreover, the dichotomous discourses surrounding (male) child soldiers as dangerous or as victims represent the paradoxical 'common-sense' western ideas about children more generally: that on the one hand, to be a child is to be passive, and innocent; while on the other, they are to be feared and dreaded, and their 'deviant' actions must be explained by reference to their inherent duplicity, their taintedness.'<sup>609</sup>

To this end, the issue of these 'victim-perpetrators' become most relevant in the pursuit of justice - the search for accountability for past crimes - and reconciliation in a post-conflict society. On the one hand, they are victims because of their abduction / volunteering, while on the other hand they turn into perpetrators when forced to commit severe atrocities. This complex situation shows that, rather than being two homogeneous yet separate groups, the line between victims and perpetrators is fundamentally unclear and vague - a complicated reality often seen in post-conflict situations.<sup>610</sup>

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<sup>607</sup> Sterling, *Visions of War, Testaments of Peace: The "Burden" of Sierra Leone*, 196.

<sup>608</sup> Ibid.

<sup>609</sup> Denov, *Child Soldiers and Iconography: Portrayals and (Mis)Representations*, 3-4.

<sup>610</sup> Asimakopoulos, *Justice and Accountability: Complex Political Perpetrators Abducted as Children by the LRA in Northern Uganda*, 7.

Generally, two interpretations can be identified that correspond with the 'complex political perpetrator frame' and the 'complex political victim frame.' And as Asimakopoulos observes the people who view these young combatants as perpetrators tend to point out a number of reasons for these young soldiers not to escape 'but in the end still think that complex political perpetrators make a rational choice to stay which makes them responsible for their actions.'<sup>611</sup> According to these respondents:

"The abductees use their 'tactical agency' to be promoted in rank that provides them with more security and profits from the bush. The aforementioned rational corresponds with the description Baines gives of the complex political perpetrator: abductees might understand that staying in the bush is the only way to exercise some control over their lives and to gain some level of material wealth and therefore indeed choose to stay in [these armed factions]."<sup>612</sup>

Conversely, those who follow the 'complex political victim frame' accept as true the notion that the complex political perpetrator does not have so much control over the situation he / she finds themselves in. They regard them as 'trained and brainwashed which implies that they do not know exactly what they are doing or that they are very afraid due to indoctrination and the systematic spread of fear.'<sup>613</sup> Therefore, according to this particular opinion:

'Complex political perpetrators do not consciously make decisions about escaping or staying. These respondents do not consider them responsible for their actions since the complex political perpetrator is ordered to commit crimes and forced by the circumstances to follow these orders.'<sup>614</sup>

The link between conflict diamonds, violence and new wars is undeniable and the plurality of cinematic representations of this complex socio-political war-time situation is reassuring [according to Leander] and the feature *Blood Diamond* is not the only cinematographing of the link between diamonds, violence and new wars. There are other films, such as *The Silent Army* and *Ezra* which focus on the different framings of these situations.<sup>615</sup>

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<sup>611</sup> Asimakopoulos, *Justice and Accountability: Complex Political Perpetrators Abducted as Children by the LRA in Northern Uganda*, 46.

<sup>612</sup> Ibid.

<sup>613</sup> Ibid.

<sup>614</sup> Ibid.

<sup>615</sup> Leander, *Sign Wars: Hollywood Documentaries Branding Politics*, 14-15.

However, according to Jay Ruby:

'A maker of images has the moral obligation... to never reproduce an objective mirror by which the world can see its 'true' image. For in doing so we strengthen the status quo, support the repressive forces of this world, and continue to alienate those people we claim to be concerned about. So long as our images of the world continue to be sold to others as the image of the world, we are being unethical.'<sup>616</sup>

Mboti argues that 'the problem with the [feature] film that is overprovided with 'truth' is its insincerity – or its fake empathy. Audiences, for instance, are supposed to 'suspend disbelief' in order to experience film minus the distractions.'<sup>617</sup> Mboti further writes that:

'The result, however, seems to always be that the text is fetishized, at once keeping the critical eye out of it, and also delaying its semiotic potential. In the end, such film can be described as 'film on steroids', if only because its energy is an overprovision of negative energy which affirms film illogically and artificially through a process of actually thwarting it.'<sup>618</sup>

In the final analysis, whether cinematic representations allude to or do not allude to the real world seems quite beside the point. What is critical is the realisation that images create their own autonomous worlds and systems of meaning, to be appropriated and borrowed for use by human societies. An awareness of how the autonomy of the image is subordinated, sometimes lost, to human influences, and even to illogical motives, is part of a critical praxis of film.<sup>619</sup> As bell hooks points out:

[That by] 'giving audiences what is real is precisely what movies do not do. They give the reimagined, reinvented version of the real. It may look like something familiar, but in actuality it is a different universe from the world of the real. That is what makes movies so compelling.'<sup>620</sup>

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<sup>616</sup> Mboti, *To show the World as it is, Or as it is Not: The Gaze of Hollywood Films about Africa*, 321.

<sup>617</sup> Ibid.

<sup>618</sup> Ibid.

<sup>619</sup> Ibid.

<sup>620</sup> Ibid.

With regards to the often simplistic categories and cinematic representations of 'childhood' in Africa, 'victim' and 'perpetrator' in terms of young child combatants, the aforementioned argument by Hooks becomes quite important. It points to the moral value and complexities that is assigned to the task when having to portray this complex phenomenon in feature films.

When theorising on victims and perpetrators, Baines argues that there exist clear, opposing connotations between the notions of *victim* and *perpetrator*. "Victims are frequently associated with the words 'pure' and 'innocent' – with the ideal victim being helpless, vulnerable and in constant need of being rescued. Whereas, perpetrators with 'evil' and 'guilt.'

These preconceptions are perhaps not surprising, given that it is far easier to deliver humanitarian aid, development or justice when clear parameters are drawn around *victims* and *perpetrators*.<sup>621</sup> Bouris is concerned that, by recognising and addressing complex political victims in justice pursuits after conflict ultimately creates a new space which 'mass victimisation, particularly genocide', can take place.

That is, the victims' exclusion from access to justice fuels the social construction of the *other*. This construction is the first step towards dehumanising a sub-group, which often leads to violence.<sup>622</sup> The same can then be argued when discussing the post-Cold War cinematic depictions thereof.

To this end, then, Baines introduces the notion of the *complex political perpetrator*. He argues that 'by becoming a perpetrator, a child or youth can gain some degree of control over his or her life (and adapt / take-up arms, or be killed themselves).<sup>623</sup> As complex political perpetrators, according to Baines, these young child combatants are responsible for their actions, but their 'accountability is mitigated by the circumstances which gave rise to his victim status.'<sup>624</sup>

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<sup>621</sup> Baines, *Complex Political Perpetrators: Reflections on Dominic Ongwen*, 177.

<sup>622</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>623</sup> *Ibid.*, 180.

<sup>624</sup> *Ibid.*, 180-181.

And as Bouris explains:

By 'recognizing these perpetrators as victims is quite critical, because if we do not see them as victims, we are unlikely to understand the true horror of [the context].'<sup>625</sup>

To conclude, Evans and Glenn argue that, although refreshing in their attempt to look at the [African continent] from new perspectives, many modern feature films, such as the three feature films that will be analysed as case studies in Chapter Five, at times are compromised by cinema's highly inter-textual nature which links them to earlier stereotypical notions and draws on genres and narratives that are familiar to audiences. They write that:

'The resulting limitations have been noted by numerous critics: the dependence on white protagonists which continues to situate African characters on the periphery; the tendency to approach Africa with a totalising gaze; to generalise about regional or national problems; a propensity to de-historicise (and thus eternalise) events; the recourse to western psychological and familial models and plots [especially when dealing with child soldiers]; a fascination with the details of violence coupled with an inability to explain its causes; and an avoidance of socio-economic realities and political complexity which makes it difficult to project realistically positive images of the continent's future.'<sup>626</sup>

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<sup>625</sup> Bouris, *Complex Political Victims*, 67.

<sup>626</sup> Evans and Glenn, "TIA - *This is Africa*": *Afro-pessimism in Twenty-First-Century Narrative Film*, 15.

## CHAPTER FIVE: FILM ANALYSES

The child soldier is the most famous character of the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

- Ahmadou Kourouma

The aforementioned quote by Kourouma rightly implies that in recent decades, 'the African child soldier living in conflict, as well as in post-conflict milieus, have progressively attracted more attention - particularly from transnational humanitarian organisations, NGOs, church groups, and Western filmmakers.'<sup>627</sup> In most analyses of armed conflict, children are invisible and are typically regarded as 'passive, incidental victims or inconsequential actors. However, in current intrastate, ethno-political conflicts, young children have come to play an increasing 'hands-on role' - both as soldiers and, along with other non-combatants as targets as well as victims in fighting at the community level.'<sup>628</sup>

Maureen Moynagh writes that even though international humanitarian groups and NGOs, like Human Rights Watch (HRW), Amnesty International (AI) and the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers (CSC), continue to "insist that child soldiers themselves ought to be understood as 'victims', the child-soldier figure remains an ambiguous one."<sup>629</sup> She goes further to state that:

'Simultaneously emblematic of the global human and of the fundamental inequality of the politics of life, the child soldier presents an impediment to the human rights model, even as that model is invoked in order to oppose the *necropolitics* that mobilise child soldiers in the first place.'<sup>630</sup>

Consequently, with regards to these realities of child soldiers that audiences around the world are confronted with, the case study films touches upon a wide range of these issues. Especially the varying ways in which the subject / phenomenon of child soldiers is being not only addressed and discussed, but then also represented to both reader and viewer audiences.

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<sup>627</sup> Singer and Dovey, *Representations of African Childhood in Conflict and Post-Conflict Contexts: Johnny Mad Dog, Ezra, and Sleepwalking Land*, 151.

<sup>628</sup> Wessells, *Children, Armed Conflict, and Peace*, 635.

<sup>629</sup> Moynagh, *Human Rights, Child-Soldier Narratives, and the Problem of Form.*, 41.

<sup>630</sup> *Ibid.*

In the article, *Child Soldiers and Iconography: Portrayals and (Mis)Representations*, Myriam Denov writes that:

'Over the past decade, child soldiers have inundated the popular media. Images of boys armed with AK47s appear ubiquitous, providing a cautionary tale of innocent childhood gone awry. While these representations turn commonly held assumptions of a protected and innocuous childhood on its head, what they conceal is as provocative as what they reveal. Popular news media [and often feature films tell readers / audiences] little about the children behind the guns or the complexity of their wartime and post-war experiences.'<sup>631</sup>

She also acknowledges that while these youths (caught up in civil unrests) are 'frequently constructed within a framework of extremes (as either extreme victims; extreme perpetrators or extreme heroes), in reality, the lives of these children fall within the grey, ambiguous and paradoxical zones of each.'<sup>632</sup> Attempting to move beyond such narrow depictions that audiences have grown accustomed to, the following chapter will explore the different faces of Africa's child soldiers on screen as well as the specific narratives that are presented to audiences which direct and shape the perceptions and thoughts on child soldiering in Africa.

### **5.1. THE DIFFERENT FACES OF AFRICA'S CHILD SOLDIERS ON SCREEN**

Lynch writes in her dissertation entitled, *Concerning Visual Representations of Child Soldiers in Sierra Leone*, that:

'Since 2001, images of child soldiers have been highly visible in mass media outlets including newspapers, magazines, film, television and the Internet. Such visual representations present a paradox, for young combatants can be viewed as both victims and perpetrators. Desperate circumstances spur many child soldiers to commit violent acts, while age marks their innocence. As children are not fully developed members of society, they are not held entirely responsible for their actions.'<sup>633</sup>

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<sup>631</sup> Denov, *Child Soldiers and Iconography: Portrayals and (Mis)Representations*, 1.

<sup>632</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>633</sup> A. P. Lynch, "Concerning Visual Representations of Child Soldiers in Sierra Leone " (Master Of Arts, University of Florida), 11-12.

She also notes that all too often the child soldier is portrayed as “smug and armed with AK47s. [And] images such as these lead to categories that reflect set-personalities generated by the media.

Seeking to generalise the multiple narratives and character types of child soldiers, [Denov uses categories like] ‘Dangerous and Disorderly,’ ‘The Hapless Victim,’ ‘The Hero,’ and ‘Invisible Girls, Emblematic Victims.’ These ‘brackets’, according to Lynch, appear then to highlight and reinforce some of the commonly held stereotypes surrounding child soldiers.”<sup>634</sup>

It is then, however, undeniable that Africa’s child soldiers have many a different faces - especially in the cinematic representations that are taken to audiences around the world. The pitfalls and complexities of such Afro-pessimistic / Afro-optimistic portrayals are evident (as explained in the previous chapters), and they are noticeably still present in modern (post-Cold War) feature films. Where specific countries, conflicts, and rebel and government factions are explicitly mentioned, a brief context thereof will be provided in order to enhance the analysis of a particular film. All of the case study films share major features of Afro-pessimism, for example in *The Silent Army*, which demonstrate the emergent Western view of post-colonial Africa.

However, in the case of *Ezra* and *War Witch*, features of Afro-optimism also are taken to silver screens due to its narratives which allude to stories of love, resilience, remorse, peace, redemption and reconciliation being possible for child soldiers. All of the aforementioned issues will now be discussed at the hand of three case study films.

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<sup>634</sup> Lynch, *Concerning Visual Representations of Child Soldiers in Sierra Leone*, 12.

### 5.1.1. Complex Political Victims and / or Complex Political Perpetrators in *Ezra*

‘Coming to terms with the participation of child soldiers, simultaneously perpetrators and innocents, is key to post-war reconciliation and peace building.’<sup>635</sup>

The Sierra Leonean civil war 1991-2002 is familiar to Western spectators / audiences for the ‘media portrayals of terror tactics carried out by combatants against a powerless populace.’<sup>636</sup> During the war, the key fighting factions have been firstly, ‘the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) rebels, [secondly], the Sierra Leone Army portions of which at one point joined the rebels in overthrowing an elected government, [thirdly], the locally organized Civil Defense Force (CDF) militias - often known as Kamajohs - growing out of traditional hunting secret societies, and [lastly], the international peacekeepers first of the regional West African coalition and then of the United Nations.’<sup>637</sup> Shepler notes that the sequence of events during the war was confusing - with ‘coups and counter-coups and shifting alliances.’<sup>638</sup> She writes that:

‘In addition to murder, rape, and looting; amputations by machete were carried out by youth recruited for just such acts. By the end of the conflict, a full 75% of the Sierra Leone population reported being displaced at least once during the war. [And] today, according to the most recent Human Development Report by the United National Development Program, Sierra Leone is the country with the lowest quality of life in the world.’<sup>639</sup>

The conflict in Sierra Leone, one of many seemingly similar conflicts in Africa and in particular in the region, personified an intense battle over natural wealth and resources “within the context of a post-colonial ‘weak state.’”<sup>640</sup> Some have pointed to the international trade in diamonds and illegal weapons as the most important element to understanding the war - these elements become clear in the cinematic depictions dealing with African conflicts, and then in particular filmic case studies of child soldiers. *The Silent Army*, *Ezra* and *Blood Diamond* serve as good examples hereof.

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<sup>635</sup> S. Shepler, "The Rites of the Child: Global Discourses of Youth and Reintegrating Child Soldiers in Sierra Leone," *Journal of Human Rights* 4, no. 2 (2005), 198.

<sup>636</sup> Ibid.

<sup>637</sup> Ibid.

<sup>638</sup> Ibid.

<sup>639</sup> Ibid.

<sup>640</sup> Ibid.

However, according to Shepler, 'the underlying issues are both local and international in character. In terms of local factors, many observers have understood the war in Sierra Leone as a crisis of youth, arguing that it was a lack of opportunities for education or any kind of future that made legions of disaffected youth ripe for recruitment.'<sup>641</sup>

Set in Sierra Leone, the film *Ezra*, deals with the civil war motivated by various factors including governmental corruption, authoritarian rule, mass poverty, economic grievance as well as illegal diamond trade. The Revolutionary United Front (RUF) initiated a coup d'état in 1991 to overthrow the one-party rule of the All People's Congress (APC).

The role of the diamond trade in fuelling the civil war is involved but is not the focus of the film's narrative. Rather it is Ezra's psychological trauma and breakdown and his final redemption that is deeply explored.<sup>642</sup> After the war ended, in 2002 Sierra Leone's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (SLTRC) began to facilitate reconciliation between victims and the perpetrators of human rights violations during the civil war. The film is presented primarily as a series of flashbacks provided by Ezra, his sister Oditcha, and other witnesses who have agreed to participate in a TRC hearing. By doing this, Aduaka thus engages the character of Ezra, as a complex political victim rather than flattening his character into a Western stereotype of the brutalised, victimised African child.

Aduaka, presents his film, *Ezra*, as a 'reaction to the patterned northern representations of child-soldiers.'<sup>643</sup> He was quoted saying the following:

"It was really my intention to speak not just what I saw in those news reports from the children, you know, with the western camera man with his camera and asking 'did you lose a lot because of the war?' Of course they lost a lot. 'What do you want to do with your life now? / I want to go to school'. Of course they want to go to school... I wanted Ezra as a character to say his own anger. Yes, I killed people, but I'm angry. And it is difficult to take that stand. It's almost like you are not entitled to it."<sup>644</sup>

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<sup>641</sup> Shepler, *The Rites of the Child: Global Discourses of Youth and Reintegrating Child Soldiers in Sierra Leone*, 198.

<sup>642</sup> Korman, *African Cinema: A Comparative Look at Blood Diamond and Ezra. Nigeria versus Hollywood.*, 1-5.

<sup>643</sup> Ibid.

<sup>644</sup> C. Martins, "The Dangers of the Single Story: Child-Soldiers in Literary Fiction and Film," *Childhood* 18, no. 4 (2011), 440.

Catarina Martins argues that 'in order to create this space of resistance, where child-soldiers are allowed to express their anger and betrayal, Aduaka portrays his main character as an adolescent ex-soldier who testifies before a Truth and Reconciliation Committee. Though maybe unrealistic, this perspective foregrounds the responsibility and voice of the young soldier who claims the right to be treated as an adult and according to his military rank.'<sup>645</sup>

Conscious agency by adolescent soldiers is without a doubt underlined in the film through for example the love story between Ezra and Mariam. Mariam is 'a remarkably mature girl-soldier with strong cultural and ideological formation, who volunteers to fight for the cause of democracy and social justice, though she is lucid about the corruption of the political ideal by greedy leaders and diamond traffic.'<sup>646</sup>

Martins writes that:

'Even if the film preserves a portrait of extreme violence inflicted upon child-soldiers (being kidnapped, slave work, vulnerability in combat, death, drugs), it also includes raids in which violence is exercised upon the community by the same child-soldiers (under the effect of drugs). In one of these, Ezra murders his own parents.'<sup>647</sup>

Furthermore, the typical rhetoric of innocence used by the humanitarian discourse is criticised as an inadequate solution for a both individual and collective problem.<sup>648</sup> Erica Bouris, in her book, *Complex Political Victims*, rejects universal understandings of victim identity and instead she deconstructs the binary model of the political victim as innocent, free from guilt and in binary opposition to the perpetrator. Bouris offers arguments that some political victims contribute to the sustainability of social discourses that have contributed to, and prolonged his / her own political victimisation.

Some child soldiers in Sierra Leone nurtured cycles of violence through voluntarily serving in the army and committing violent atrocities against the civilian population, motivated by avenging friends and families lost to the very same atrocities. Consequently, it becomes clear that that boundary between victim and perpetrator, once thought of as clear delineation, is in actual fact very complex.

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<sup>645</sup> Martins, *The Dangers of the Single Story: Child-Soldiers in Literary Fiction and Film*, 440.

<sup>646</sup> Ibid., 440-441.

<sup>647</sup> Ibid.

<sup>648</sup> Ibid., 441.

*Ezra*, serves as a raw and violent character study of a young child soldier in Africa rather than just being a typical catalogue of wartime shocks and horrors. It also has a more politicised angle than some films on child soldiers geared towards a wider mainstream audience. Rather than reproducing the dichotomy between children as victims and adult perpetrators, *Ezra* then also succeeds in highlighting child perpetrators and adult victims, which are notably absent from other mainstream, humanitarian child soldier narratives – both written and visual.

In several recent written and cinematic child soldier narratives the rehabilitation and ultimate reintegration of ex-child combatants into their families and communities are represented as a natural and logical obligation on the part of the family and community at large. However, in the film *Ezra*, Ezra is depicted in two very distinct post-conflict spaces: firstly, the rehabilitation centre and secondly, the TRC hearings. Both of these spaces are representative of institutional structures rather than familial or social structures. In fact, during some of Ezra's flashbacks, stronger social bonds are depicted between some of the child soldiers than what he experiences in his community.

In her article, *The Rites of the Child: Global Discourses of Youth and Reintegrating Child Soldiers in Sierra Leone*, Susan Shepler in part focusses on the 'issues of post-conflict reconciliation and reintegration of young ex-combatants into society, particularly with respect to the tensions around different versions of childhood and how power is implicated in those struggles.'<sup>649</sup> She argues that in the struggle to reintegrate child soldiers, new meanings of youth emerge in Sierra Leone, meanings informed by global human rights discourse but created in rites of everyday practice at the intersection of the global human rights regime and local everyday rites.'<sup>650</sup>

In her meetings with child soldiers, Shepler, in the course of her research, noticed that these young combatants had to navigate a 'tricky / complex social landscape as they move through various intersecting contexts - among their friends and fellow soldiers, they try to maintain the status that being part of the fighting gives them.'<sup>651</sup>

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<sup>649</sup> Shepler, *The Rites of the Child: Global Discourses of Youth and Reintegrating Child Soldiers in Sierra Leone*, 198.

<sup>650</sup> Ibid.

<sup>651</sup> Ibid., 199.

They wear combat clothes and sunglasses and brag about firing rocket-propelled grenade launchers. Shepler noted that:

“With NGOs, they adopt the persona of the traumatized innocent, usually requesting aid in furthering their education. With community members and in school they act like normal kids, never mentioning the past. Thus, their ‘[rehabilitation and] reintegration’ is achieved in social practice across a variety of contexts using a variety of strategically adopted identities. Some child soldiers utilize what I call *discourses of abdicated responsibility*: ‘I [did not] choose to fight, I was forced, I was drugged, I was too young to know any better,’ they varyingly argue. These claims of innocence ease children’s reintegration into their communities and also make it easier for community members to live with former fighters in their midst. Adult combatants use some of the same strategies, of course, but there is something quite specific to the case of children.”<sup>652</sup>

It is then against this back-drop that Shepler and other scholar continue to argue that one must be wary of regarding child soldiers as simply victims. During times of war, many of these youths had to make tough decisions and perform difficult acts to survive. According to Shepler:

“Before the war, the everyday life of Sierra Leonean children was often quite difficult, many labouring to support their families as active participants in social life. On the other hand, during the post-war period some child ex-combatants exercise agency, paradoxically, through their claims of wartime *non-agency*. Youth in post-war contexts are strategic users of different discourses as they move through different contexts. Child rights discourses and practices in some ways then ease the reintegration of child ex-combatants by buttressing these ‘discourses of abdicated responsibility’ in children’s narrations of their war experiences, thereby facilitating forgiveness and acceptance.”<sup>653</sup>

Aduaka seems to adopt a multi-axial understanding of child soldiers as actors and competent arbiters of change even in situations of exploitation. At the beginning of the film, Aduaka, expresses the sense of Africa as a deeply humanistic continent that has sadly been disrupted by post-colonial conflict. Consequently, the fundamental goal here not to make a brilliant work of *cinema*, but to engage with the complexities of the continent and particularly with the question of what happens to child soldiers when the conflict in which they have been involved ends.

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<sup>652</sup> Shepler, *The Rites of the Child: Global Discourses of Youth and Reintegrating Child Soldiers in Sierra Leone*, 199.

<sup>653</sup> *Ibid.*, 199-200.

From the aforementioned, it becomes undeniable clear that complex political victims (as well as complex political perpetrators) are born out of these situations. Bouris writes that a theory of political victimisation will ultimately challenge 'simple, reductionist image[s] of the innocent victim to show more precisely the nuance and complexity of those [youths] suffering political victimization.'<sup>654</sup>

*Ezra* stands out among other cinematic representations concerned with child soldier narratives because it is a complex psychological study - not just of the brutalising, healing and reintegration into society of one of thousands of traumatised former child soldiers, but also as a key for reconstructing these societies themselves. For, it is only after Ezra confronts his crimes, how he came to commit them and repents, that he will reach a point in his healing process where he will be ready to re-join society as well as make peace with himself. In a sense, the audience is placed in the position of the judges, initially seeing Ezra only in terms of his crimes against humanity, but, gradually coming to realise he is a complex political victim.

As in the case of Ezra, Mariam and Onitcha, a discourse such as the one to be found in the film, reaffirms the humanity of all victims / characters and young role players in times of war. Brought in front of the SLTRC to testify of his war crimes, Ezra's humanity is however never doubted or brought into question. The extreme difficulty for all those involved in these hearings, and to relive the horrors of their wartime experiences, as Bouris writes that, is rather aimed at not holding the victim up to a 'nearly able standard of pure good and pure innocence (and fault him or her when they do not), but rather encourage a discourse of the complex political victim which embraces the complexities and contradictions of the victim in order to better recognise them, better respond to their situation, and better contribute to peace and reintegration.'<sup>655</sup>

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<sup>654</sup> Bouris, *Complex Political Victims*, 7.

<sup>655</sup> *Ibid.*, 7-8.

Korman writes that:

'*Ezra* focuses on how the child transforms as a result of the rebels' torturous actions. Moments / scenes such as when the young boys quietly encourage one another to stay alive by following orders engages the viewer in the children's progression. The portrayal of the horrific pre-raid ritual allows the viewer to see the final steps of the children's transformation. The depiction is believable without being graphic. *Ezra* shows this process that turns young boys into crazed animals. One of the most powerful moments occurs when the young boys prepare to raid a village. First they are injected with a narcotic, and then they are gathered into a circle to dance around and chant while waving their guns in the air.'<sup>656</sup>

Later in the film during his testimony in front of the SLTRC, Ezra explains that the aforementioned ritual(s) puts the young boys in a dazed / hallucinogenic state of mind - allowing them to commit horrific acts without being aware of their actions or showing any remorse. *Ezra* focuses on how *ritual* is used to bring these children to the point where they are capable of raping, murdering and destroying.<sup>657</sup>

As Ezra rises in the ranks of the militia, he gets a glimpse into the background forces which drive the endless warfare. For instance, he glimpses white mercenaries and arms dealers which are symbolic of corrupt capitalism. This political consciousness is on display during his hearing:

"Our government was corrupt; lack of education was their way to control power. [...] You are richer than us, but we pay for school. Your country talked about democracy, but you support corrupt governments, like my own. Why because you want our diamonds. Ask if anyone in this room has ever seen a real diamond before."<sup>658</sup>

The character of Mariam is also of interest because she not only defies gender stereotypes but exhibits strong ideological principles and has chosen of her own volition to fight. And so, *Ezra* (and other films such as *Heart of Fire*) suggests a childhood that takes into account the socio-economic responsibilities of children (in wartime contexts) rather than Western humanitarian notions that deem all children as vulnerable and innocent.

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<sup>656</sup> Korman, *African Cinema: A Comparative Look at Blood Diamond and Ezra. Nigeria versus Hollywood.*, 1.

<sup>657</sup> Ibid.

<sup>658</sup> Aduaka, *Ezra*, [00"57'43" - 00"58'18"]

As the hearings come to a close, accused by his sister of murdering his own parents, Ezra collapses, physically and mentally. In the final scene, Ezra confesses to his therapist that he knows he has killed many people's parents and the suffering he has caused. This may mark his first uncertain steps towards social and psychic rehabilitation.

The film clearly symbolises the challenges facing Sierra Leone and other nations devastated by civil war. It acknowledges the irrevocable horrors of the past, the need for achieving reconciliation in the present and the hope of forging a productive and equitable new national identity for the future.

Korman noted that 'Ezra approaches violence from a different perspective by focusing more on the person committing the violent act than on the resulting mayhem.'<sup>659</sup> He writes further that:

'When Ezra is raiding his parent's village the camera cuts several times to him screaming and stomping, terrifying people and preparing to kill. The actual murder of his family is never shown. It is not about shocking the audience with realistic images of violence, but rather demonstrating how a teenager can be brought to the point where he can kill without knowing or understanding why.'<sup>660</sup>

Consequently, it can be argued that *Ezra* is concerned with the events leading up to the violence and its aftermath. So, in conclusion, by deviating from mainstream cinematic representations of the child soldier, Eduaka's *Ezra* offers a new portrayal of an ex-combatant who is not simply reduced to his status as a former child soldier. Instead, a multiplicity of identities is emphasised under the notions of complex political victims and / or complex political perpetrators, including that of soldier, yes, but also that of brother, husband and citizen.

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<sup>659</sup> Korman, *African Cinema: A Comparative Look at Blood Diamond and Ezra. Nigeria versus Hollywood.*, 1-2.

<sup>660</sup> *Ibid.*, 1-2.

### 5.1.2. The Ethnographical Spectacle in *The Silent Army*

Asked about the lack of portrayal of child soldiers and similar important issues affecting Africa in modern, [Western] Hollywood movies, Van der Velde says that for Hollywood 'it is difficult to really touch the harshness and cruelty of child soldiers... the audience would be appalled.'<sup>661</sup> Van der Velde considers the films, *Hotel Rwanda* and *Blood Diamond*, Hollywood films that have dealt with these extremely touching issues and stories, 'but in execution, to [his] taste, they always felt a bit like Disney Africa, they lack any real feel for the content and stories of Africa.'<sup>662</sup>

The film contains some quite shocking scenes that give a horrifying insight into the atrocities child soldiers encounter, and at times audiences may feel inclined to look away. Yet, Van der Velde is clear about his aim for the film and that he did not want the audience to turn their heads, but rather he wanted audiences to experience the message carried within the film.<sup>663</sup>

Although, the name Uganda is not used outright in the film for fear of reprisals from militants against the actors that star in the film, the director revealed that they used real Ugandan children and adults instead of established actors when they made the movie.<sup>664</sup> The opening sequences of the film, as Livesav writes:

'Paint a good picture of what peaceful life is like in a small African village. A boy named Abu receives a gift of Soccer cleats from his best friend whose European father owns a restaurant in the city. He plays soccer against make believe opponents while his mother and father watch when all of a sudden this once peaceful village becomes the site of a blood bath. Men women and children are slaughtered - with children being forced to kill their own family members or face an execution at the hands of children not much older than themselves.'<sup>665</sup>

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<sup>661</sup> J. Parrot, "Interview: Jean Van Der Velde on *The Silent Army*," *The Film Review*, 10 December, 2010, 1. (Accessed 19 June, 2013)

<sup>662</sup> Ibid.

<sup>663</sup> Ibid.

<sup>664</sup> B. Livesav, "*The Silent Army* (Jean Van Der Velde, 2008): Netherlands," *SBC Film Reviews*, 9 September, 2011, 1. (Accessed 19 June, 2013), 1.

<sup>665</sup> Ibid.

Naomi Cahn also correctly alludes to the fact that children are abducted and indoctrinated easier than adults, thus increasing their chances of involuntary recruitment. Children may be kidnapped while they are walking home from school, from refugee camps, or from within their own homes. In Uganda, children are called 'night commuters,' because they sleep in populated towns at night in order to prevent abduction.<sup>666</sup> The phenomenon is then also part of *The Silent Army's* narrative when Thomas goes to look for Abu at one of these shelters where young night commuters come to sleep in safety.

Similarly in *Machine Gun Preacher*, this phenomenon is represented when Childers goes to 'explore' and takes in some of the night commuters and shelter them for the night. The next morning, he is wakened by news of a village attack where he witnesses these young night commuters returning home, finding their parents and community members murdered.

Sterling argues when one examines the ways in which Hollywood and its commentators fetishise Africa and African conflicts, one is subjected to another form of what she considers to be an 'ethnographic spectacle.'<sup>667</sup> She contends that Western films become a form of 'cinematic trauma, as they are built on the foundation of empire building, the causative narrative of the civilising mission – they presuppose and reaffirm an understanding of the African world / [reality] as a world of chaos, as world in perpetual need that only Western intervention can save.'<sup>668</sup>

In 2007, Maryllen Higgins spoke the African Studies Association Conference on the ways in which Western (and in particular Hollywood) perpetuates the 'ethos of Empire.' She gave a five-fold clarification of how this rhetoric is cinematically reproduced and taken to audiences:

- 'White protagonists... mediate the narrative point of view, while African perspectives and African actors, even in films that are specifically concerned with African suffering, are marginalized;
- Exposition about Africa and Africans... relies primarily on the authority of white protagonists, who lecture other naïve characters about African;
- European or American power... is used to rescue good Africans from evil ones;
- Africa [is] the site of horror, an Inferno, hell, or heart of darkness, à la Conrad; and

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<sup>666</sup> Cahn, *Poor Children: Child Witches and Child Soldiers in Sub-Saharan Africa*, 420.

<sup>667</sup> Sterling, *Visions of War, Testaments of Peace: The "Burden" of Sierra Leone*, 196.

<sup>668</sup> *Ibid.*, 196-197.

- Infantilized African leaders... [positing] the political maturity of colonized or formerly colonized peoples.<sup>669</sup>

*The Silent Army* gives viewers almost all of these tropes of 'empire building.' Sterling further argues that 'the intention of any film, [one] may presuppose, is to manipulate the subjective identification of the audience.'<sup>670</sup> Therefore, according to Sterling, it is crucial to establish the tone of such films – and then in particular *The Silent Army*, through its stance as human rights advocacy and its underpinning narrative of testimony, which attempts to engage with the representations of the experiences of the oppressed / *othered*.<sup>671</sup> In accordance to many Western narratives, *The Silent Army* then establishes a 'problematic pattern of having the privileged speak for rather than with the oppressed / [*othered*]. And privilege is situated as an authenticating presence and underscores the alienation of the subject of trauma [child soldiers], who remains without voice.'<sup>672</sup>

Such 'ethnographic gazes' of an *Other* - of Africa, its conflicts and its child soldiers - can be found in numerous films such as *The Silent Army*. It then becomes clear that such a discourse of *othering* strengthens the broader, long-standing racially prejudiced and Afro-pessimistic characterisation of Africa (and in particular then child soldiers) as 'inherently childlike and incapable of self-determination without Western aid and intervention.'<sup>673</sup>

On the official website of War Child Holland, it is stated that:

'Having consulted on the original Dutch version of the movie, *Wit Licht*, War Child Holland hopes that the international attention to *The Silent Army* will not only help place the effect war has on children on a higher political and social agenda, but will also inspire as many people as possible to take action in the name of child soldiers and other children affected by war.'<sup>674</sup>

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<sup>669</sup> Sterling, *Visions of War, Testaments of Peace: The "Burden" of Sierra Leone*, 198.

<sup>670</sup> Ibid.

<sup>671</sup> Ibid.

<sup>672</sup> Ibid.

<sup>673</sup> Singer and Dovey, *Representations of African Childhood in Conflict and Post-Conflict Contexts: Johnny Mad Dog, Ezra, and Sleepwalking Land*, 153.

<sup>674</sup> War Child Holland ([www.warchildholland.org](http://www.warchildholland.org)) (Accessed 13 May, 2013)

Subsequent to the aforementioned notions, the film, *The Silent Army*, was chosen as case study in line with what numerous critics have noted that the film's plot seems to device yet 'another white man's burden / redemption.' Having similar narratives / plots as the films *Blood Diamond* and *Machine Gun Preacher*, in *The Silent Army*, it once again becomes evident that the stories of African child soldiers as told from the inside — such as in the films, *War Witch* and *Heart of Fire* - offer much stronger, emotive, and more gut-wrenching material than the 'dramas of rich white men confronted with the same.'<sup>675</sup>

Sterling extends the orientalist trope of cinematic discussions pertaining to Africa. She writes that the 'normative gaze that the West casts over Africa becomes a trope with which to understand the ways in which the West assumes a right to control, and determine Africa's destiny.'<sup>676</sup>

It also underscores what Stuart Hall refers to as an 'inferential racism' which have racist / Afro-pessimistic premises and propositions inscribed in them as a set of unquestioned assumptions and according to Sterling the inferred assumption then is that film representations of African conflicts 'cannot have an African character as its leading man.'<sup>677</sup> This then, signals to be true with regards to *The Silent Army* because even though Abu's abduction is the reason for Eduard's journey into the jungle and into hostile territory, the film's narrative ultimately follows Eduard's quest to find Abu and his subsequent exposure of General Obeke's camp and illegal drop-off point for illegal weapons.

It is important to note, as Kapuściński's argues, with regards to phenomenon of child soldiers, that even though, "abduction as a means of recruitment is undoubtedly a problem, more frequently, orphaned children, or vulnerable children displaced by civil war, poverty, and migrant labour are easily drawn in. 'Weapons,' as he points out, 'are not only for waging war, but are a means of survival.'"<sup>678</sup>

The child soldiers in this particular film are caught-up in a rebel faction which illegally trades in weapons, and in the end, these weapons (guns and grenades) that are used to 'keep them inline' are used to allow Eduard to escape with Abu and other child soldiers when a young girl detonates a grenade and destroys the weapons.

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<sup>675</sup> Van Hoeij, Review: 'The Silent Army', 1.

<sup>676</sup> Sterling, *Visions of War, Testaments of Peace: The "Burden" of Sierra Leone*, 200.

<sup>677</sup> Ibid.

<sup>678</sup> Evans and Glenn, "TIA - This is Africa": *Afro-pessimism in Twenty-First-Century Narrative Film*, 27.

Consequently, the audience is left with an 'action movie in which the answers to all of life's problems (particularly when it comes to Africa) are found at the end of a white-man's gun [and within his reason].'<sup>679</sup>

*The Silent Army*, similar to two other well-known feature films, *The Constant Gardener* and *Blood Diamond*, shine noir Atlantic spotlights on oppression. Speaking primarily through moral the white characters of Eduard and the aid worker, Valerie, the film targets Western (white) role players (weapon smugglers and corrupt journalists) for taking advantage of conflict situations and socio-political climates in Africa.<sup>680</sup> Similarly, as John Parrot writes during an interview with the director Jean Van der Velde, the tragedy that makes the poverty and civil unrests in Africa all the more distressing is the continent's immense natural resources which should create wealth for the general population.<sup>681</sup> According to Van der Velde:

"The ex-colonial powers must take much of the responsibility for the social problems that arise when they 'steal the commodities of the country and leaving the people with nothing at all.'"<sup>682</sup>

The film, however, fails to successfully mediate between *us* and *them*, and each ultimately becomes trapped by its own fantasy of Africa. By simultaneously blaming the West and encouraging Western intervention, the film leaves viewers with a message that is ambiguous at best.<sup>683</sup> On the matter, Lee Marshall writes that *The Silent Army* has:

'Some difficult-to-watch sequences which chart the brutalisation of child soldiers as they are turned from kids into killing machines raise the age-old question of whether showing such horrors on the screen can educate without being exploitative. But Van De Velde's film is clearly well-researched, and has a sensitive, at times even ironic approach to the white man's burden of guilt about suffering Africans – and most audiences will give it the benefit of the doubt.'<sup>684</sup>

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<sup>679</sup> Campbell, "A Review: '*The Silent Army*,'" 1.

<sup>680</sup> Mafe, *(Mis)Imagining Africa in the New Millennium: The Constant Gardener and Blood Diamond*, 71.

<sup>681</sup> Parrot, "Interview: Jean Van Der Velde on *The Silent Army*," 1.

<sup>682</sup> Ibid.

<sup>683</sup> Mafe, *(Mis)Imagining Africa in the New Millennium: The Constant Gardener and Blood Diamond*, 95.

<sup>684</sup> Marshall, *The Silent Army*, 1.

In recent years filmmakers have come to turn their cameras more toward the spectacle of Africa. Films such as *Johnny Mad Dog*, *Heart of Fire*, *The Silent Army*, and *Blood Diamond* - staged in wars, IDP / refugee camps, slums and rural and ill-equipped hospitals rather than out on exotic safari's - have introduced global audiences to a wider range of specific conflicts and violent, socio-political problems faced by particularly the younger generation on the African continent. These filmmakers have represented these African unrests, socio-political problems and humanitarian crises, given them meaning and directed calls of action towards their audiences. These films in the long run, as Anna Leander argues, 'want things from their audiences - in particular they want to shape the way we understand the problem they are dealing with.'<sup>685</sup>

Sterling argues that as according to Shohat and Stam, 'cinema is consumed in *communitas*, and thus, spectatorship can take on a national or imperial thrust.'<sup>686</sup> The aforementioned notion raises the question of to what extent "observing the suffering of others position viewers as 'tourists amid their landscapes of anguish.'"<sup>687</sup> In the case of the case study film, *The Silent Army*, there exists a 'combination of narrative and spectacle – where the human rights objective seemingly is to allow viewers to become voyeurs.'<sup>688</sup>

*The Silent Army*, then aptly serves as an example of the aforementioned when Eduard goes in search of Abu and enters the UN refugee-camp. In the camp there is a sense of peace and hope for a better (and rehabilitated) future for the young ex-combatants that found their way there. This is juxtaposed with the violent and chaotic scenes of Abu's training and the tasks and atrocities he and the other child soldiers had to perform under the warlord, General Obeke's, instructions.

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<sup>685</sup> Leander, *Sign Wars: Hollywood Documentaries Branding Politics*, 3.

<sup>686</sup> Sterling, *Visions of War, Testaments of Peace: The "Burden" of Sierra Leone*, 200.

<sup>687</sup> Ibid.

<sup>688</sup> Ibid.

In *The Silent Army*, the victimised character, Abu, is consolidated into the “demonization of the African perpetrator, a tyrant figure whose actions alone are represented as legally responsible for the decimation of local populations and are cast against the backdrop of the resource-rich and endemically violent ‘Africa’ of the international imagination.”<sup>689</sup>

Through the ‘systematic elision of the root causes propelling violence, international criminal law finds a concrete *Other*: a singular perpetrator - a commander directing mass violence, a warlord - whose agency can be severed only through external judiciaries, and whose acts of violence are re-contextualized within a new political and moral economy based on victims’ justice.’<sup>690</sup>

Sterling writes that the popular interpretation of the preference for child soldiers, as Honwana also suggests, is that children are better at soldiering because they are more susceptible to ideological conditioning.<sup>691</sup>

‘They are easier to manipulate and control; they are readily programmed to feel little fear in combat or revulsion at atrocious acts; and they can simply be made to think of war and only war. Their abductors and [rebel] commanders believe that children possess excessive energy so that, once trained, they carry out brutal attacks with greater enthusiasm than adults.’<sup>692</sup>

Sterling further notes that scenes, like the one in *The Silent Army* where the newly abducted children finally reach General Obeke’s command post deep in the jungle when he addresses the children by saying: ‘Comrades in arms. You have chosen to fight... You have joined more than an army; you have joined a family... You can call me daddy from now on...’<sup>693</sup>

Scenes like the aforementioned are obviously geared to manipulation and the ‘deceptive simple repetition of the call and response becomes a deliberate form of brainwashing that allows both the words and the intensity of their delivery to reverberate and become imbedded in to psyche of the

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<sup>689</sup> K. M. Clarke, "The Rule of Law through its Economies of Appearances: The Making of the African Warlord," *Indiana Journal of Global Legal Studies* 18, no. 1 (2011), 11-12.

<sup>690</sup> Clarke, *The Rule of Law through its Economies of Appearances: The Making of the African Warlord*, 11-12.

<sup>691</sup> Sterling, *Visions of War, Testaments of Peace: The “Burden” of Sierra Leone*, 211.

<sup>692</sup> A. Honwana, *Child Soldiers in Africa* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 44.

<sup>693</sup> Van Der Velde, *The Silent Army*, [00”19”05”]

children.<sup>694</sup> In *The Silent Army*, then, the mise-en-scène also extends an understanding of the 'patrimonialism fostered in the relationships between the children and the adult soldiers, for the commander becomes simultaneously teacher, father, protector of the children, and, as in any deviant relationship, their abuser.'<sup>695</sup>

Once initiated and trained to be part of the rebel group, similar to the narrative of the film, *Johnny Mad Dog*, these young soldiers in *The Silent Army*, take on so-called combat names like Abu's name, Captain Lion, which Abu and his co-child soldiers also make their own and absorb entirely – they for all intents and purposes become those ruthless fighters to which their combat names allude. For example, when Eduard asks General Obeke if Abu can be freed, General Obeke denies that there is any 'soldier' by that name under his command, and during a parade in front of Eduard, when asked what their names were all the children gave their combat names – ignoring and denouncing their birth names / heritage. This can be viewed a psychological break and a coping mechanism for these young combatants, for then they detach themselves emotionally from the atrocities they are forced to commit during.

In conclusion, as one reviewer, Boyd van Hoeij, writes in *Variety Magazine*, *The Silent Army*, tells the 'tale of an African child soldier rescued by a brave white man' and the film's narrative becomes indicative of the tropes of ethnographic spectacle, white man's burden and redemption.<sup>696</sup> This Afro-pessimistic outlook - of Africa as consistently being in a state of needing to be saved and the West is the only agent able to broker peace, reason and stability - is brought to life in scenes of *The Silent Army*.

For example, when Eduard finally reaches the rebel camp and enters into conversation with the General Obeke, he tries to reason with him to free Abu and the other child soldiers by saying: 'Your army is full of children – it does not make you look good in the rest of the world... Do not bring children into war...' Upon which General Obeke replies: 'Learn you history. Black children grow-up faster than white children... You know why? Because we die earlier... There are no boys here. Only men. There are no rebels here. Only soldiers.'<sup>697</sup>

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<sup>694</sup> Sterling, *Visions of War, Testaments of Peace: The "Burden" of Sierra Leone*, 211.

<sup>695</sup> Ibid.

<sup>696</sup> Van Hoeij, "Review: 'The Silent Army,'" 1.

<sup>697</sup> Van Der Velde, *The Silent Army*, [(01"12"40); (01"16"50 - 01"17"00)]

### 5.1.3. Human Resilience and Magic Realism in *War Witch*

'One theme that emerged [during the shooting] was human resiliency in a postmodern world, a deconstructed world. In our Western world, there are fences which prevent us from seeing this post-modernity.'<sup>698</sup>

- Kim Nguyen

The 2012 film, *War Witch*, directed by Kim Nguyen, contains many of the 'characteristic traits' of a tragic (cinematic) child soldier narrative. As one reviewer writes, *War Witch* [similar to other films about child soldiering in Africa] portrays Africa's child soldiers as 'lost boys and girls who are snatched from their villages and transformed into vacant-eyed merchants of death. These *gun-toting ghosts* have no ability to grasp the reasons behind the wars they are forced to fight, much less come to terms with the atrocities they commit, so they sleepwalk through it all and do as ordered.'<sup>699</sup> However, Nguyen succeeds in turning the table on its head by successfully challenging these Afro-pessimistic representations of Africa's child soldiers that persist in the minds of audiences.

Nguyen gained inspiration and began his research and writing of the *War Witch* screenplay after reading a news story about child soldiers. His idea, he says, 'was to depict how human resilience can overcome the tragedies of war. Though violence and brutality overshadow most of the film, the theme of resilience stubbornly shines through in rare moments, like in the courtship of the two young lovers, or in interactions with kind strangers.'<sup>700</sup>

Shot entirely in the Congo but set in an unnamed sub-Saharan country, the opening scene of *War Witch*, is a voiceover, delivered by the 14-year-old protagonist - a girl named Komona. In this voiceover, she tells her life's story to her unborn child. She tells how rebels kidnapped her from her village when she was only 12.

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<sup>698</sup> A-C Loranger, "Director Kim Nguyen on *War Witch*," *Filmmaker Magazine - A Magazine of Independent Film*, 17 May, 2012, 1. (Accessed 24 July, 2013)

<sup>699</sup> M. Scott, "*War Witch* Movie Review: Searing Drama is Example of Cinema at its most Vital," *NOLA.Com - the Times Picayune*, sec. Entertainment, 28 March, 2013. (Accessed 25 July, 2013)

<sup>700</sup> A. Temkar, "Life during Wartime: *War Witch* Weaves Engrossing, Grotesque Tale of Child Soldiers in Africa," *Monterey County Weekly*, 21 March, 2013, 1. (Accessed 24 July, 2013)

She tells how they forced her to gun down her parents after giving her a gun. This dramatic turn of events, almost instantly made Komona a murderer, an orphan and a child soldier.<sup>701</sup> The film's title (*War Witch*) is derived from a name given to Komona by the rebels, who come to see her 'as a sage on the battlefield after the ghosts warn her of an ambush. What tactical advantage she provides is not all that clear, but there is no doubt the rebels believe in her power. Moreover, the entire culture believes in witchcraft to such a degree that it forces us to see items of industrial culture - like machine guns - differently.<sup>702</sup>

According to the New York Times, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is a personification of ground zero where there is endless carnage and unspeakable atrocities.<sup>703</sup> However, the only references to the issues of this specific war are fleeting mentions (during Komona's narration) of coltan, which is short for *columbite-tantalite* - a black, metallic ore used in cell-phones. The DRC produces more than 60% of the world's supply and is the site of a so-called 'coltan gold rush'.<sup>704</sup>

However, due to the fact that film's narrative is driven by the intermittent off-screen voiceovers of Komona - *War Witch* barely acknowledges the social, political and economic factors that gave rise to the civil (and international unrest). For example, the combatants (both young and old) are identified only as either being part of the government or the rebel forces, with the villagers / civil communities caught-up in this endless circle of war.<sup>705</sup>

The director actively contends that he purposefully did not 'name' a specific African country as the setting for his film. It is not the Congo's reality, he said, but rather a horrific socio-political injustice faced by young children across borders in Africa.

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<sup>701</sup> Scott, *War Witch Movie Review: Searing Drama is Example of Cinema at its most Vital*, 1.

<sup>702</sup> J. Sharp, "Movie Blog: *War Witch*, Metamorphosis of a Child Soldier," *CBS Minnesota*, 22 March, 2013, 1. (Accessed 25 July 2013)

<sup>703</sup> S. Holden, "*War Witch* Review: Atrocities, through a Child's Eyes," *The New York Times*, sec. Arts, 28 February, 2013. (Accessed 25 July, 2013)

<sup>704</sup> Ibid.

<sup>705</sup> Holden, "*War Witch* Review: Atrocities, through a Child's Eyes."

Nguyen divides the film into three parts: In the first act viewers get a glimpse of Komona's new life as a young rebel fighter, and also how she comes to be known as a war witch, possessing mysterious powers making her valuable to the rebel leader. She refrains from arguing with this perception of her being a war witch, because she realised that ultimately these *powers* will ensure her relative safety and survival.<sup>706</sup>

This, however, becomes a very ironic situation because for young child soldiers, apart from being rejected by their communities due to wartime atrocities they were forced to commit, in many African cultures children who are accused of witchcraft are even more so stigmatised and ostracised by their families and communities, and are unable to be successfully rehabilitated and reintegrated. Consequently, it becomes clear that even with Komona enjoying a degree of protection from the rebels as a result of this, the rebels succeed in exploiting this 'double stigmatisation' of Komona as both a child soldier and a war witch, in the film to their own advantage to keep young children like Komona from returning to their communities.

In the second act, Komona is now age 13, and she finds love with another young child soldier - a 15-year-old boy named Magicien - whom she later also marries. Here audiences are confronted with a sense of humanity that yearns to break free of the shackles of oppression and conflict. When she is with him, one sees her smiling, laughing and in those moments, this young overwrought warrior is, suddenly, a little girl again.<sup>707</sup>

The third act brings an end to Komona and Magicien's happiness, and finds 14-year-old Komona raped by the rebel commander. Now also pregnant, she dreams of better future, but doubts if that will be possible after everything she has been through and everything she has done as a child soldier - telling her unborn child: 'Each day, I pray to God to help me so I don't hate you...'<sup>708</sup>

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<sup>706</sup> M. MacDonald, "Review: *War Witch* - Odyssey of a Child Soldier." *The Seattle Times*, sec. Movies, 14 March, 2013. (Accessed 30 July, 2013)

<sup>707</sup> MacDonald, "Review: *War Witch* - Odyssey of a Child Soldier."

<sup>708</sup> Nguyen, *War Witch*, [01"17"50"]

Gifted with these ghostly visions, she is, however, extremely traumatised, troubled and haunted by the memory of her murdered parents and struggles with the idea of returning to her village to lay them to rest. Thus, by blending magical realism with the harsh realities of conflict, *War Witch* shows the appalling conditions some children (especially child soldiers) face and are forced to survive in around the world. There are scenes of this film that set the experience of the characters outside of the viewers' realities. Within the film, as one reviewer noted, 'the idea of magic is repeated and the film never dwells on the question of whether it is reality or not. It [forms] part of Komona's reality and that is all that matters. Witchcraft is used as a political tool for power, by having the warlord focus on witches as a key to his sustained victory.'<sup>709</sup>

Nguyen, in an interview with Anne-Christine Loranger, correspondingly stated that from his experiences during his time in the DRC, he noticed that:

'Magic is omnipresent in Kinshasa, in the Democratic Republic of Congo. It is very surprising for us Westerners. I do not want to generalise Africa but of what I saw of the DRC, there is an omnipresent, daily interaction with magic, with spirituality. It has its good sides and its bad sides. There's also a part of manipulation. Politics is much influenced by magic. It's a way of handling crowds.'<sup>710</sup>

As mentioned, Komona is set apart from the other young children forced into the rebel militia because of her eerie and ghostlike visions. The rebel leader, Great Tiger, considers her a war witch and this gives her an elevated status of protection within the rebellion, but this does little to keep her safe at all times because she becomes a weapon of war herself as the rebels rely on her to spot government soldiers hiding nearby.

For example, in the scene where Magicien tells stories to the other child-soldiers, the film's narrative then also highlights the links between storytelling and magic, and connects both these means of propaganda to the political warlord's political aims.<sup>711</sup> It can thus be argued that the themes of magic help audience members to build a world that lives outside of their own reality in order to identify, and sympathise with the characters and their life's journey.

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<sup>709</sup> Blog: Pile O'words - A Regina Film Journey, 14 October, 2012, <http://mwilmink.wordpress.com/2012/10/14/118/>. (Accessed 30 July, 2013)

<sup>710</sup> Loranger, "Director Kim Nguyen on *War Witch*," 1.

<sup>711</sup> Wilmlink, "The Calgary International Film Festival - *Rebelle*," 1.

Also, Melanie Wilmink writes that 'within the film itself, the soldiers use drugs and magic to reach a place where they are distanced from the trauma of their every-day, and the film implicitly does the same for the audience. Although the storytelling and the ideas of witchcraft as a tool for power are also a part of [Western] reality, they are likely treated as a more abstract concept, and by Western standards, are rarely considered to have a direct impact on the world around us. It is interesting to see this film subtly blend the notions of witchcraft and storytelling together, to make a point about the power we have over the way we see and engage with the world around us.'<sup>712</sup>

According to Stephen Slemon, the term *magic realism* 'is an oxymoron, one that suggests a binary opposition between the representational code of realism and that, roughly, of fantasy.'<sup>713</sup> He writes that:

'In the language of narration in a magic realist text, a battle between two oppositional systems takes place, each working toward the creation of a different kind of fictional world from the other. Since the ground rules of these two worlds are incompatible, neither one can fully come into being, and each remains suspended, locked in a continuous dialectic with the *other*, a situation which creates disjunction within each of the separate discursive systems, rending them with gaps, absences, and silences.'<sup>714</sup>

Consequently, for Komona, her two worlds can never fuse / become one living reality for her. After her abduction she comes to reside in two worlds – one, her horrific life with the war rebels, and two, one she cannot seem to forget / move on from - the death of her parents and destruction of her village. Komona is haunted by spirits / ghost from her past which are represented by restless, wandering, mute, and dead-ridden characters covered in white dust or paint. Sharp writes that 'as we [the audience] watch the ghosts haunt battlefields and tree canopies, [as Jonathon Sharp writes], they appear both harrowing and beautiful [at the same time]. To Komona, they offer purpose, or the promise of it. To us, they seem to be incarnations of war's invisible injuries.'<sup>715</sup>

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<sup>712</sup> Wilmink, "The Calgary International Film Festival - *Rebelle*," 1.

<sup>713</sup> Slemon, *Magic Realism as Postcolonial Discourse*, 10-11.

<sup>714</sup> Ibid.

<sup>715</sup> Sharp, "Movie Blog: *War Witch*, Metamorphosis of a Child Soldier," 1.

Nguyen, asked in an online interview about what inspired the idea of the ghosts that Komona sees, replied the following:

“One of the problems [of shooting this] was how one testifies on the screen to the state of mind of these children. I saw films which were *objective*. But their story was written in the third person, they did not give the perspective of the child soldier. I wanted to make a film which talked from the point of view of the ‘I’, even if formally that will be stylized at certain times. For example, when the child soldiers kills, there is a whole system operated by the commanders, the armies of rebels, to soften the violence, to make it acceptable and even ‘satisfying.’ I decided to represent that by the fact that the people whom these children kill die, but one never sees them dying with the red blood rushing on the ground. We see ghosts.”<sup>716</sup>

Robert Kroetsch and Linda Kenyon observe that “*magic realism* as a literary practice seems to be closely linked with a perception of ‘living on the margins,’ encoding within it, perhaps, a concept of resistance to the massive imperial centre and its totalizing systems.”<sup>717</sup> The established systems of generic classification are themselves, according to Slemon, examples of these ‘centralized totalizing systems, for they have been constructed through readings of texts almost exclusively of European or United States provenance.’<sup>718</sup>

The use of the ‘concept of magic realism, then, can itself signify resistance to central assimilation by more stable generic systems and more monumental theories of literary practice, a way of suggesting that there is something in the nature of the literature it identifies that confounds the capacities of the major genre systems to come to terms with it.’<sup>719</sup>

Magic realism in the film *War Witch* then, becomes a tool in the quest to actively challenge audiences to seek new understandings and to change their receptions of the complex phenomenon of child soldiers in Africa - what they endure, the realities they face and more importantly how their stories are narrated.

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<sup>716</sup> Loranger, "Director Kim Nguyen on *War Witch*," 1.

<sup>717</sup> Slemon, *Magic Realism as Postcolonial Discourse*, 10.

<sup>718</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>719</sup> *Ibid.*

The narrative of Komona and Magicien's love-story carries with it a strong message of resilience, determination to survive and hope for the future. Asked in an interview why he chose to show a story of love between two child soldiers, and whether this kind of narrative is at all possible when one of them had committed war atrocities, *War Witch* director, Kim Nguyen answered that:

'That's the point of view that I chose. The public can, of course, question it. What I found out in my research is that there is a so-called bipolarity within the child soldier. His familial bonds are killed so that he is rejected by his roots. One makes him commit horrible acts to that effect. But they remain children. Often for these child soldiers who live years in armies of rebels, the moment of rupture, the initial cataclysm is often a place where emotional maturity remains. Either they inwardly shut down or they play football with friends and the attachment to the friends remains. There is a distance with those that they kill but the close friends stay. But at the same time, because they have a Kalashnikov they could kill their friends without additional justification.'<sup>720</sup>

Arvin Temkar argues that what makes the film so unsettling in its depiction of 'violence – and the fact that the characters are child soldiers – is also [ultimately] what makes those soft-hearted moments, as subtle and sparse as they are, deeply powerful. The child cannot simply be reduced to soldier. The innocence, though shattered, is not completely exhausted.'<sup>721</sup>

Once audience acknowledges the aforementioned polarity and complexity that resides within each young child combatant, there is a strange sort of empathy awakened within audience members when the narrative invites them to connect with these child soldiers and young lovers. However, this is difficult to do. 'The [intimate moments shared by] Komona and Magicien are among the most powerful, a gritty look at the blurred boundary between childhood and the too-soon responsibilities of adulthood.'<sup>722</sup>

As one observer noted, it is never made clear to audience members whether Komona's ghostly visions are 'real or caused by hallucinogens, nor is it necessary to her young mind, as the real and unreal intermix the nightmare of her captivity.'<sup>723</sup>

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<sup>720</sup> Loranger, "Director Kim Nguyen on *War Witch*," 1.

<sup>721</sup> Temkar, "Life during Wartime: *War Witch* Weaves Engrossing, Grotesque Tale of Child Soldiers in Africa," 1.

<sup>722</sup> Ibid.

<sup>723</sup> J. R. Hammerer, "*War Witch* Portrays Haunting Exploration of Child Soldiering in Africa," *Washington Square News*, sec. Arts, 26 February, 2013. (Accessed 3 August, 2013)

In another gripping scene when she narrates her journey to her unborn child, Komona says that:

'I don't know how long I stayed at The Butcher's. It feels like time stopped. Every night my nightmares tell me to go back and bury my parents, but you force me to stay here at The Butcher's, even if I have to bury my parents before you come out of my belly, or else the evil spirits will punish you for all the bad things that I have done, just like they punished my husband the magician because I married him before I buried my father and my mother...'<sup>724</sup>

The final journey Komona needs to undertake to find inner peace is one that will put the ghosts of her parents to rest, and is indicative of a true heroine's journey and carries with it and resembles the purity of an ancient myth that to find peace and show some kind of remorse one must pay final respect to those who passed-on – especially her parents.<sup>725</sup>

To conclude, *War Witch*, then, is not only a harrowing journey of a young girl into a heart of darkness, her survival, and resilience, but it is also 'a subtle map towards some kind of transcendence.'<sup>726</sup> Nguyen commented on his film that he '[hoped] that if tears [were] shed, [that] they'll be accompanied not by a feeling of pity, but by a summoning of courage within ourselves to bring one of the globe's worst human rights abuses to the forefront.'<sup>727</sup> He states in an interview that:

'We're kind of nihilistic about Sub-Saharan Africa right now,' and 'what I've seen through these tragedies is a tremendous sense of resilience [which is something] that we've lost with our comfort.'<sup>728</sup>

*War Witch* aims (and also succeeds) to push audiences out of their comfort zones - it challenges viewers in terms of their Afro-pessimistic beliefs about Africa and then especially its child soldiers, while still managing to capture their sympathy with and compassion for the Komona, Magicien and the other child soldiers in the film.

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<sup>724</sup> Nguyen, *War Witch*, [01"14"54" - 01"15"23"]

<sup>725</sup> Hammerer, "*War Witch* Portrays Haunting Exploration of Child Soldiering in Africa," 1.

<sup>726</sup> Ibid.

<sup>727</sup> S. Saito, "*War Witch* Takes Aim at Child Soldiering and Oscar," *Take Apart (Digital Division: Participant Media)*, 20 December, 2012, 1. (Accessed 3 August 2013)

<sup>728</sup> Ibid.

Komona's 'inextinguishable inner resolve and resilience is crucial to her survival, as is the belief of the rebel soldiers - adopted when she emerges unscathed by a hail of bullets during her training - that Komona has been blessed with magical powers.'<sup>729</sup>

In *War Witch*, the child soldiers drink 'magic milk' - a very powerful and hallucinogenic drug / remedy that keeps them in an ethereal haze - to enable them carry out the horrific raids, killings and other atrocities they are ordered to do.

When Komona drinks this substance, her late parents visit her as white ghosts with cloudy eyes, not only to protect and guard over her, but also to plead with her to return home to give them a proper burial.<sup>730</sup>

In yet another interview with Jean Trinh, Nguyen states the following:

'I wanted it to be told in the point of view of the reality by this girl's twisted past—the way she was indoctrinated, the way she has her own beliefs, and how she's influenced by drugs. [And] paradoxically, this film is more subjective in that it provides a reality bended by this person's psyche, making it more objective in a psychological state of the character.'<sup>731</sup>

By narrating the film through Komona's individual struggles and journey as a (girl) child soldier, Nguyen aimed and hoped to succeed in producing a non-judgmental gaze at the lives of the *Other* in the film. This is due to the fact that Nguyen strongly feels that there exists great differences and complexities between notions of good and evil, [childhood and child soldiers] and [victims and perpetrators], and that these are far more multifarious than simply trying to distinguish between these 'categories' – especially in sub-Saharan Africa.

The rich characters of *War Witch*, who are ironically complex (as child soldiers) in their simplicity (as young children), are just some of the many elements that make this film uniquely thought-provoking and cinematic, highlighting the experience of living in country ravaged by war, and how that can alter a person's sense of humanity. Nguyen uses magic realism to tell this story - mixing the surreal with the real – in order to effectively tell the disheartening tale of child soldiers (and then in particular girl soldiers) in an African context.

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<sup>729</sup> Saito, "War Witch Takes Aim at Child Soldiering and Oscar," 1.

<sup>730</sup> J. Trinh, "War Witch Filmmaker Kim Nguyen on Africa's Child Soldiers," *The Newsweek Daily Beast*, 1 March, 2013, 1. (Accessed 3 August, 2013)

<sup>731</sup> Ibid.

With the open-ending of *War Witch*, Nguyen rightfully aims to challenge [Western] audiences' perceptions and expectations, and he states that audiences 'tend to have a sort of monolithic code about child soldiers but the trauma of these children, what they went through, their various personalities, is as vast as in the normal life. Some recover much better than others. Each child soldier is different. It's very complex.'<sup>732</sup>

This also then brings the notions of child soldiers as complex political victims and / or perpetrators to the table, and ultimately the preconceived, Western, Afro-pessimistic representations of African child soldiers are called into question and demands fresh perspectives. And, despite the harsh content in this poignant narrative, *War Witch* ultimately and undeniably succeeds in taking to screen an Afro-optimistic representation of Africa's conflict-stricken realities by touching upon aspects of the human spirit, resilience, hope in Komona's personal journey.

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<sup>732</sup> Loranger, "Director Kim Nguyen on *War Witch*," 1.

## FINAL CONCLUSIONS

'[Africans love to shoot machine guns.] We shoot our machine guns from trucks. We shoot our machine guns from boats. When we run out of bullets, we shoot rocket launchers... We are obsessed with violence... We hate smiling; smiling is stupid. We are fantastic role models... However, there is nothing more dangerous than a brave western protagonist... And one thing is for sure: A day without war is a day not worth living.'<sup>733</sup>

- *African Men, Hollywood Stereotypes*

Those who are already convinced that black Africans are a violent race of humans will not be surprised by what they see in the three case study films *The Silent Army*, *Ezra*, and *War Witch*. However, the present dissertation has challenged these preconceived perceptions of the child soldier as an international (cinematic) icon. Grossman's review of *A Long Way Gone* underscores the popular image of the child soldier. He writes that:

'The kid-at-arms has become a pop-cultural trope of late. He's in novels, movies, magazines and on TV, flaunting his Uzi like a giant foam hand at a baseball game. He's in the latest *James Bond* movie and *The Last King of Scotland* and is the key point of *Blood Diamond*.'<sup>734</sup>

Indeed, images of child soldiers appear widely across various media outlets and national boundaries. Consequently, these youth combatants have become tragic symbols for the continent of Africa - representing dire and complex issues.<sup>735</sup> This study has then explored the complex issue of the use of child soldiers as a technique of violence in civil war in Africa. In order to understand the complex socio-political situations that these children continue to find themselves in, as well as the highly complex ways in which these child combatants are represented in feature films, this study firstly looked at the cultural construction of the notion of childhood.

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<sup>733</sup> *African Men, Hollywood Stereotypes*, YouTube Video, directed by Joe Sabia (YouTube: MamaHope.org, 2012)

<sup>734</sup> Lynch, *Concerning Visual Representations of Child Soldiers in Sierra Leone*, 58-59.

<sup>735</sup> Ibid.

Shepler writes that, “when we in the West think about child soldiers, we tend to do so with our Western notions of what childhood is and should be. We think we know what ‘child’ means and we think we know what ‘soldier’ means, but these words mean something different than our expectations in the context of various conflicts around the world.”<sup>736</sup>

The differences between the three case study films ‘suggest particular patterns of acceptable representations of violence in Africa at different levels of cinematic production, consumption and reception. That is, in order to gain funding and engage a broad mainstream audience with its challenge to Western ignorance about the illegal weapon and diamond trade and child soldiers, *The Silent Army*, *Ezra* and *War Witch* engages familiar colonial narratives.’<sup>737</sup>

The three case study films all focus on the journey of one (or more) central protagonist(s) like Ezra (*Ezra*, 2007); Komona (*War Witch*, 2012); and Abu (*The Silent Army*, 2008) respectively. By personalising their struggles and journeys, these cinematic narratives draw its audiences in from an emotional point of view.<sup>738</sup> These poignant representations and subsequent *emotive* associations ultimately allows the audience to sympathise with the protagonist’s journey on not only an emotional level, but it also draws ‘the audience into the reading of the text, and thereby promotes a very specific understanding’ of the phenomenon of child soldiering in Africa.<sup>739</sup>

This dissertation succeeded in addressing a variety of issues, for example, firstly, by establishing the significance of Afro-pessimistic / Afro-optimistic on-screen portrayals of African child soldiers to Western audiences, and also in identifying how are these films are Afro-pessimistic / Afro-optimistic in nature. And secondly, the dissertation explored how the notions of complex political victims / perpetrators, ethnographical spectacle, *othering*, compassion fatigue and magic realism act as modalities of thinking of, and engaging with, the phenomenon of child soldiering in Africa (particularly then on the silver screen).

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<sup>736</sup> S. Shepler, "The Social and Cultural Context of Child Soldiering in Sierra Leone" (Oslo, 20 - 21 August, 2004).

<sup>737</sup> Duncanson and McMillan, *This is Africa': Filmic Negotiations of Crime, Justice and Global Responsibility*, 5.

<sup>738</sup> Sakota-Kokot, *My War, Your War: Understanding Conflict in Africa and the Middle East through Fiction Film: Hotel Rwanda and the Kingdom*, 213.

<sup>739</sup> Ibid.

Maureen Moynach, in writing on the value of reading memoirs as well as novels about child soldiers, states that:

'In narrating the war-machine from inside, whether as activist or as *pícaro*, the (former) child soldier also rights / writes wrongs, holding out the promise of a more human/e vision of globality. In emphasising the interrupted development of the child soldier, the memoirs and novels foreground the crisis for human personhood that necropolitics represent. Emblematic not only of inhuman conditions but inhuman behaviour, the child soldier nonetheless invites sympathy as a figure who is as much wronged as doing wrong. In extending our sympathy, we readers lay claim to a common humanity belied by the very structures that produce these narratives, riven as they are by the global inequalities that sustain necropolitical formations.'

Moynach's statement can be relayed to the visual representations of child soldiers and the effect that these specific portrayals of Africa's child soldiers have on the viewers' understanding of this horrific reality unknown to them. '[Visual] African trauma narratives, [according to Evi Anthonissen], often deal with scandalous situations [like child soldiering] that are still continuing [to ravage the continent]. They want to encourage their [audiences] and to participate in social action, but the [viewers], of course, first need to understand these traumatic experiences before they will act.'

Although the outrageously popular and even literary currency of these accumulating [cinematic] narratives might well, as Alexandra Schultheis has noted, derive from the fact that the "terms defining the relationship between humanitarian and 'victim' depend on global structural inequalities, masked by a discourse of universalized childhood, their very purveyance also traces a well-nigh paradigmatic historical trajectory of the 'once upon a time'-genre: Once there were children, then they became soldiers, now, please, if you will, just bring back the children. But where will they go, these disarmed and conflict-scarred youth?"

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<sup>740</sup> Moynagh, *Human Rights, Child-Soldier Narratives, and the Problem of Form.*, 54.

<sup>741</sup> Anthonissen, *Representing the Trauma of Child Soldiers: Ishmael Beah's A Long Way Gone and Uzodinma Iweala's Beasts of no Nation*, 81.

<sup>742</sup> B. Harlow, "Child and / Or Soldier?: From Resistance Movements to Human Rights Regiments," *CR: The New Centennial Review* 10, no. 1 (2010), 196.

And so, in accordance with Dovey's argument on film theory (pertaining to Africa in particular) it has been shown during the current research and analyses of various case studies that there are vastly different ways in which violence is represented on cinematic screens. It also became clear that by dealing with violence in certain ways filmmakers are participating in the larger project of understanding and aiming to work against continuing violence / conflict situation on the African continent. Consequently they succeed in problematizing representations of Africa as being inherently violent.<sup>743</sup>

Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois writes on *violence* that:

'Violence is a slippery concept -- nonlinear, productive, destructive, and reproductive. ... Violence can never be understood solely in terms of its physicality -- force, assault, or the infliction of pain -- alone. Violence also includes assaults on the personhood, dignity, sense of worth or value of the victim. The social and cultural dimensions of violence are what gives violence its power and meaning.'<sup>744</sup>

During this study, however, the term *violence* has been narrowed down to only focus on child soldiers and the realities that they live during times of conflict and how their realities are represented on cinematic screens. Singer and Dovey write that:

'In most contemporary Western societies, childhood is defined as covering the [entire] period from birth until eighteen years of age, and is widely seen as a stage of innocence, vulnerability and pre-existence to adulthood.'<sup>745</sup>

Although all three of the case study films deal with the topic of child soldiers, their individual approach to this subject and their description of this traumatic experience is rather different.<sup>746</sup> In the discussion of the three case study films, it has been illustrated, that 'the boundaries between childhood and adulthood are typically less clearly drawn in many African societies [both in times of peace and conflict [...]]

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<sup>743</sup> L. Dovey, *African Film and Literature: Adapting Violence to the Screen*. Columbia University Press, 2009), xiv.

<sup>744</sup> N. Scheper-Hughes and P. Bourgois, "Introduction: Making Sense of Violence," in *Violence in War and Peace: An Anthology*, eds. N. Scheper-Hughes and P. Bourgois (Malden, USA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2004), 1.

<sup>745</sup> Singer and Dovey, *Representations of African Childhood in Conflict and Post-Conflict Contexts: Johnny Mad Dog, Ezra, and Sleepwalking Land*, 167.

<sup>746</sup> Anthonissen, *Representing the Trauma of Child Soldiers: Ishmael Beah's A Long Way Gone and Uzodinma Iweala's Beasts of no Nation*, 82.

[...] In numerous African societies and cultures, children are from a very early age entrusted with various responsibilities, and are at times expected to contribute to the household and livelihood of their [extended] families - rather than a certain age defining the end of childhood and the beginning of adulthood, initiation rites into womanhood and manhood, or marriage, or the accessing of employment may mark this transition in African cultures.<sup>747</sup> As Singer and Dovey point out, 'any attempt to express these cultural differences in relation to age and maturity consequently needs to embrace an alternative understanding of childhood.'<sup>748</sup>

Scholars from the school of thought, the *New Sociology of Childhood*, correctly defines childhood as 'a discursive and fluid concept [that is] contingent upon socio-economic context(s) and distinct across different cultures and societies [across the world, and then in particular in Africa.]'<sup>749</sup> The *New Sociology of Childhood*, 'challenges universalising Western perceptions of childhood – arguing that notions of what it means to be a child [in Africa] are often culturally entrenched and cannot be blindly accepted.'<sup>750</sup> However, when it comes to the debate about childhood and African conflicts, there are certain undeniable realities and truths that cannot be swept under the proverbial carpet.

During times of war, the atrocities children endure and witness at first-hand, disrupt them developmentally in their most important formative years. As their families are broken up and larger social institutions cease to function, these children are denied lasting relationships of affection as well as stable ground upon which to develop in physical, intellectual, and moral terms.

Under such conditions, Garbarino et al. argue that, 'children may be socialised into a model of fear, violence and hatred.'<sup>751</sup> Because the scars of '[battle and extreme psychological trauma]' are borne by these children for the rest of their lives, it is argued, these children come to constitute a so-called *lost generation*.<sup>752</sup>

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<sup>747</sup> Singer and Dovey, *Representations of African Childhood in Conflict and Post-Conflict Contexts: Johnny Mad Dog, Ezra, and Sleepwalking Land*, 167.

<sup>748</sup> Ibid.

<sup>749</sup> Ibid.

<sup>750</sup> Ibid.

<sup>751</sup> H. G. West, "Girls with Guns: Narrating the Experience of War of Frelimo's Female Detachment", *Anthropological Quarterly* 73, no. 4 (2000), 180.

<sup>752</sup> Ibid.

Writing on the Special Court for Sierra Leone (SCSL), Clarke writes that:

'In the [SCSL] court transcripts, the force of law is made real through the figure of the victim - a victim to be saved by the rule of law, a victim around whom collective guilt is made visible and reassigned to those seen as bearing the most responsibility for mass atrocity. African victims are central to the processes of international intervention, but not to the prescribed resolutions. Rather, the figure of the victim exists as a necessary precondition for imagining the legitimacy of the international reach of the SCSL. The imagery with which this figure collaborates is that of the third-world sufferer - the indigent individual, the defenceless child soldier forced to bear arms, the raped or violated concubine, the (African, Christian, Muslim, Jewish) refugee, or the internally displaced. African victimhood is crucial for constructing a moral obligation to punish the perpetrator in charge.'<sup>753</sup>

Moreover, as Clarke argues, as a result of this fixated gaze on the child soldier as *perpetrator*, the cycles of commodity chains are rendered insignificant. The possible ellipsis is the often violent processes of producing what I refer to elsewhere as 'a fiction of justice - the creation and codification of a regime of truth that concerns itself with only some crimes and that celebrates the achievement of punishment and its symbolic potential to deter future crimes, rather than addressing some of the contests at the heart of violent struggles.'<sup>754</sup>

The SLTRC tribunal has then, as can be seen in *Ezra*, used these newly emergent subject forms of child soldier, victim, perpetrator, and warlord, to change and create the spaces for complex political victim (and complex political perpetrators) to reach full recovery and getting them onto the road of rehabilitation. Thus, as Clarke further argues, this 'recuperation, like highlighting the actions of insurgents, relocates agency from the state to inter- or supranational agents who, in sub-Saharan African contexts, set new terms for the management of violence.'<sup>755</sup>

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<sup>753</sup> Clarke, *The Rule of Law through its Economies of Appearances: The Making of the African Warlord*, 13.

<sup>754</sup> Ibid.

<sup>755</sup> Ibid.

It can then be argued that the roles of victim and perpetrator are not necessarily mutually exclusive and have in recent years become a somewhat grey area when discussing African child soldiers. In the stereotypical / Afro-pessimistic scenario, portrayed in both the writings on and visual representations of children and war in various locations around the globe (and then in particular in Africa), children are conscripted to serve guerrilla insurgencies and, sometimes, state militaries well below the age of eighteen. After a brief, but extensive training (and indoctrination) period, the loyalty of new recruits is often tested through compelling them to commit atrocities, sometimes against former neighbours and even members of their own family.<sup>756</sup>

West argues that:

‘These children are overtaken by a sense that they no longer have a home and a family to which they might return someday. State militaries and guerrilla armies are often successful in driving [an almost permanent and irrevocable] wedge between new conscripts and their communities of origin, producing for societal consumption an image of these young people as in-sensate killing machines. But many who have worked with ex-child soldiers in a post-war context have reported that they suffer long-term remorse and guilt for such deeds, even when carried out under compulsion.’<sup>757</sup>

The general Afro-pessimistic assumption in the literature, as well as visual representations of children caught-up in the grips of war, especially their active participation in it, is that it ‘gives rise to a future generation of adults for whom violence is a part of everyday life. West writes that “today's victims reproduce the ‘trauma’ they have experienced, giving rise tomorrow to cycles of recurring violence. If this is true, it does not bode well for Africa, a continent in which so many of today's population are young people who have experienced violence at first hand.”<sup>758</sup> Recently, however, the assumption that young people are irrevocably scarred by violence has been challenged. Sara Gibbs, for example, has suggested that the application of Western notions of ‘innocent’ and ‘vulnerable’ youth to contexts of violence elsewhere can be misleading. Among the Mozambicans of Milange, Zambesia, with whom she conducted research after the end of the Mozambican Civil War (1977-1992), youth were seen, and saw

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<sup>756</sup> West, *Girls with Guns: Narrating the Experience of War of Frelimo's Female Detachment*, 180.

<sup>757</sup> Ibid.

<sup>758</sup> Ibid.

themselves, not as more vulnerable but, rather, as more resilient than other social groups in coping with the impact of war.<sup>759</sup>

This can be seen in two of the case study films, *Ezra* and *War Witch*, as well as in another film *Heart of Fire* where the young Awet and her sister vow to return to Eritrea once peace is brokered and it is safe for them and their families to return. In both *Ezra* and *War Witch* audiences are confronted with resilient and strong-willed child soldier characters that are determined to survive. However, it must be noted that the three case study films differ in their depiction of firstly, childhood in Africa; secondly, child soldiers (victim versus perpetrator) and thirdly; in their discussion of the future of these former child soldiers and the possibility of redemption.

Evans and Glenn conclude their article, '*TIA – This is Africa*': *Afro-pessimism in 21<sup>st</sup> Century Narrative Film* by correctly noting that 'the first crop of 21<sup>st</sup> century films about Africa display a fresh earnestness in their approach to the continent, and try hard (although not always successfully) to shuffle the stereotypes of earlier filmic offerings. This is particularly evident in the attention paid to realist detail, in turn influenced by photojournalism and the growth of mass media.'<sup>760</sup> According to them what comes to light is a 'new set of stereotypes and commonalities – the emblematic child soldier, the corrupt official, the meddling multi-national and the sacrificial white do-gooder' – which are intriguing in laying bare the tension(s) within western schools of thought about the African continent and its people.<sup>761</sup>

These include seemingly contradictory elements: 'the appreciation of the West's complicity in Africa's problems is, for instance, coupled with impatience over the continued failures of the independent African state; the approach to African violence and poverty is visually and realistically detailed but lacks explanatory power...'<sup>762</sup>

And so, the 'Afro-pessimist TIA mantra - a sardonic response to African apathy and brutality - rings especially true with audiences, and the abbreviation has become part of popular [international media] discourse dealing with African [conflict situations].

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<sup>759</sup> West, *Girls with Guns: Narrating the Experience of War of Frelimo's Female Detachment*, 180-181.

<sup>760</sup> Evans and Glenn, "*TIA - This is Africa*": *Afro-pessimism in Twenty-First-Century Narrative Film*, 19.

<sup>761</sup> Ibid.

<sup>762</sup> Ibid.

The problem, with especially films like *The Silent Army* and *War Witch*, where countries and villages and opposing factions are fictionalised, is that there is 'once again [a cinematic representation where] Africa's problems are not seen discretely...'<sup>763</sup>

Catarina Martins argues that the 'differences between child-soldier representations from the North and the South clearly show how a northern construction of Africa has replaced Africa and the Africans and made them non-existent on the other side of an invisible abyssal line. The moral and affective value invested in a portrait of the child-soldier built upon a western notion of childhood as fragility and innocence are instrumental in reinforcing this discourse and, in turn, legitimising imperial domination by the North over the South.'<sup>764</sup>

She further contends that 'the representations from the South are more ambiguous and leave many questions unsolved. However, in their wider variety and in their questioning of the neo-colonial stance of western stereotyped / [Afro-pessimistic] constructions, they are proof of the existence of a counter-hegemonic discourse that must be taken into account. It gives voice to different conceptions of children and their involvement in armed conflict, as well as of African societies and politics that have to be acknowledged as an important part of a resistant anti-colonialist African culture.'<sup>765</sup>

This study has found that both feature films and literature that deal with the issue of African child soldiers have the chance to offer insight into these individual's experiences and have the added political responsibility to educate others. As such, they also at times tend to reinforce a certain hegemonic discourse based on Western conceptions of childhood, and Afro-pessimistic modes of thinking and engaging with African conflict situations.

By diverging from mainstream representations of the child soldier the characters of Ezra, Abu, and Komona, offer new portrayals of both active child soldiers, as well as, ex-combatant. One who is not simply reduced to his / her status as a (former) child soldier. Instead, a multiplicity of identities is emphasised including that of soldier, but also that of brother, sister, lover, and citizen. These films are particularly useful in representing fragmented post-colonial realities in which traditional socially predetermined roles do not neatly exist.

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<sup>763</sup> Evans and Glenn, "*TIA - This is Africa*": *Afro-pessimism in Twenty-First-Century Narrative Film*, 19.

<sup>764</sup> Martins, *The Dangers of the Single Story: Child-Soldiers in Literary Fiction and Film*, 441.

<sup>765</sup> Ibid.

The personal cinematic representations of the journeys of Ezra, Komona, and Abu as child soldier's not only rehearse / mimic some aspects of child-soldiering, but it also elaborates at considerable and considered length on those circumstances, both ethnic, socio-political and personal, that have in some way always already implicated them in the violence that ravaged their communities and countries and displaced their families. And according to what Evans and Glenn argue, one can safely argue that:

'In film, the attempts to grapple with Africa also suffer from the limitations of genre and the pressures from industry, resulting in weaknesses which project an Afro-pessimistic outlook, but fail to portray the real challenges facing the continent, [in particular then the phenomenon of child soldiering].'<sup>766</sup>

To conclude, the present dissertation has shown how Afro-optimistic perceptions / gazes of an *Other* – in this case, Africa, its conflicts (and in particular its child soldiers) – to a great extent shape audience expectations and sustain specific Afro-pessimistic interpretations thereof by means of cinematic representations, styles and narrative structures. The roles the cinematic and photographic lens plays in the construction of difference are profound, according to Cheryl Sterling, and as she argues, it goes back to their use as ethnographic tools to document and represent an 'Other'.<sup>767</sup>

She writes that:

'When the visuality privileges Western culture, values [and audience perceptions and expectations], it often causes a derogatory [or Afro-pessimistic] gaze. The camera, as an extension of the imperial eye, becomes an instrument of power and control over the representations of the 'other', and that control is wrested back when those subjugated by the derisive lens create their own visuals and their own discourses.'<sup>768</sup>

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<sup>766</sup> Evans and Glenn, "*TIA - This is Africa*": *Afro-pessimism in Twenty-First-Century Narrative Film*, 19.

<sup>767</sup> Sterling, *Visions of War, Testaments of Peace: The "Burden" of Sierra Leone*, 221.

<sup>768</sup> Ibid.

Singer and Dovey then argue that in light of the aforementioned, both the international humanitarian community, as well as Western filmmakers, as a result, “need to go beyond Western psycho-therapy and universalising [Afro-pessimistic] notions of childhood and turn their attention [and cinematic gazes] to the potential of children’s agency [both when they are faced with adversity, and when building towards and ‘fighting for’ a better future] within the realms of conflict and child soldiering in Africa.”<sup>769</sup>

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<sup>769</sup> Singer and Dovey, *Representations of African Childhood in Conflict and Post-Conflict Contexts: Johnny Mad Dog, Ezra, and Sleepwalking Land*, 168.

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