

RE-INTEGRATING CHILD SOLDIERS IN AFRICA THROUGH PEACE EDUCATION

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Abstract

The phenomenon of child soldiering—the involvement of children in violent conflict and war—came into national, regional and global focus after the end of the Cold War. During violent conflicts, schools and healthcare facilities are the major targets in rural areas, towns and cities. Not all children are forcibly recruited but a good number of them who never saw the value of education voluntarily join armed groups as a survival strategy, believing that it would enable them acquire important life skills, a new identity, food and shelter. By the time the hostilities are brought to an end, these ex-combatants would have matured enough to decide what to do with their lives outside the bush. Nevertheless, children who had spent many years in the bush as child soldiers may find it difficult or impossible to go back to conventional systems of education to regain lost time and opportunities. This paper reviewed the literature on the education of former child soldiers in selected countries in Africa. The study adopted the Adult Learning theory premised on the Sustainable Development Goal 4 that underscores the need for promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all. It argued that introducing ex-child combatants as adult learners to Peace Education is appropriate because it seeks to address their particular needs, interests and experiences during and after hostilities. In the process of re-integration, former child soldiers would have the opportunity to tell their painful stories, learn from them and appreciate peace and peaceful co-existence as more rewarding alternatives to violence and war.

Keywords: Child soldiers, Violence, Peace Education, Re-integration

Introduction

The involvement of children in violent conflicts and wars came into national, regional and global focus after the end of the Cold War in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Akinrinade and Sesay, 1998). In many conflicts across the world, children, some as young as five years, are used to fight or to carry out other war-related errands such as spying, pottering and being decoys, among others, by all sides in the conflicts. As many as 120,000 children were believed to be carrying arms and fighting actively in wars (Wessells 1997). In Africa, child soldiers were/are used extensively in the following countries: Chad, Democratic Republic of Congo, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Sudan (North and South), Somalia, Uganda and Nigeria (by the Boko Haram insurgent group). Outside Africa, countries that are going through violent conflicts (Afghanistan, Myanmar, Iraq, Yemen and Syria) use children as

soldiers and fighters. It is important to stress that the recruitment of children for combat duties has continued although many countries are signatories to the continental Conventions and other Protocols on the Rights of the Child (UNRISD 1995).

However, a good number of such war children were not forcibly recruited. Many had volunteered to join the war as the only available option to secure income, food and safety (Vise-Lewis, Schwarz and Mupenda 2018). Given the protracted nature of intrastate conflicts, a peculiarly post-Cold War phenomenon, these 'little soldiers' would have reached the age of maturity as young adults by the time the armed conflict is resolved. For example, when the civil war in Sierra Leone began in 1991, a child recruited at the age of 12 would have reached the age of maturity (23) by the time the peace agreement was signed in 2002. Many of them would have also lost both parents and had nowhere to call home. Thus, several questions beg for answers in any discussion on child soldiering in Africa and other parts of the world. Why do children participate in wars and violent conflicts? What are the causes of child soldiering in Africa? What is the impact of war and brutal conflicts on child soldiers? How does the reintegration process take into account the aspirations of former child combatants? Many such questions have been widely discussed in the literature with regard to their return to school as part of the standard process of demilitarisation, demobilisation and reintegration (Betancourt et al. 2008, Sesay 2003, Wessells 2005, UNICEF 2007).

Numerous humanitarian organisations target children in war fronts and they are committed to protect, educate and stand up for the rights of children in war. Some of them including the UK-based 'War Child' and *Peace Direct* claim to give back to them the lost childhood and take them away from violence even though violence can be found everywhere. Even where the process of demilitarisation, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) has taken place, there is a dearth of scholarship about the kind of education that is appropriate for students that have spent many years in the bush. Central in this paper is the question as to whether former child soldiers that have reached adulthood should continue to be treated as innocent children during DDR and sent to conventional schools where they would recover the lost years of formal education (UN 2005). Exposition to violence predisposes people to develop more reactionary behaviours and less creative thinking. It is important therefore that child soldiers are introduced to peace education as a way of reminding them of the past, raising their awareness about the evils of wars and sensitising them to the need for maintaining peace in the society (Hinton 12). The study engages the literature on the reintegration of former child soldiers in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Democratic Republic of Congo. It adopts Knowles's theory of adult learning given that these young adults have developed special needs and interests stemming from critical experiences of violence and war over many years.

Conceptual discourse

Ascertaining who a child is and by implication, who a child soldier is, are conceptual and definitional quagmires, since there is no universally acceptable definition of a child soldier. This is partly because notions of 'child' and 'childhood' vary from culture to culture. In many African societies, for instance, a young person ceases to be a child if he or she has gone through certain culturally sanctioned rituals such as circumcision for male and female children, membership of certain age-groups, 'secret societies', or after killing certain types of animals. In Sierra Leone, for example, a young person ceases to be a child if he or she has successfully gone through certain rites and has been admitted into the "*Poro*" society for boys, or the "*Sande*" society for girls after going through circumcision ceremonies, which was very common prior to the global campaign against female genital mutilation. Among the Massai in East Africa, killing a lion with a spear or bow and arrow removes the hunter/killer from the childhood bracket in the community. In Eastern DRC, a study reveals that what qualifies one to be a child is not age but physical appearance with its attendant actions: "You know, custom is different to the State, and custom dictates that when a boy has a beard and a girl has breasts, they can get married. Without these elements, the person would still be a child" (Vise-Lewis et al. 2018: 38).

Culturally determined definitions of the child have had direct consequences for definitions of child soldiers and child soldiering across the world. Lack of agreement on who a child is, is largely responsible for the variety of definitions of child soldiers in the literature. However, in Europe and other Western societies, one ceases to be a child after attaining the age of 18 years. Not surprisingly, given the predominance of European and Western culture in international law, almost all international statutes and conventions on the rights of the child have 18 years as the cut-off point. Expectedly, recruitment into the armed forces in most European countries starts from 18 years and above, except in the United Kingdom where voluntary enlistment into the country's armed forces starts from 16 years. The age of 18 years is believed to be an end point of being a child but this is a new development because initially, children aged 15 and above were regarded as fit for conscription, going by the 1949 Geneva Convention and 1977 Additional Protocols (Hinton 2012).

In Africa, parents always refer to their children as "my child" irrespective of their age, status or responsibilities. At this juncture, it is worth noting the definition of 'child soldiers' provided by Liberian mothers in 1998. To this group of women, a child soldier is "an underage child who fought as a combatant during the Liberian civil war" (Sesay et al. 2000: 47). However, their characterisation of child soldiers does not fully address the debate. First, *underage child* is tautological as a juvenile is supposed to be below the culturally defined age of 'adulthood' or consent. Second, their definition did not take into cognisance the African cultural context of childhood. The Liberian mothers did not also say if 'underage' refers to a person below 18 years

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as provided in most global conventions and Western European countries. One of such conventions, *The Paris Principles*, describes a child soldier thus:

Any person below 18 years of age who is or who has been recruited or used by an armed force or armed group in any capacity, including but not limited to children, boys and girls, used as fighters, cooks, porters, messengers, spies or for sexual purposes. It does not only refer to a child who is taking or has taken a direct part in hostilities (UNICEF, 2007: 7).

Aside from the categorisations of a child based on their wartime roles, it is very important to also take into cognisance their age differentials at the time of their involvement in the war, and at the end of hostilities. This is because post-conflict reintegration programmes like getting child soldiers back to school or engaging them in life or vocational skills acquisition are, of necessity, “not a one size fits all” package. Shepler (2005) argues that several actors use the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) which prohibits the recruitment of children under the age of 15 in armed groups (art. 38) and other Western constructions of childhood to portray the image of innocence which contrasts with the model of youth as hardworking and humble. According to Pauletto and Palleti (2010) the one-size-fit-all Western notion of childhood as an ideal period, free from responsibility, is misleading because it robs child soldiers of their agency. Put simply, aid agencies wish to maintain the identity of childhood or adolescence on these young combatants which the latter may no longer possess, or which their community may no longer wish to accept. As Wessells (2006: 190) points out, “Developmental science has tended to embrace a universal model of childhood and to overlook the fact that ‘the child’ is a socially constructed idealisation that reflects the values and agendas of particular researchers, cultures, and traditions”.

In a study conducted in Eastern DRC, Vise-Lewis, Schwarz and Mupenda (2018) argue that child and childhood are not defined by age but social, physical and emotional markers that determine when a child between 12 and 15 years is undergoing apprenticeship in preparation for adulthood. As they put it: “Children who are joining armed groups older than this age are not considered children anymore but rather adolescents or even young adults who are becoming independent and exercising their own agency.” From the foregoing, it is obvious that a child soldier is anyone that has not attained the age of 18 years, but is participating in civil wars and other forms of violent conflict, irrespective of whether they are actively involved in combat roles or used to carry out ancillary but critical supporting roles earlier mentioned. There is no denying the fact, however, that child soldiers, irrespective of their roles or ages, were all exposed to extreme violence when they joined armed groups. Some of them committed despicable atrocities during their time in the “bush” irrespective of their assigned roles during the hostilities.

Pull/Push factors in Child Soldiering in Africa

How do children get involved in warfare in the first place? Sadly, there is no simple answer to the salient question. A good starting point, however, is to argue that children participate in violent conflicts because African leaders—and indeed other leaders across the world—as well as the rest of their citizens have failed them. Accordingly, the blame starts and rests squarely on the leaders who perpetuate the “sit-tight or president for life” syndrome that leaves in its wake chronic poor governance, impunity, massive corruption, exclusion and extreme poverty in their respective countries, which combined trigger the violent conflicts and eventually state collapse. Put differently, long years of bad governance in Africa have asphyxiated the political space and driven opposition elements underground or to other countries. In all this, the children are the most vulnerable.

Excruciating poverty, political and economic marginalisation and utter hopelessness among the teeming youth in rural areas and urban slums were, and are, among the more potent pull factors for child soldiering in Africa. Pull factors suggest a voluntary move by a child soldier but the concept of voluntarism in this case is misleading because it takes responsibility away from war lords and places it on the children. According to Vise-Lewis et al. (2018), joining an armed group in the DRC is not only a choice for most young people but the only available opportunity for survival in a self-help environment. In Liberia, children from the Gios and Mano ethnic groups, who were widely persecuted by the repressive regime of Samuel Doe, joined the NPFL of Charles Taylor in the bitter struggle for control of the State. A nine-year Liberian child soldier, Martin, justified fighting with the rebels thus; “I became a soldier to avenge the death of my father...I came home one day to find him dead and my school (burnt) down” (UNICEF, 2000 cited in Sesay et al. 2009: 15).

Similar studies also found that poverty played a significant role in their decision to join the wars (Betancourt et al. 2008). Chronic poverty which manifests itself in the inability of parents and guardians to pay school fees and sheer hopelessness, are among the more popular reasons for the decision by child soldiers—male and female—to join government or rebel forces. As Pauletto and Patel (2010: 44) observe, “In a context of widespread poverty, limited socio-economic opportunities and insecurity, an organised militia can provide protection, food, and a surrogate family.” In its Report, the *Child Soldiers International*, gives a voice to girl child soldiers in DRC who made the following statements:

If I had been going to school, I would not have joined; ...I was pushed out of school for failing to pay school fees, so instead of roaming aimlessly in town, it was better to go and join them in the bush; ...We heard that we could make money there (in the armed group). I went because I wanted to get enough money to go back to school (CSI 2016).

In short, whether in Liberia, Sierra Leone or DRC, child soldiers believe that taking up arms would ensure their financial empowerment and that of their parents and families.

Child soldiering was also perpetuated through forceful conscription or abduction of children especially very young ones, into rebel and government forces as it was believed that they were very malleable, easily indoctrinated and efficient fighters because they have not yet developed a concept of death. Targeting young children has a weird logic to it because in the African context, adults have a plethora of concerns and responsibilities that make them wary of taking unnecessary risks (Vise-Lewis et al. 2018). Abduction was a very popular method of recruitment and “stock-pilling” of child soldiers by Uganda’s Lord’s Resistance Army, and the Sudanese Peoples’ Liberation Army in the conflicts in the two countries. Haer and Bohmelt (2017) associate the prolonged duration of armed conflict with the recruitment of child soldiers by non-state actors as a stopgap strategy. It was widely believed that Charles Taylor’s “boys’ brigade” carried out tasks that older fighters could not undertake during the civil war. Refugeeism as well as separation in the heat of conflict also makes children and young people easy prey to conscription because they have/had no one to shield them from violence.

The incredible exploits of child soldiers during the civil wars in Liberia, Sierra Leone, DRC and elsewhere in Africa, were sometimes reinforced by the ruthless initiation processes and “ceremonies” that they were subjected to after their ‘recruitment’. A female child soldier in DRC has this to say: “We were forced to kill using a big stick and were told exactly where to hit. When I was ordered to kill, I trembled. They gave me a little time, but if I did not manage to kill soon, they told me I’d be killed” (CSI 2016). As part of the bizarre ‘rites of passage’, child soldiers were, and are, also sometimes required to kill close family members including parents and siblings, to demonstrate their loyalty to the cause, and transition from civilian life to military life. Recently, it was revealed that underage militiamen were meant to believe that they would not die from the military’s bullets once they were initiated into the fetish-based power of *Kamuena Nsapu* armed group in Democratic Republic of Congo (Iaccino 2017). Irrespective of what they were required to do or witness, what child soldiers had or have in common, is their harrowing psychological and physical abuse and trauma during the long years in the bush. Many of them had been forcibly uprooted from their schools and loved ones and conscripted into the war, while others volunteered because they had no other option to their survival. However, at the end of hostilities, some of them were eager to return to school but many of them found it difficult to make up for lost time and opportunities through conventional schooling. For instance, those who survived the war in Liberia and wanted to enlist in the “new” Armed Forces of Liberia, AFL, were readily absorbed, and formed the core of the post conflict national army. The next section examines some of the crucial issues revolving around the re-integrating of former child fighters into schools.

Reintegrating Child Soldiers into Schools: Some Preliminary Concerns

In the process of training them as soldiers or service providers in the war zones, children quickly specialised in the art of looting shops and warehouses from time to time to cater for sundry needs and to support their families from the bush. Possession of the deadly but easy to carry and service AK47 enabled them to intimidate and compel unarmed civilians— including adults old enough to be their parents—to surrender valuable possessions without a fight. They also used the gun to commit other heinous crimes such as rape, sexual slavery and crude amputations, against unarmed civilians with impunity sometimes under the influence of drugs. Treated like adults during the war by way of feeding on hard drugs and alcohol which desensitise and encourage them to commit atrocities, many child soldiers may come out of war with disabilities (loss of limb, sight, hearing...). They may be suffering from diseases that may not allow them to go back to school such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, anxiety, substance abuse, social withdrawal, low self-esteem, loss of trust, excessive guilt, hostility and aggression among many other mental disorders. The simple fact remains: “whenever conflicts ended, child soldiers needed to overcome years of physical and psychological damage and find a place back in their communities” (Child Soldier Report, 2004: 33).

Narrating the plight of living in the bush, a girl child soldier in the D. R. Congo has this to say: “I was often drugged. I would wake up and find myself naked. They gave us drugs so that we would not get tired of all of them using us” (CSI 2016). These war-time behaviours and habits became serious obstacles to the successful reintegration of former child soldiers back into conventional schools in particular and into their communities in general. Part of the reason for this is that child soldiers matured quickly in the bush even when they were under the age of 18 at the time they joined the fighting forces, and developed habits that were difficult to wean them from after the war. It is important to bear in mind that while child soldiers are a generic group, their educational needs are not necessarily the same. The type of education they should be exposed to and which schools to send them are very important factors in their reintegration processes. Such considerations are significant because it is often assumed by many in society, that getting child soldiers back into the school system is simply a matter of enrolling them in schools. However, and from experiences in Liberia, Sierra Leone and D.R. Congo, reintegration into schools is not a “one size fits all” approach. It highlights the need to borrow an example from the Chinese approach to economic development; ‘One Country, Two Systems.’

Accordingly, it is imperative to ask the central questions: which type of education and education for what? Answers to the two questions are important since the educational and other needs of former child soldiers cannot be stashed in just one basket. It is evident from the interview conducted by the *Child Soldiers International* (CSI) in the DR Congo, that girl child soldiers suffer a great deal of discrimination and stigmatisation in a conventional school system:

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One girl told us: 'At school, others discriminate against me. They say they are afraid of me. Some don't talk to me.' A few told us that their classmates call them 'HIV carriers' and encourage others not to associate with them. In one school the teachers would not let former girl soldiers carry the school register. If they made a mistake, teaching staff would remind the whole class that they come from 'the bush'. We received reports of some schools refusing admission to children formerly associated with armed groups (CSI 2016).

According to the *Paris Principles*, "reintegration is the process through which children transition into civil society and enter meaningful roles and identities as civilians who are accepted by their families and communities in a context of local and national reconciliation..." (UNICEF 2007: 7). The implication of this definition is that it addresses the needs of children who had played active roles in wars. Successful re-integration of child soldiers into schools therefore requires 'several baskets' and 'several approaches'. Although a child played diverse roles in war, they had also grown much older during which time they had been negatively socialised through easy access to drugs, loot, money, women and so forth. For such reasons, older former child soldiers may not want to return to formal schools.

Reintegrating child soldiers is more than just getting them back to school. It is first and foremost, about respecting the rights of young adults as bona fide citizens of a country (Shepler 2005). Consequently, successful reintegration of child soldiers into schools should be hinged on a series of complex and even delicate processes, whose outcome cannot be taken for granted especially in a dynamic post-conflict African setting. In the wider context of societies ravaged by several years of violent conflicts, children played indispensable roles that made them both victims and perpetrators of atrocities and violence. For such children, it was certainly "good-bye to innocence", with serious implications for post-conflict security, stability and restoration of basic social services like schools, water and health. It is not enough to feel for the child soldier but to envision a kind of world we would like us and them to live in (Galtung, 2008). So, providing an appropriate education which is commensurate with their actual age, interests and life experience as young adults and the needs of their communities and nations is important.

Theoretical framework

The reintegration of child soldiers does not necessarily imply the end of hostilities because it is a human right issue rather than a security concern. In other words, young fighters have to be rescued from hostilities as soon as possible, given psychosocial support, and helped in the re-integration process (Pauletto and Patel 2010). Having spent many years away from the comfort of family members, they now enjoy a certain level of autonomy in terms of choice-making. As far as survival is concerned, they are better prepared to learn new things in response to the challenges of everyday life outside of the battlefield. For a young adult therefore, the

satisfaction of human needs, especially the need to belong, to be accepted back in society, to be loved and recognised as well as the need to participate in the decision making process (Burton 1990) becomes the main impetus for learning. Their education is expected to provide practical answers to their numerous questions: is there any alternative to violence? Is life after war worth living? How best can a former child soldier be prepared for civilian life?

Accordingly, this study adopts the Adult Learning theories by Malcom Shepard Knowles (1913-1997) who believed that the way children are taught in classrooms (pedagogy) cannot be extended to adult learning (andragogy). According to *Teaching Excellence in Adult Literacy* (2011: 1), "Adult learning theories provide insights into how adults learn, and can help instructors be more effective in their practice and more responsive to the needs of the learners they serve." Adults learn differently from children because;

1. they have reached a mature developmental stage in life and so moved from dependency to increasing self-directness;
2. they can back their learning abilities with accumulated reservoir of life experience;
3. they are ready to learn something new in order to apply it in real life;
4. they approach education as problem-solving and
5. their motivation to learn comes from within rather than from external factors such as fear of punishment and incentives (Esthermsmth 2017).

Part of the Adult Learning is Self-Directed Learning (SDL) which is a process tailored to the learners' convenience, preference and experience such that content, methods, resources and evaluation of the outcomes are decided upon by adult learners themselves. The teacher is therefore expected to encourage and support learners throughout the process and offers a variety of options geared towards successful learning outcomes. There is also Transformational Learning (TL) as a process designed to produce a change of mind through a problem-posing approach. Put together, these adult learning approaches are appropriate for the education of child soldiers. The remainder of the study dwells on the relevance of Peace education for the reintegration of former child fighters.

The Imperative of Peace Education for Successful Reintegration of Former Child Soldiers into Society

Life is like a school in which any subject matter that is not fully assimilated is repeated until a pass mark is granted. In other words, we must learn from past mistakes if we are willing to move forward. In such regard, education is synonymous with empowerment because it is a process that seeks to effect positive changes through the development of personal non-violence capacities. This is obvious from its Latin word— *educare*— which means ability to draw forth, to bring out and to develop from a latent condition. As Sen (2006) argues, "education is not about

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getting children, even very young ones, immersed in an old, inherited ethos. It is also about helping children to develop the ability to reason about new decisions any grown-up person will have to take.”

Former child soldiers are most likely to express regret at having lost their childhood in the bush. At the same time many of them show interest in learning in order to become useful members of their society. Article 26.2 of Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) spells out clearly the nexus between peace and education thus:

Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.

Consequently, the primary objective of education for former child soldiers is not about learning how to read and write, reclaiming the lost years or compressing the school calendar in order to accommodate overage students. Rather, it is about providing an opportunity to lay the foundations for the culture of peace, which UNESCO (1998) defines as:

A set of values, attitudes, traditions and modes of behaviour and ways of life based on respect for life, ending of violence and promotion and practice of non-violence through education, dialogue and cooperation...promotion of all human rights and fundamental freedoms...commitment to peaceful settlements of conflicts...efforts to meet the developmental and environmental needs of present and future generations... respect for and promotion of equal rights and opportunities for women and men (UNESCO 1998).

At the level of the individual, then, peace education is aimed at inculcating in every person the universal values and behaviours on which a culture of peace is predicated, including the development of non-violent conflict resolution skills and a commitment to working together to realise a shared and preferred future in prosperity. The appropriateness of peace education for former child soldiers is also incorporated in *Global Vision 2030* which pledges to leave no one behind (UN 2015). Even though the education element is found in almost all the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the promotion of ‘quality education’ is contained in plank 4 of the SDGs with strong emphasis on former child soldiers. Thus, unlike the Millennium Development Goal 3 which focused only on the achievement of universal primary education with no specific reference to peace building, SDG 4 is to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all”(UN 2015). As such, the new UN Agenda has broadened the scope of education to include education for sustainable peace. Target 4.7 is explicit in this regard:

By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including among others through

education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity..." (UNESCO 2015).

Kesler (2010) contends that education for peace rests on inquiry-based methodology that helps the learners to ask critical questions and acquire the needed skills to rebrand themselves, such as: Who am I? How do I identify myself? What, if anything, represents me? and so on. To what communities do I belong? How do I solve conflicts? How do I involve myself with others in my community? What are the examples of conflict and peace building in my community, and how do I harness the potentials encapsulated within conflict to transform it? How do I define violence? What are alternatives? These and similar questions are expected to come from the young adults and former combatants who are ready to turn their lives around in favour of peace. As far as the education of child soldiers is concerned, peace education is primarily transformative in the sense that through inquiry-based methods of learning that is only appropriate for adult learners (asking questions and sharing experiences with their peers), former child soldiers will "begin to see events, peoples, experiences and structures in a new light. They (*will*) begin to question their previous assumptions and values" (Kesler 2010: 3). At this juncture it is worth recalling the four principles of Knowles's theory which stipulate that:

Since adults are self-directed they should have a say in the content and process of their learning. Because they have so much experience to draw from, their learning should focus on adding to what they have already learned in the past. Since adults are looking for practical learning, content should focus on issues related to their work or personal life. Learning should be centered on solving problems instead of memorizing content (Esthermsmth 2017).

Accordingly, every effort must be done to help former combatants overcome their violent past and embrace peaceful coexistence in their new lives and environments. Peace education for former child soldiers should therefore take precedence over any other form of education. It is also important to teach peace in post-conflict classrooms to remind students about the past, raise their consciousness about the evils of war and sensitise them to the need for maintaining peace at the end of hostilities. Wessells (2005) argues that peace education in the post-conflict context has a stronger practical effect than didactic overture. It must be compatible with the idea of promoting and sustaining peace and peaceful-coexistence, while addressing both direct (visible) and structural (invisible) violence. Galtung (2008: 51) contends however that the system of education as we have it worldwide still perpetuates structural violence through a highly vertical division of labour that manifests in a one-way communication by the teacher, and as a result of fragmentation, prevents

those on the receiving end (students) from developing horizontal interaction that will allow them to organise and eventually turn the communication flow the other way.

A two-way communication is possible if peace education is learner-centred as advocated in the Adult learning methodology propounded by Knowles. It is against this background that Paulo Freire (1970) has proposed a problem-posing model of education based on “questioning the status quo rather than taking it as given” (Bartlett 2008: 41). Such a learner-centred model of peace education is only fitting for adult learners (former child soldiers) who are capable of critical thinking about their world. Accordingly, the aim of peace education for this group of young adults is to raise their level of consciousness instead of assessing their level of assimilation through examination. As Galtung (2008: 52) puts it, “there should be no examinations of any kind in connection with peace education, no basis for an emerging class of peace specialists. Such devices may have a place in military academies and business schools, but not in institutions promoting peace insights.”

Peace education for ex-child soldiers adopts a simulation-based model with a curriculum based on child soldiers’ narratives and centred on critical incident debriefing to extract important invaluable information and insights from them for the purpose of drawing lessons in the military tradition of soldiers returning from the battlefield (Hinton 2012). The idea behind such debriefing exercises is that individuals who might have developed anxiety disorders due to traumatic events can benefit from the same debriefing methods of the military also known as Self-facilitated After Action Review (AAR), whereby description of and reaction to an experience is followed by analysis of behaviours and application of new knowledge into clinical practice. According to medical experts, Zigmont et al. (2011), post-experience analysis or debriefing comes out in three dimensions: defusing, discovering and deepening. As they put it, “During the debriefing individuals must reflect upon the experience, identify the mental models that led to behaviours or cognitive processes, and then build or enhance new mental models to be used in future experiences”. Accordingly, demobilised ex-fighters are encouraged to tell their dreadful stories, learn from their past mistakes and embrace a new lifestyle. As Sundheim (2015) contends,

Debriefing digs into *why* things happened and explores implications for the future. Accurate understanding and knowledge is placed ahead of egos. People participate with a desire to truly understand root causes of their successes and failures so they know what to repeat and what to change. The conversation may be uncomfortable, but participants realize that the discomfort of getting things out on the table is minimal compared to the pain of making the same mistakes.

Michell and Everly (1996 as cited in Hinton 2012) spelt out the five steps of Critical Incident Debriefing: (1) Fact: what happened: (2) Thought: what do you think about what had happened, (3) Reaction: identification of the most traumatic aspect of the event, (4) Symptoms: identification of personal symptoms of distress and (5)

Teaching: education about normal reactions. This approach is all about learning from past experience which is also common in healthcare simulation sessions. Needless to say at this juncture that this form of education is not judgemental and as such, it appeals to former child soldiers who may have trouble adjusting to the conventional system of education, which serves as a medium for social classification. As for the content of peace education, Galtung (2008) provides a five-phase methodology as follows; analysis, goal-formulation, critique, proposal making and action. Such analysis of our real world with its contradictions must be followed by a vision of a better world, a critique of the preferred world (utopia), a road map that deals with the question, of how to get there and the peace action to be taken at the end of it all.

Conclusion

Violent conflicts lead to massive destruction of infrastructure, including schools and healthcare facilities. The situation is much worse if the hostilities are prolonged as was the case in Liberia and Sierra Leone or presently in DRC. Evidence from the three countries indicates that DDR processes were also fraught with grave challenges, which included poor funding, poor participation by former child soldiers, especially former girl child soldiers for fear of stigmatisation and name calling. Other challenges to the successful reintegration of child soldiers into schools especially in Liberia include what can be described as “premature adulthood”, resulting from many years in the bush as fighters during which they indulged in some “social bads” such as drugs, prostitution and easy access to money through looting, extortion or armed robbery. In the process, some became literally ‘addicted’ to violent behaviours such as stealing, mugging and blackmail to make ends meet, and to satisfy cravings for drugs, alcohol, women, etc. Though relatively young, such former bush fighters were unlikely to return to the orthodox classroom that prepares future generations of leaders. However, successful reintegration of child soldiers back into school is just one important aspect of all the processes and activities that are associated with post-conflict reconstruction and rehabilitation of societies that have been torn apart by many years of civil wars.

Even if schools and related infrastructure were not badly affected, which is seldom the case, successfully returning former child fighters into school goes beyond the availability of buildings and even teachers. A critical pre-condition is the effectiveness or otherwise of the psychosocial interventions that were carried out prior to the immersion into civil society. Where these invaluable services are not provided, or are in limited supply, the entire exercise would be fraught with serious challenges and could, ultimately, fail to achieve the desired objectives or goals in the long run. Instead of putting the cart before the horse, as it is usually the practice based on conventional wisdom, this paper has argued that peace education is central to effective re-integration of former child soldiers into the society. In other words, dealing with the “ghost” of the past and exorcising it from the ex-combatants are preconditions for their successful re-integration into the school system and society at

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large. This is imperative because re-integrating them into civil society especially through education, and in particular peace education as advocated in this paper, hopes to effectively reclaim and secure their "futures" in their respective communities rather than recovering their lost pasts. It is a kind of education that contrasts the conventional system of education in which a teacher ignores the life experience, interests and needs of individual students while expecting the latter to simply assimilate strange topics designed for them without their participation. Peace education helps former child soldiers to unlearn survival skills associated with violence and war in order to prepare them for peaceful co-existence with civilians. As such, it complements the Adult learning model whereby the desire to re-integrate former child combatants successfully into civilian life prompts them as mature students, to learn from past experience in an environment that is not abusive, judgemental and unduly competitive. Future-oriented, it prepares the young adults to embrace and project peaceful futures. The study therefore recommends that a comprehensive curriculum be designed for the education of former child soldiers in which appropriate form and content reflect their particular needs and interests.

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