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Child, soldier, child soldier - the implications of the construction of 'child' and 'child soldier' for rehabilitation practices in Northern Uganda

Abstract:

This paper investigates the view that non-governmental organizations have on childhood and child soldiers, and what its implications on the rehabilitation and reintegration of former child soldiers can be. Four documents produced by the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers are examined by using qualitative discourse analysis. Postcolonial theory and new sociology of childhood are the main theoretical frameworks applied to the study. The study finds that the documents share a certain view of childhood, and that the aim of rehabilitation is to reproduce the child in that image. As the discourse may not be shared with local community, it is necessary to become aware of the different discourses and attempt to reconcile them.

Keywords: child soldier, Uganda, NGO, discourse, postcolonialism

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Abbreviations

AVSI.....	Associazione Volontari per il Servizio Internazionale
DDR.....	Demobilization, Disarmament, Reintegration
ICC.....	International Criminal Court
IDP.....	Internally Displaced Person
INGO.....	International Non-governmental Organisation
LRA.....	Lord's Resistance Army
NGO.....	Non-governmental Organisation
NRA.....	National Resistance Army
OAU.....	Organization of African Unity
UN.....	United Nations
UNICEF.....	United Nations Children's Fund
UNCRC.....	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

1 Introduction

1.1 *Problem statement*

It is often stated that the amount of child soldiers has only recently significantly increased, especially in the 'new wars' that are internal conflicts often fought by rebel or guerilla forces and often target civilians as victims (Kaldor 2001:16f; Singer 2006:6f; Wells 2009:142). One of the most common reasons cited is that children are easier to brainwash and indoctrinate since the moral sense of a child is not as developed as that of an adult (Rosen 2005:10-18). The problem has gotten vast international attention in the recent decades, which has had implications of both international law and the work of international non-governmental organizations (INGOs). Consequently, the use of child soldiers is now forbidden in several international conventions, the most ratified of which is the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (UNCRC; 1989). Both the legal bodies and the INGOs have, however, been criticised for relying on a particular model of childhood in their work. There is, consequently, an array of criticism towards this attempt to 'universalize' the concept of childhood.

In most areas where child soldiers are widely used there are various initiatives to make their return back to the communities as smooth as possible, many of these being rehabilitation centres run by INGOs. The influence these organizations have on international law has also been significant, and most of the organizations claim to base their work on children's rights outlined in the UNCRC and other legal frameworks such the 1949 Geneva Conventions and the Protocols Additional I and II of 1977, sometimes using even stricter language than the legal conventions (Rosen 2005:9). They thus seem to share a certain view of what 'childhood' should be.

The INGOs working with former child soldiers have been accused of reproducing a certain narrative about the 'child soldier crisis' and exporting a Western view of childhood and with it, certain educational policies (Boyden 1997; James & Prout 1997; Rosen 2005; Scheper-Hughes & Sargent 1998; Wells 2009). The problem is that having a certain fixed view of childhood can be expected to have an effect on the work that the organizations do, and thus also the rehabilitation and reintegration of former child soldiers. It is this effect that I wish to investigate.

1.2 *Aim and research question*

In this thesis, I wish to analyse several INGO publications on child soldiers from a social constructivist perspective (Cresswell & Plano Clark 2007:22). This is done in order to raise

awareness of the implications the construction of the 'child soldier' and 'childhood' may have on the work done by these organizations via the various rehabilitation and reintegration initiatives taken in the South. Thus, the aim of this study is both descriptive and explanatory since I both describe the discourses adopted by the NGOs and discuss their implications. Hopefully, the reader will, as a result, be able to critically review the work done by INGOs.

The research problem and the aim of the research lead to the following research question:

What is being done when rehabilitating child soldiers?

The main research question can be operationalized through the following sub-questions:

1. How are 'children' and 'childhood' described in the publications?
2. How are the terms 'child', 'soldier', and 'child soldier' defined in the publications?
3. What are the children being rehabilitated as and what are the implications of this?

1.3 Delimitations

There are some limitations that I wish to set to my research. Even though I take up Northern Uganda as a case example and explain the necessary background details of the conflict, I do not intend to go deeper into the original reasons of this particular conflict, nor to the effects successful reintegration may have for sustainable peace in the area. My approach is social constructivist rather than psychological, which means that I will not evaluate the effects of war or rehabilitation from an individual, psychological perspective. Even though the reasons for becoming a child soldier are interesting, they do not fit into the scope of this research project since I aim to focus the reintegration part.

1.4 Background of Uganda

Uganda was under British colonial rule until 1962, and the current conflict has its roots in the colonial period. In order to control the population in Northern Uganda and for administrative convenience, ethnic groups were more rigidly classified and divided by the British officers into 'tribes', such as the Acholi, Langi and Alur. Such ethnic identities probably existed even before the British rule, but they were reified or codified by the colonial administration (Allen & Vlassenroot 2010:4; Finnström 2008:31). The territory was divided between the Bantu-speaking south and

Nilotic- and Sudanic-speaking north, which still has implications for the development of an integrated nation (Allen & Vlassenroot 2010:6). During the colonial rule, ethnic groups from Northern Uganda (mainly the Acholi) recruited largely for military jobs, thus remaining economically disadvantaged but controlling the instruments of violence (Cheney 2005:25).

The years after independence saw a series of civil wars and government changes, after which president Yoweri Museveni acquired power in 1986 and has been leading the country since then (Allen & Vlassenroot 2010:6). In 1986 Joseph Kony, who is an Acholi, founded his guerilla force, the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), claiming that it seeks to overthrow the government in order to run the country according to the Ten Commandments (Cheney 2005:23). Until the early 1990's, the battles were mainly between Museveni's National Resistance Army (NRA) and the LRA, but the LRA then started increasingly attacking the civilian populations in Acholiland, terrorizing the people and abducting children to join the rebel force (Cheney 2005:26, Dunn 2004:140).

Several peace talks were held during the 1990's between the Ugandan government and the LRA, but these kept constantly failing, not least due to President Museveni's apparent disinterest in a permanent solution (Dunn 2004:141). It has been claimed that the war in the North has both political and economic advantages for his government: the conflict is being kept contained in the north and the Acholi depicted as wild barbarians, thus allowing Museveni to gain popularity by 'protecting' the southerners from them, and the army is kept occupied and gaining wealth from the situation (Allen & Vlassenrot 2010:12, Dunn 2004:141f). The conflict gathered international attention after the 9/11 attacks when the LRA was included in the US government's list of terrorist organisations, and in 2005 the International Criminal Court (ICC) in the Hague issued warrants for the arrest of LRA rebel leadership (Allen & Vlassenrot 2010:13f; Finnström 2008:85). The ICC warrants have, however, been much criticised for undermining hopes for a negotiated settlement and also for being biased for the Ugandan government (Allen & Vlassenrot 2010:16).

The conflict has probably affected children the most due to the LRA tactics of abductions. It has been estimated that in 2001, 80 % of the LRA combatants were children (Dunn 2004:140). Altogether, it is estimated that from 25,000 to 38,000 Ugandan children were abducted and used as soldiers between 1986 and 2006 (Pham et al. 2006:410). Moreover, government strategy was to force the majority of the people in the north to move to internal displacement (IDP) camps, and at the highest more than one and a half million people were living in these camps in appallingly poor conditions and largely dependent on aid agencies (Allen & Vlassenroot 2010:14f). Understandably, this forced displacement has also affected the intergenerational social structure and traditions of the

Acholi (Cheney 2005:31). Several reception centres for formerly abducted children run by both local and international NGOs have been operating in the area since 1995 (Akello et al. 2006:230). It has been estimated that between 13 and 43 % of all abducted children pass through reception centres (Pham et al. 2006:406).

It is also widely acknowledged that the government troops, supposed to protect the civilians, have committed a large amount of human rights violations such as raping or shooting the very people they were supposed to protect or failing to protect them from the rebel attacks (Dunn 2004:142; Finnström 2008:90f). The local government officials have also forcibly recruited children to local defence forces operating in close cooperation with the national army (Finnström 2008:90f). The focus of the conflict has recently shifted towards the Democratic Republic of Congo and Southern Sudan, but the local governments are negotiating and cooperating in order to defeat the LRA. The situation in Northern Uganda is relatively stable, and the population is beginning to move out of the IDP camps (Allen & Vlassenroot 2010:19ff).

1.5 Outline of the thesis

I have now given a brief introduction and background to the research problem and the questions I aim to tackle in this paper. Next, I will explain the methods and material that I have used for this study. Then, I will give a fairly extensive account of the theoretical background that I employ in the analysis because it is essential for understanding the points that I wish to make. The theoretical perspective I will employ springs from postcolonial theory and sociological study of childhood. I will then move on to analyse four reports produced by the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers. The analysis will be structured according to the three sub-questions that my research question has. Finally, I will discuss the main research question and then conclude by summarizing the results and highlighting some suggestions for further research.

2 Methodology

As mentioned above, I will conduct the research from a social constructivist epistemological standpoint (Cresswell & Plano Clark 2007:22). The method I found most suitable for finding answers to the research questions is discourse analysis. It is defined in the Sage Dictionary of Social Research Methods as "detailed exploration of political, personal, media or academic 'talk' and 'writing' about a subject, designed to reveal how knowledges are organized, carried and reproduced in particular ways and through particular institutional practices" (Jupp 2006:74). It is a qualitative method aimed at revealing "how institutions and individual subjects are formed, produced, given meaning, constructed and represented through particular configurations of knowledge" (ibid.). Language is therefore not seen as a neutral medium for transmission of information but loaded with meanings displaying different versions of reality (Walliman 2006:205f).

2.1 Methods

In practice, I analysed four documents presented in detail under 'Material'. I identified the explicit and implicit discourses by looking at each of the sub-questions at a time and finding the discourses relevant for the answer. This was done by coding the texts according to predefined categories, i.e. the research questions, as incident-by-incident coding (Charmaz 2006:53). Some of the more implicit discourses were, however, 'between the lines' and there was no exact quote to exemplify a discourse. I therefore had to rely on my instinct especially in the case of noting absences and controversies in the discourses. After this, each of the questions was then further divided into categories that emerged during the initial coding, and a focused coding was done to the data gathered during the initial coding, thus deciding on which categories made the most analytical sense (ibid.:57ff). I then combined the information to answer the main research question.

The asset of discourse analysis in this study is that its aim is precisely to identify the mechanisms whereby some versions of 'truth' come to be accepted and internalized, while others are marginalized (Jupp 2006:75), and I wanted to examine the claims to 'universal truth' and seemingly self-evident facts found in NGO discourses since these obviously have an effect on the charity work done by them. Thus, the idea is not to criticise NGOs as such, but rather find those discourses that may be contested or criticised and point out the social practices that strengthen those discourses by reproducing them.

Discourse analysis can be criticised for its intuitive and subjective nature, since the researcher's personality is always present when doing the 'reading' and can affect the result. Social research can, however, never be completely objective, and one 'true' reading of social reality is impossible (Jupp 2006:76; Walliman 2006:15). Thus, it can be said that my discourse analysis is as valid as any other, but the importance lies in the process that allows us to discuss, compare and challenge multiple readings (Jupp 2006:76). The amount of documents I analysed was quite small (approx. 100 pages) due to the time frame of the study, which is why the generalizability of the research could be contested, but on the other hand it is typical for qualitative research to make an in-depth analysis on a few cases rather than gather little data on many cases (Chambliss & Schutt 2006: 196f; Walliman 2006:34). Previous research, however, suggests that the reading I have produced could be similar even when reading other documents since others have arrived to similar results when observing the actual practice of NGOs, which also increases the construct validity of this research (Akello et al. 2006; Chambliss & Schutt 2006:73f; Cheney 2005; Rosen 2005).

2.2 Material

2.2.1 Primary sources

The documents chosen for the discourse analysis are all produced by the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers. The Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers (hereafter referred to as the Coalition) was formed in May 1998 by leading international human rights and humanitarian organizations. The Coalition's international member organizations are: Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, International Federation Terre des Hommes, International Save the Children Alliance, and the Jesuit Refugee Service. It maintains active links with the UN, UNICEF, the International Committee of the Red Cross and the International labour Organization (Coalition 1). The mission statement of the Coalition states that it works to prevent the recruitment and use of children as soldiers, to secure their demobilization and to ensure their rehabilitation and reintegration into society. Moreover,

the Coalition's goal is to promote the adoption and adherence to national, regional and international legal standards (including the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict) prohibiting the military recruitment and use in hostilities of any person younger than eighteen years of age; and the recognition and enforcement of this standard by all armed groups, both governmental and non-governmental.

(Coalition 1)

I chose to focus on just one organization because it is a coalition of several internationally known organizations and thus its publications will represent a general view adopted by all the participating NGOs. This was done in order to increase the generalizability of the study (Walliman 2006:34). Generalizability is further increased by having several documents produced by the same organisation: if there are several examples of the same discourse, it is likely that they are representative of the participating organisations.

The Coalition's website has a resource collection that is divided into thematic sections, the themes being Global Reports, Themed reports, Press releases, News, Actualités en français, Ultimas Noticias, Newsletter and Photo gallery. I wanted to base my choice of articles on these categories in order to get a variety of different types of texts. However, after an evaluation of the publications contained in these, the two first categories seemed most relevant. I chose to rule out press releases and news since it is out of the scope of this research to focus on media, and I do not have the language skills to analyse the French and Spanish reports. The Newsletter was only published between 2001-2007 and was focused on an amount of different areas, whereas I tried to find documents that concentrate on Northern Uganda. Analysing photos does not seem like a viable alternative for a student with no background in visual arts. Thus, I was left with Global Reports and Themed Reports. I chose to analyse the 18-page summary of the newest Child Soldiers Global Report from 2008, since the whole report is over 400 pages long and thus analysing it would not fit within the word limit of this study. From the Themed Reports, I chose to analyse "Returning home - Children's perspectives on reintegration: A case study of children abducted by the Lord's Resistance Army in Teso, eastern Uganda" (2008) by Vera Chrobok and Andrew S. Akutu. It is a report of a research project undertaken with the aim of allowing the voices of children and youth who have been abducted by the LRA to be heard in the planning for reintegration procedures for future returnees.

Moreover, in order to get a wide variety of different topics and perspectives on child soldiers, I decided to choose two items from the Psycho-Social Section of the Coalition's website, the purpose of which is to "foster a constructive inter- and intra-disciplinary dialogue on relevant psycho-social issues in the area of children and armed conflict" (Coalition 2). The articles are "Psychosocial Support for War Affected Children in Northern Uganda: Lessons Learned" (2005) by Lucia Castelli, Elena Locatelli and Mark Canavera, and "Crossing Bridges and Negotiating Rivers: The Rehabilitation and Reintegration of Children Associated with Armed Forces"(2005) by Elizabeth Jareg. Here, I aimed at variety too, but still kept to the two main topics of my interest, Northern

Uganda and reintegration of child soldiers. The first one "shares lessons learned for providing psychosocial support to war-affected children, including formerly abducted children (FACs), by describing the recent interventions undertaken by the humanitarian NGO Associazione Volontari per il Servizio Internazionale (AVSI) in two districts of northern Uganda", whereas the latter one is concerned with questions of rehabilitation and reintegration generally, including personal reflections on these topics by a long-term employee of Save the Children Norway.

2.2.1 Secondary sources

Some background literature was needed on child soldiers and their rehabilitation. It seems that a large amount of such texts are produced by NGOs (Wells 2009:163). It is common that either the author is an NGO, or the author is an academic but the publisher an NGO. It is, however, not suitable to use reports commissioned by NGOs as a reliable resource when doing a critical reading of other NGO reports. This is why I chose to use only material written by academic writers, books published by commercial/university publishers and articles published in scientific journals. There are cases where the publisher is an NGO but it is clearly stated on the front page that the organisation is not responsible for the views presented in the paper, and I could use them.

3 Theory

Because the aim of this paper is to reveal the underlying thought patterns that may colour the texts, and because the method for doing this is discourse analysis, several issues need to be acknowledged. For this purpose, I find the thoughts of postcolonial theorists a useful point of departure. Not only do they point out that colonialism does not only belong to the past and that contemporary cultural processes cannot be analysed as situated outside the colonial history (Eriksson et al. 2005:16), but they take into account such essential factors as identity and subjectivity, authorship and thereby the power of language and discourse. 'Discourse' is a central concept to critical theory and postcolonial criticism since discursive practices are exercises in power and control (Loomba 2005:37f). Since the postcolonial thinkers have affected and been deeply affected by developments in linguistics as well as post-modernist and post-structuralist thought, these theories are largely intertwined and overlapping, which is why I will in this chapter also touch upon the importance of all of these for my analysis.

In the following, I will make a brief account of postcolonial theory building because it is the framework from which I will analyse the texts. I will first give an overview of how the term 'postcolonial' has been defined and what it can mean. Then, I will discuss the role of language and discourses in forming world views. I find these theoretical issues important to discuss before doing the actual discourse analysis in order to show what kind of factors need to be considered when reading the texts (or any texts).

After situating myself theoretically within this broad framework, I will discuss the concept of 'childhood' as it is seen in recent anthropological accounts and sociological childhood studies. This is done in order to open up the complexity and variability of the term and to give a firm basis from which to analyse texts where 'the child' is the central concept.

3.1 *Postcolonial theory*

'Postcolonialism' as a term has been contested and criticized, and many theorists have attempted to define it. The prefix 'post' has been criticized for being ambiguous and especially for implying the end or aftermath of something, when it quite clear that colonialism still has implications today (Hall 1990:81; Loomba 2005:12). It has been argued that the prefix has in fact two opposing dimensions: a temporal one, as in a colony becoming a postcolonial state at a certain point in time, and a critical

or ideological dimension, where postcolonial theory replaces or criticizes the established theory of colonialism (Hall 1990:92; Loomba 2005:12). Even the ideological dimension has been contested since it is not at all clear that the inequities of colonial rule have been erased, but instead it could be said that "a country may be both post-colonial (in the sense of being formally independent) and neo-colonial (in the sense of remaining economically or culturally dependent) at the same time" (Loomba 2005:12). Many theorists argue that neo-colonialism is a more apt term since political sovereignty did not translate directly into economic self-sufficiency (Nealon & Searls Giroux 2003:141).

The term 'postcolonialism', then, can be used in many ways – some countries with very different pasts may be called 'postcolonial' but in different senses of the word. It could be used for describing a change in social relations, an emancipatory process (Hall 1990:85), but also works as a generalization of a "process of disengagement from the colonial syndrome, which takes many forms and is probably inescapable for all those whose worlds that have been marked by that set of phenomena" (Hulme 1995:120 cited in Loomba 2005:21). From a more subjective perspective it could mean, as opposed to something signifying the literal demise of colonialism, "a contestation of colonial domination and the legacies of colonialism" (Loomba 2005:16). This definition has, however, been accused from shifting the focus away from locations and institutions to individuals but it is useful for us since it allows us to incorporate the history of anti-colonial resistance to contemporary resistance of Western domination and signifies a "subjectivity of oppositionality" to colonizing discourses and practices (de Alva cited in Loomba 2005:16).

Postcolonial theory is central for the purpose of this paper since it argues that colonialism does not only belong to the past, and that decolonization was not a complete end to the colonial era. It can be seen as a critique of the view that contemporary cultural processes could possibly be situated outside of the colonial history (Eriksson et al. 2005:16). It is quite easy to see that colonization affected the colonized society, but one has to realize that the society of the colonizing power was never left unaffected either but was deeply influenced by the colonial process (Hall 1990:86). Thus, both were also restructured by decolonization, but, as mentioned above, they are still not post-colonial in the same way (Loomba 2005:22). What postcolonial theory has done over the years and still does is to deconstruct the 'we-them -mentality' that justified imperialism, to re-interpret, re-tell and rewrite the history of colonialism by stressing a shift from eurocentrism to a focus on the 'peripheries' of the world (Hall 1990:86,89; Nealon & Searls Giroux 2003:145). There have obviously been different schools of thought in these developments, but what is most interesting for us here is that most contemporary thinkers do agree that postcolonialism is not about abandoning

the so-called 'Western' values but criticizing the eurocentric approach and its claims of ownership and right to interpretation as well as the selective application of these values (Eriksson et al. 2005:47). This is exactly why the postcolonial approach is highly relevant for my study: the aim of this study is to find the implicit 'Western values' in the NGO reports and analyse their application.

The role of language for the reproduction of ideas and creation of identities has been important for postcolonial analysis. This is where linguistics and post-structuralism have inspired postcolonial thinkers (ibid.:17). It can be said that the meaning of the text has everything to do with the contexts where it is produced and read (Nealon & Searls Giroux 2003:23). Post-structuralism stresses the meaning of language for creating identities and institutions: there is no essential connection between a word, the entity it refers to, and what the word means in a given system of symbols (ibid.:24), and thus the world is structured by the practice of language use (Eriksson et al. 2005:17-18). Both the 'signifier' (the word itself) and the 'signified' (what it refers to) are in a way arbitrary and dependent on the context in which they are used (Loomba 2005:35; Nealon & Searls Giroux 2003:136).

This arbitrariness does not imply that words can be used in any way. They get their meaning in relation to other words and specifically in a relation of contrast and difference. This means that associations in the mind work through a principle of exclusion and meanings are given by binary oppositions (Eriksson et al. 2005:18; Loomba 2005:35). This is especially interesting when discussing colonialism, since it is argued that thinking in terms of oppositions creates social hierarchies and implicit relations of dominance since binary oppositions are often asymmetrical (Eriksson et al. 2005:18). This is exactly how the colonial use of language was able to so powerfully affect the whole world views of societies and individuals by creating the 'other' as an opposite of 'us' and everything 'we' are. It also essential to point out the post-structuralist view that racism should be seen as a discourse embedded in our language categories and is thus always a latent dimension of our world view defining our thinking and actions (ibid.:38). That is why it could be said that any text written by a Western person, even if it is an NGO worker, will strengthen these categories by reproducing them. What is common to most post-structuralist thinkers is that they question the position of individual as the only source of meaning but instead argue that “any set of words could be analysed to reveal not just an individual but a historical consciousness at work” (Loomba 2005:37).

Another important aspect of language is that it is one of the tools of identity formation. As mentioned above, meaning is given through binary oppositions, which makes identity creation a

process of exclusion. Identity is defined in terms of difference since it presumes some characteristics but excludes others. For example, the identities of the colonizers and the colonized were defined by each other as well as reproduced, modified and changed in relation to each other (Eriksson et al. 2005:34). Such a colonial heritage can be seen even today in neo-racist discourse where group belonging is defined in terms of cultural difference, presuming that culture is understood as a homogeneous, natural entity (ibid.:39ff). The process of exclusion is evident here, too, since “any attempt to configure a 'same' (a coherent or narrow group) is always dependent on [...] a series of 'others'” (Nealon & Searls Giroux 2003:58). Thus, every majority presupposes a minority, and vice versa (ibid.:58).

After having considered all this, I will once more remind that “colonialism is a crucial historical and economic consideration helping us to understand the history of colonial powers in present-day postcolonial countries”(ibid.:142). Past and present economic and political conditions should be considered in this historical context. This is why the discourse of postcolonialism was and still is so crucial: it “highlights the fact that our very definitions of culture, civility and artistic achievement, as well as notions such as political autonomy, economic development, and modern progress, are firmly rooted in the history of colonialism and its attendant images of savagery, backwardness, despotism, and underdevelopment” (ibid.:149).

3.2 *Childhood theories*

I will now highlight the concept of 'childhood' as a socially constructed domain that I draw ideas from when analysing the phenomenon of child soldiers. This perspective is then paired with the postcolonial perspective by considering the implications of the export of Western norms and values to the South, both directly and through international conventions.

It has come to be widely agreed among sociologists and anthropologists that childhood is a socially constructed institution and children's lives are shaped by those constructions (Stephens 1995:4-6; Wells 2009:2). To be a child and to raise children is a way to form the surrounding reality, but there is no single way of being human, or a child, in a society (Norman 1996:13f). The question that academics have only in recent decades started asking, namely 'What is a child?', means that questions about the beginning and end of childhood in different societies, how children are raised, and children's own thoughts are complex, and have been answered in many different ways in different times and places (Wells 2009:5).

It has not, however, always been recognized that childhood is socially constructed. The current debate on 'childhood' is relatively young, and has its origins in the work of Philippe Ariés from 1960, who posed a challenge to previous orthodoxy and assumptions about the universality of childhood, claiming that, based on his analysis of medieval paintings, childhood as a separate concept only emerged in Europe between fifteenth and eighteenth centuries, and that the idea of childhood did not exist in medieval society (Wells 2009:5; James & Prout 1997:16). His study inspired a wide range of historical and sociological studies on childhood and family life as socially constructed domains instead of naturally given entities (Stephens 1995:5), and a critical rethinking of childhood. Wells argues that “within any particular historical and social context there will be a normative and hegemonic concept of childhood against which children themselves are compared as individuals and collectives” (2009:16). Thus, the model of childhood usually described as 'Western' or contemporary is not only specific to a time and space, but also to a particular class, race and gender, e.g. bourgeois white boy (ibid.:69). The new sociology of childhood studies thus recognizes children's active agency and aims at incorporating the voice of children to childhood studies (ibid.:14f).

A point of debate is the extent to which biological constraints affect the social understanding of childhood (James & Prout 1997:26). However, even though children are biologically immature, it is rather “the ways in which this immaturity is understood and made meaningful” (ibid.:7) that are determined by culture. “It is in this sense one can talk about the social construction of childhood and its re- and deconstruction” (ibid.:7). Post-structuralist thinking, explained in the previous chapter, has had a strong effect on the thinking in childhood sociology: since subjects are effects of discourse, “different discourses of childhood constitute childhood (and children) in different ways” (ibid.:24). This is why there cannot be any 'real' or 'authentic' childhood behind the discourses (ibid.:26).

A natural effect of this view of childhood as a social construction is a critical attitude towards the universalization of 'childhood' which seems to be happening with the increasing amount of international laws and other attempts to govern childhood globally. These topics will be dealt with in more detail later on, but let us now contend with a short account of the main arguments against universalism. Firstly, the global norms of childhood are based on liberal political philosophy, depicting the child as a free, autonomous, thinking individual, and the single most criticized evidence of this is the UNCRC from 1989 (Wells 2009:166, 183). Scheper-Hughes and Sargent, in the introduction to their volume 'Small wars : the cultural politics of childhood', wonder how cultural anthropologists could celebrate a 'universal' code of children's rights “when the notion of

'the child' is so dependent on local meanings and practices?" (1998:8). This is exemplified by the amount of discussions during the drafting of the UNCRC that show that there is far from global agreement on the age when childhood ends (Wells 2009:22). Another useful example is the rhetoric of 'children's needs' commonly seen in any policy papers. Such 'needs' are usually based on research data and child psychology theories derived from Europe or the United States, but their influence extends well beyond those societies and are sometimes almost universally applied in development policies and treaties like the UNCRC. Thus, it would be important to "recognize the plurality of pathways to maturity" (Woodhead 1997:76). Moreover, concepts such as 'child's best interests' are also a matter of cultural interpretation: for instance, 'rights' and 'needs' of the child in themselves are a Western way of understanding adult-child-relationships. For instance, in OAU's African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, the dominant terms are 'responsibilities' and 'duties' of the child (ibid.:80). The challenge is to interpret children's rights in different contexts, as well as to empower children themselves in the process of defining their rights and needs, rather than making them powerless dependants and objects in the 'politics of age' exercised by international and national actors (Rosen 2007:296; Woodhead 1997:80f). Researchers also call for a better understanding of the role of the child in the structures of modernity, how Western models have been exported, and the specificity of childhood in different world regions, national frameworks and social contexts (Stephens 1995:14).

4 Analysis

In the following, I will attempt to answer the research questions based on a discourse analysis of the NGO reports. I will first trace different discourses concerning 'childhood' and 'child' that can be found in the texts and show how the children are described in them. Then, I will highlight how 'child', 'soldier', and 'child soldier' are defined in the reports. Finally, I will discuss the question 'What are children being rehabilitated as?' and thereafter, show what the rehabilitation programmes aim at doing.

4.1 *Discourses about childhood*

Theories of childhood have been elaborated during the twentieth century and new technologies of knowledge, such as psychological experiments, applied to the study. Consequently, the dominant account of childhood has been that of development, 'rationality', 'naturalness' and 'universality', where developing into an adult represents a progression from simplicity to complexity, irrationality to rationality. This has led to a “growing imposition of particularly Western conceptualization of childhood for all children which effectively conceals the fact that the institution of childhood is a social construction” (James & Prout 1997:9f). This dominant account can also be traced in the documents I have analysed. Even though the texts seem to be very conscious about taking into account the local cultural context, this is still done in order to make successful 'interventions' underpinned with specific notions of 'children' and 'rehabilitation'. It is a challenge to combine these efforts with the possibility of taking into account local conceptions of childhood because there are no general surveys or written sources that form a coherent narrative of African childhoods, mainly just literature on colonial childhood and child labour. It is also important to note that due to colonization, the African concepts of childhood were changed, particularly in relation to school and work (Wells 2009:9f).

I have divided the discourses that I traced into two analytical categories: the normative ones that make certain presumptions about what childhood should be like, and those that describe the particular characteristics and the 'essence' of children. The first category includes the discourse of childhood as an essentially safe, carefree and happy phase, the responsibility of adults in providing it, the discourse of children's 'needs', the child as a free and choosing individual with a focus on the child's self-confidence, and the discourse of childhood as fixed steps of development. The second category involves the overlapping discourses of children as passive, vulnerable and innocent

victims.

4.1.1 The ideal childhood

There are several overlapping but still different discourses about childhood and children to be traced in the documents. Perhaps the most implicit one, at least for a reader with a Western background because it is so naturalized for me, is that of childhood, in opposition to adulthood, as a safe, carefree and happy phase, during which children are entitled to the best possible care and support (Boyden 1997:191, Honwana 2007:41). This thinking is underpinned by theories of pollution: that adult society threatens and undermines childhood innocence and children should be protected from the harsh reality and social danger (Boyden 1997:191, Stephens 1995:9). The concern for the loss of childhood innocence has been growing in recent decades, but it is in fact questionable whether this protected space ever existed in the way it is imagined – this concern may actually reflect the concern for the loss of social spaces autonomous from the realm of market-driven politics (Stephens 1995:9f). Thus, this view of childhood is culturally and historically bound to the social preoccupations of capitalist countries in Europe and the United States (Boyden 1997:192, Honwana 2007:41).

For example, in the *Global Report* (2008), the UNCRC is repeatedly discussed in terms of protection for children, which admittedly is its pronounced aim, but it in any case shows the ideal of a secure childhood. For example, “a checklist on integration and protection of children was adopted to ensure that child rights and protection are systematically addressed in European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) operations and mission planning” (Coalition 2008:6) and “the Paris Principles offer guidance on protecting children from recruitment” (ibid.:5) point to the importance of protection, but at the same time share the view that the main protective bodies are international. Statements such as “children whose families cannot be found [...] will need counselling and comfort to help them deal with loss, and to help them find alternatives for their future” (Jareg 2005:5) or that the infants born in captivity are “in need of programs to support their nurture, care and protection” (Castelli et al. 2005:2) further testify to the assumption that children need to be taken care of by others. This is not to say that children should not be cared for, but to point out that 'protection' is, underpinned with paternalistic intentions, at least when exercised by external actors such as international agencies and laws setting standards for ideal childhoods. Especially the statements that the children need *counselling* and *programs* would point to the conception that the NGOs rely more on their own work than that of the local community. The discourse of a carefree childhood without heavy responsibilities is very obvious in Chrobok & Akutu (2008). It mentions three times that the

most disadvantaged children were those former abducted children who faced "the premature assumption of responsibility for themselves and/or their siblings, and in absence of a protective family structure" (Chrobok & Akutu 2008:14) when being left without parents and having to "provide for themselves and/or shoulder the burden of caring for younger siblings [...] they had to abandon the hope of education and seek a way of earning a living" (ibid.:20). This is, however, often the case in many countries and it may be seen as natural for children to take care of their siblings, so it can hardly be called 'premature'. In order to do that, one would have to define what 'mature' is and when a person is ready to it, and this is, again, socially constructed.

It seems that the final responsibility for providing this kind of an ideal childhood lies with adults, be it the parents, authorities or NGOs and thereby all their donors and the international community. Moreover, it seems that the care should primarily be given by the parents, and family relationships are acknowledged as important in both Chrobok & Akutu (2008) and Jareg (2005). However, the reunion with families is discussed in terms of the problems it causes, and their recommended solutions. Chrobok and Akutu point out that a traditional cleansing ritual was performed to some of the children, but "while these ceremonies were meaningful and important to families and communities, their value to the children themselves varied [because] the ceremonies did not *'prevent them from thinking about the bush'*" (2008:13, original emphasis). It is also noted that "for a few children, mostly those who did not pass through a reception centre but returned on their own, the initial reception by their families was more problematic" (ibid.:14). After this, a boy is quoted telling that he had to return to a reception centre for a while because his mother was so afraid of him. Herein lies the problem: the reaction of the family is seen as an obstacle that needs to be tackled by the NGOs, even though it is problematic that the capacity of the family is not relied on. In case the parents 'fail' to protect the children or understand their needs 'the right way', it is the international community's and NGO's task to do it or at least give advice. The same idea is exemplified by Jareg:

to be listened to, given feedback, comfort, information on the inevitability of the reactions and assurance that they will gradually subside is important, taken together with all the other efforts described here to build up trust and self esteem and restore normality [...] parents/caregivers need to know how they should respond to the distress of their child...

(2005:7)

She thus describes the values (e.g. self-esteem which will be discussed later on) of the rehabilitation programmes and recommends these as the solutions that the parents should use too. A similar

conception can be found throughout the text, e.g. “interim care centres need some form of assessment process [...] to assess the child's 'readiness' to go home, and the family's 'readiness' to accept him/her” (ibid.:5). It seems to be taken for granted that the families will need outside help to assess whether they are able to accept their own child. Moreover, the assumption that an interim care is needed would imply that the parents cannot take care of their child themselves. Even when there are problems during the reunion, the family needs to understand that the child should not be held responsible for this and be sensitive and accepting, for which they will need guidance. In these cases, the child's advocates are often professionals and not the parents, which can be said to undermine the moral agency of adults in developing countries (Pupavac in Wells 2009:32).

Moreover, it is stated that “the responsibility for longer-term follow-up of these children belongs with district authorities and local child protection agencies” (Chrobok & Akutu 2008:9). This reflects a belief in authorities having the final responsibility for the well-being of the child. This is a legacy of colonialism, since the earliest attempts at state regulation of childhood took place in Western Europe and the United States, and in the South, welfare provision of such kind arose through colonialism (Boyden 1997:200) Hence, power is seized from the local community in determining how the child should be rehabilitated. The types of welfare services provided in the South during the colonial period reflected the concerns of the rulers rather than the people using those services (ibid.:202) which is why the regulation of childhood by others than the local community (elders/parents) is still problematic. Even in Uganda, both state and army officials work in cooperation with the NGOs at least in the hand-over ceremonies of released child soldiers, sharing and reproducing with them a discourse of the children as innocent victims (Akello 2006:231,233).

The culmination of undermining the moral agency of the parents is the idea that in the end, every adult has a global moral responsibility for every suffering child, often present in NGO appeals. This moral sense is being appealed to when calling for international attention: “the impact of that attention is yet to be felt by many children who are, or are at the risk of becoming, child soldiers [...] the international community is to make good its promise to protect children from military exploitation” (Coalition 2008:3) or “its impact is not yet felt by tens of thousands children in the ranks of fighting forces”(ibid.:5). It is a distinctive feature of 'child-saving' that “if the protection of children is not forthcoming from local adult populations or institutions, then it is the moral duty of other adults and institutions to intervene”(Wells 2009:178.), and it is the idea of childhood inscribed in the UNCRC that constitutes a moral imperative (ibid.:179).

Possibly a result of this moral duty is talking about childhood in terms of 'needs'. This discourse is clearly exemplified in all of the reports. For example, one should have learned lessons “about the priorities and needs of children during official DDR processes...” (Coalition 2008:10), children experiencing trauma “need a period of intensive assistance from trained social and health workers and teachers, in some form of interim care, before returning to their communities” (Jareg 2005:2), and the helpers and specialised services for children should be “knowledgeable about children's specific needs” (ibid.:7). Statements of needs such as these may well have a foundation in systematic research but “global inferences neglect the cultural context of particular child care arrangements [and the] cultural definitions of mental health and psychological adjustment that the research presumed” (Woodhead 1997:71). Thus, when designing programmes based on the concept of 'children's needs', one should be aware that the needs, too, are constructed. These quotes also undermine the capability of the local community to define the children's needs since it is assumed that it is the officials, teachers and social workers have to take care of the rehabilitation first and rely on notions of needs that may actually have their origin in a completely different context.

A discursive practice present in the reports I analysed is the focus on the child as an individual. AVSI's “interventions are linked together in a holistic approach, by keeping the single person at the centre [and it] supports individual children with a wide array of interventions each tailored to the specific needs of a child and his or her family” (Castelli et al. 2005:2). In addition to the interventions being focused on the individual, the family is addressed but there might be a problem with both defining 'family' and its meaning. Chrobok & Akutu have admittedly conducted a study of individual children's perceptions, but they discuss even community relationships only from the child's perspective: “their reintegration to the community was a slow and difficult process for the majority of children. Most encountered a great deal of hostility from community members” (Chrobok & Akutu 2008:14f). It has, however, been argued that the formerly abducted children gain acceptance into the community by not thinking or talking about the abduction experience – the past is not forgotten or denied, but the children feel it is more important to engage in productive activity and to reconnect with family and community. Additionally, the Western approach to trauma, where the goal is to decrease the individual's trauma symptoms by talking about the experience and increasing the conscious tolerance of the emotional and cognitive aspects of the trauma, has been criticised because of the focus on the individual's construction of the trauma experience, rather than focusing on the community's experience (Corbin 2008:327f). Jareg, especially, holds high the role of children taking active roles in their rehabilitation: “participation completely turns around the ways children have been trained to behave in military environments [...] now they are asked to reflect, plan, explore, discuss – and protest” (2005:5). Protesting, however, may not fit well with the

ways children are expected to behave against their elders. This, again, may cause problems after family reunion.

A prominent trait of this discourse was the emphasis on boosting the child's self-confidence, which reproduces the discourse of the child as an autonomous, choosing individual. For example, "children's psycho-social health can be fostered in a variety of ways that increase their self confidence and esteem [...] life planning assistance is of central importance [...] exploring different choices they may make for their future lives, helping them to be realistic, or to gain the courage to make important decisions" (Jareg 2005:6) are statements that suggest that it is important to be able to choose one's own, individual path in life from a multiplicity of choices. This is discussed in the context of developing programmatic responses, and the role of the family and community in these choices is not acknowledged in the context. It is also taken up that some children learned new skills in the bush with the LRA, for example that leadership skills helped one boy to get "a position which raised his self-confidence and earned recognition and respect from others" (Chrobok & Akutu 2008:21). Here, one can see the tendency to assume that in addition to protection, the children need help from adults to become proper adults. Underneath lies a Western view that their self-confidence needs to be boosted so that they will become individuals and survive alone. This, on the other hand, may be in discrepancy with the expectations of the community and the preconditions of the child's future life.

In the documents, one can see a clear tendency to unquestionably see childhood as stages of progressive development from immaturity to maturity. This is most apparent in Jareg's "integrated framework based upon both the legal rights of children and knowledge of child development", according to which strategies of rehabilitation "should respond to children both as legal subjects as well as developing human beings"(2005:1). This implies that childhood is a constant state of becoming, until at some point the 'ready' human being is achieved. It is common to the other suggestions about the best way of rehabilitating children that "factors such as the age, gender and the stage of development of the children need to be taken into account in a way that reflects possible interactions between them" (Chrobok & Akutu 2008:27). The stage of development is, however, quite difficult to define and there may be a controversy between views of different actors (authorities/law, NGOs, community). Theories of development usually suggest a steady progression from immaturity to maturity, whereas the shift from childhood to adulthood is seen differently in cultures where rites of passage mark this step. Moreover, when seeing childhood as a stage of becoming, the focus is not on the intrinsic merit of the child but rather on "what kind of adult the child will develop into and how he or she can be shaped to develop into the right kind of adult"

(Wells 2009:180).

4.1.2 The innocent children

Recurrent themes in the documents were also those of children as inherently innocent, passive and vulnerable. The innocence discourse is well exemplified by the language of the *Global Report* (2008), where a point is made of charging “those who recruit and use children in hostilities [for war crimes] relating to the conscription, enlistment and active participation in hostilities of children under 15” (Coalition 2008:3f). This implies that children should not be held culpable since it is the adults' fault. Taking this position signifies that children are exploited and powerless and have no legally relevant agency. This view, however, may contradict with the experience of the victims of crimes committed by child soldiers and may violate local understandings of justice (Rosen 2007:297). It is clearly pointed out in the documents that the children should not be held responsible by anyone: “Community views of child/youth culpability seemed to fuel rejection of returning children, and these views remain targets for effective intervention” (Chrobok & Akutu 2008:33). Moreover, when the children have committed terrible acts, they “have deep qualms of conscience about their acts, forced or not. Many wish to seek forgiveness, and have ideas of becoming 'helpers' to make things good” (Jareg 2005:4).

Part of this discourse is depicting children as vulnerable and victims. “There is no doubt that many children will remain vulnerable for life” (ibid.:9) is Jareg's concluding remark. The discourse is obvious in Chrobok & Akutu's (2008) 'traumatized but resilient' rhetoric going on throughout the text:

This picture of continuing vulnerability combined with resilience and a determination to readjust to life upon return, illustrates that it is an oversimplification to regard formerly abducted children as either traumatized or resilient. The emotional outcome is more complex than that.

(2008:2)

Jareg, too, mentions this: “However, children are also resilient and able to adapt, and it may be anticipated that many adolescents will gradually be able to take up life again with the support of a rehabilitation/reintegration model which addresses the main issues outlined here” (2005:7). The main issues outlined admittedly do include family and community relationships, but they also include practices to raise the child's self-confidence, sense of individuality and the ability to question and protest. This may then be a cause of discrepancy when returning to a community

where one is supposed to show respect to elders and authorities. Moreover, if the child is portrayed as an innocent victim and the discourse is present during the whole rehabilitation process, the community views of child culpability may be undermined and stigmatization occur. The victimization of children is further underlined by recounting in detail the horrors experienced by former child soldiers. They were deprived of rights, food, rest and social relationships (ibid.:4) and "were subjected to extreme violence and sexual abuse. They were drugged and forced to carry heavy loads and walk long distances... Their testimonies reveal how much they endured" (Chrobok & Akutu 2008:11). Not only were they forced to suffer when in the bush, but they also had to encounter the rejection and stigmatization by the community after returning home (Chrobok & Akutu:14-16; Jareg 2005:2f). To be treated this way is obviously negative for the children, but the language used still paints a simplistic picture as to the experiences and motivations of the children. Moreover, the stigmatization from the community is portrayed as one problem to be tackled among others and it seems to be the community that needs to be changed: "many interventions are implemented to enhance the community's capacity to identify, plan and address the psychosocial needs of the children inside their community" (Castelli et al. 2005:3) and "reintegration programmes in Uganda have included elements of community awareness-raising prior to the return of the children from armed groups" (Chrobok & Akutu 2008:30). It may admittedly be seen as positive that the community is for example informed about the experiences of the children. It may, however, be a further source of stigma that the problematic past of these children is emphasized (Akello et al. 2006:235) and they are labelled traumatized.

4.2 *Controversial terminology*

4.2.1 Who is a 'child'?

When trying to find explicit definitions of what a 'child' is in the reports, the task is much more difficult than finding descriptions of childhood and children. It is thus left unclear whom exactly the descriptions of an ideal childhood discussed above should apply to. Moreover, when definitions are to be found, there are some controversies which will be discussed below. As one could have predicted from the fact that The Coalition advocates a 'straight-18' position, the official definition in these texts seems to be that a child is "any girl or boy under the age of 18" (Coalition 2008:7). It is, however, hardly defined explicitly, but rather implied in brackets or assumed that it is obvious to everyone. For example, in the *Global Report*, the expression closest to a definition is "...children (under-18s)..." (ibid.:3). In the rest of the texts, there is no certain age limit expressed in words, even though one would assume that they adhere to the UN standard of persons under the age of 18 being children. However, the existence of certain age limits and stages of development is implied when distinguishing for example between "children and youth" (Chrobok & Akutu 2008:1). When relying on such categories and using a few simple words to define something as complex as a 'child', the issue begins to sound simple and the reader may start viewing it as natural.

The official stand concerning age is clear:

Placing children's rights ahead of military needs requires far-reaching shifts in values and attitudes. Until it is accepted that childhood extends to 18, and that the spirit of the Protocol expects more of states than just amending the age of conscription, children will continue to be at risk of becoming soldiers, especially in times of crisis.

(Coalition 2008:6)

It seems that the other reports with a more practical background have some trouble observing this line of thought since they are not so consistent with their use of words. As mentioned above, both Jareg and Chrobok & Akutu distinguish between 'children' and "youth" (Chrobok & Akutu 2008:1,2,10), "adolescents"(Jareg 2005:4), "young persons" (Chrobok & Akutu 2008:15; Jareg 2005:7), "pre-adolescents" (Chrobok & Akutu 2008:27) etc., indicating that everyone under 18 cannot be referred to as a uniform group. Jareg refers to a 22-year-old "girl" pregnant with her second child as a child (2005:4), although this may have more to do with the fact that the woman in question had been a 'child soldier' with the LRA, which will be discussed later on. Her report is,

however, the only one that openly admits that there is cultural variation in the use of the term 'child':

Older girls with children resist being viewed as 'children' themselves, even those below 18 years, and indeed culturally speaking in many parts of the world they are viewed as adults. Many have played important roles during their recruitment, and gained experience in, for example, health and social work besides their military activities. These factors also need to be taken account of in rehabilitation services.

(Jareg 2005:9)

It is, however, not discussed how exactly it should be taken account of that some might not, in fact, be 'children'. Here, again, the local and NGO's ideas of childhood, both who is a child and what the child is like, may clash. Taking this factor into account, as Jareg suggests, would mean rethinking the notion of 'child' and changing the discursive practices concerning children employed by the NGOs. Chrobok and Akutu touch on the same problem as they cite "marriage and pregnancies among the girls" as a reason for not attending school (2008:19). Here they imply that these girls, despite the fact that some of them have embraced adult responsibilities such as parenthood and some of them are over 18, are still children. Moreover, they make a point in their methodology section about whether their participants can be defined as 'children':

Participants of the study were 116 children and youth, now aged between 11 and 24 [...] we had originally aimed to include participants with a narrower age range, some older youth heard about our study [...] when they were abducted, 108 (93 percent) children were aged between 7 and 16, while only three were over 18.

(Chrobok & Akutu 2008:10)

By this, they seem to aim at more legitimacy for their study. The legitimacy would then be derived from the fact that most participants were under 18 and would thus fit the category of children embraced by the Coalition. Local conceptions of childhood and adulthood are thus not consulted, even though they may make a huge difference for the reintegration.

One more issue about the definition of 'child' that I wish to take up is that of what are seemingly double standards concerning the age were 'childhood' ends in the *Global Report*. When criticising the use of under-age soldiers by Western countries, the report repeatedly uses 'under-18s' instead of 'children': "A number of under-18s were deployed to Iraq by the British armed forces between 2003 and 2005, although most were removed from the theatre of war within a week of their arrival" (Coalition 2008:9), and "In the USA, following a dramatic number of under-18s joining the

military...”(ibid.:12). In the rest of the text, 'under-18' is usually synonymous to 'child', but here, it would make a huge difference politically speaking to swap 'under-18' for 'child'. Sending 'children' to Iraq might actually give the reader a completely different picture of situation. This is probably because for example a 16-year old in the West would belong to the category of 'youth', and not 'children', whereas an African of the same age is labelled a child (Utas 2003:29). In this case, the recruited under-18s were 16- and 17-year-olds and thus 'youth' in their local context, which is not addressed in the report where everyone under 18 is a 'child'. This fabricated age limit is necessary for the purposes of the organization, but the quotes reveal that the definition of 'child' is ambiguous also in this cultural context. This also correlates with international humanitarian law concerning child soldiers, even though the official stance of the Coalition is even stricter than that of international humanitarian law. In the Optional Protocol to the UNCRC, the language concerning states using child soldiers is softer: “States Parties shall take all feasible measures to ensure that members of their armed forces who have not attained the age of 18 years do not take a direct part in hostilities” (United Nations 2000:Article 1). Armed group distinct from the armed forces of a state on the other hand, “should not, under any circumstances, recruit or use in hostilities persons under the age of 18 years” (ibid.:Article 4).

4.2.2 Children or soldiers?

The term 'soldier' as such is not clearly defined in any of the documents, but some aspects of it become apparent either through defining what it is not, or in relation to what a 'child soldier' is. I will, therefore, try to answer to both of the questions ”how is a 'soldier' defined?” and ”how is a 'child soldier' defined?”, in the same chapter. The Coalition defines a child soldier as follows:

While there is no precise definition, the Coalition considers a child soldier any person below the age of 18 who is a member of or attached to government armed forces or any other regular or irregular armed force or armed political group, whether or not an armed conflict exists. Child soldiers perform a range of tasks including: participation in combat; laying mines and explosives; scouting, spying, acting as decoys, couriers or guards; training, drill or other preparations; logistics and support functions, portering, cooking and domestic labour. Child soldiers may also be subjected to sexual slavery or other forms of sexual abuse.

(Coalition 2008:9)

Other possible definitions seem to take up the same points: that children are recruited in many kinds of armed groups, be they government forces, militias, or irregular armed groups, and they are used in various different ways also outside combat duties. It is stated that ”where armed conflict does

exist, child soldiers will almost certainly be involved. The majority of these children are in non-state armed groups” (ibid.:3).

What is most striking in the documents is the controversy between the definition of 'child soldier', and what is usually understood as 'soldier'. Considering the wide range of tasks that child soldiers perform and the fact that they are most often recruited in non-state armed groups, an adult in the same position would hardly be called a 'soldier', but rather a rebel or a combatant. In Chrobok & Akutu, LRA fighters are “abductors” (2008:4) or “LRA members” (2008:12). A 'soldier' seems to refer only to a combatant in government armed forces, as in “defeated soldiers of the deposed government” (ibid.:5). Thus, apparently one is a 'soldier' if recruited as a child, but as soon as the magical age limit of 18 years is passed, one is more likely to be a 'rebel'. Moreover, the texts give the impression that if one is recruited as a child but released as an adult, one still belongs to the category of child soldiers. As mentioned above, “older girls with children resist being viewed as 'children' themselves” (Jareg 2005:9) (this will be elaborated further below). The term 'rebel' implies a political agenda as well as consciousness and rationality (rebellious *against* something), whereas a 'child soldier' is not supposed to have agency but is “forced to carry out atrocities” (ibid.:9). This lack of agency is kept up in the 'innocent victims' discourse which is necessary for the NGOs rehabilitative practices. One may wonder whether adult rebels are, then, never forced, even if it is not done by people but by the circumstances. One of the most common reasons for joining, for both adults and children, is in fact poverty and the lack of alternatives in life, as well as the struggle for recognition, power and agency (Mazurana et al. 2002:106, Utas 2003:15). Thus, joining armed forces is often caused by structural violence (Galtung 1990:293f; Ramsbotham et al. 2005:10f). From this line of reasoning, I would conclude that 'soldier' in 'child soldier' is not the same 'soldier' as in 'soldier'.

Moreover, the finding that most descriptions or definitions of a 'child soldier' would not fit the term 'soldier' testifies that 'child soldier' (as we know it) is a social construction, or, in post-structuralist terms, the connection between the signifier and signified is arbitrary. Obviously, 'soldier' is, too, since it is the quality of the armed force one fights in that defines whether one is a 'soldier' or a 'rebel'. However, the addition of 'child' deprives 'soldier' of agency and brings with it the aspect of being forced and exploited. This conclusion is further reaffirmed by the history of 'child soldiers'. In pre-industrial societies, there was no fixed age for soldiers to enter war (Rosen 2005:4). The moment of becoming a soldier was defined by rites of passage, for instance initiation and circumcision which may have occurred as early as the age of 12-14 in the case of Liberia (Utas 2003:90). According to some estimates, boys would fight 3-4 years after puberty in pre-colonial

Africa, which means that fifteen-year-olds were able to fight in wars (Wells 2009:150). The rite of passage, however, signified the passage to adulthood and thus they were not children and soldiers simultaneously, but would most likely still fit into the category of 'child soldiers' depicted e.g. by the Coalition (Utas 2003:90).

'Child soldier' is mainly defined in terms of the horrible deeds the children have been forced to do. The main feature seems to be that they have been forced and have no own agency, that they are irrational and that they are victims, i.e. the same themes that could be found in the descriptions of 'child' discussed earlier. Jareg describes the destiny of a child soldier as follows:

They are seldom aware that their rights have been violated when taken into armed forces, although most of course know that crimes are being committed when unarmed civilians are killed and women raped. All children recruited into armies have to forfeit the right to education and family care (if they have a family); all risk death or disability on the battlefield, and death, torture and confinement on capture. Children are deprived of food, rest, and normal social relationships with others. Many risk being forced to carry out repeated atrocities against unarmed civilians, including family members and peers, and in so doing, cross a threshold of 'no return' in terms of what human beings should and should not do. Girls may be relatively protected in some armed forces, whereas in others they are subjected to years-long sexual enslavement. As soldiers, they risk rape from opposing forces, also when captured.

(2005:4)

Just to remind of the previous statement, one may notice here, too, that a 'soldier' would definitely not be defined in these terms. However, what is interesting in the above quote is how child soldiers are depicted as victims of horrors and forced to carry out atrocities. The rhetoric of having been forced is visible in the documents in sentences such as "children who have been socialised into a military hierarchy for many years" (ibid.:5) and "participation completely turns around the ways children have been trained to behave in military environments, where they received orders which were not negotiable" (ibid.:5). Jareg does, however, devote a paragraph to restoring relationships with the community. She addresses important issues, such as "projects need to have an on-going dialogue with communities so as to fully understand community attitudes towards returning children. This will allow an assessment of the investment required to achieve community partnership" (ibid.:6). She does not, however, mention what the community attitudes might be and why, and it is this absence that is crucial. The community's conceptions of the child's culpability might undermine the discourse of innocence present in the report. This is the inherent contradiction of the report: it is possible that Jareg has observed this issue, but stating that the children could

possibly be seen as perpetrators would reveal that most of the text, along with the underpinning tenets of rehabilitation procedures, is contradictory. Perhaps that is why the language is tidied in order to avoid this issue and maintain the discourse of child soldiers as victims.

The child soldier is represented as a forced victim elsewhere, too:

All endured a great deal of hardship and violence during their captivity. In addition to experiencing physical, psychological and sexual abuse, they were forced to witness atrocities committed by their captors against their communities, families and friends. Under the threat of death, they were sometimes forced to commit atrocities themselves.

(Chrobok & Akutu 2008:1)

This is the primary picture given of the children in the report. It does not only concern the interviewed children, but also those previously abducted by the LRA: “once in the LRA children were forced to participate in combat, to carry out raids, to loot and burn houses and kill and mutilate other child soldiers and civilians” (ibid.:5). This view, then, is paired with an emphasis on the “hostility from community members, which took the form of isolation [and] stigmatization” (ibid.:14). Such pairing poses the community's view against that of the NGOs. Community awareness-raising is seen as important both by the children and the authors, but it is the content of the awareness-raising that could be questioned. As mentioned above, in this report “community views of child/youth culpability [...] remain targets for effective intervention” (ibid.:33). The community view is also undermined when dismissing the traditional cleansing practices as meaningless for the children's psychological well-being (ibid.:32) and not acknowledging that they might serve other purposes, too. Moreover, even if it is admitted that the former child soldiers have done bad things, the fact that they are often treated very badly is apparently supposed to mitigate their culpability. Again, we see the plea to the global moral duty of adults: “... children whose lives are blighted by their involvement in conflict and for whom international attention is of little comfort unless it changes their individual circumstances for the better. The damage resulting from the experience of being a child soldier may never be fully repaired” (Coalition 2008:7). It seems that it is the international community who has the responsibility for the fate of these children. Thus, since they are dependent on funding from international donors, it is necessary for the NGOs to depict child soldiers in a certain way in order to win the attention and pity of the international community.

A related characterization of 'child soldiers' is that they are irrational and not fully aware of what they are doing while participating in atrocities. The process of becoming a soldier, according to

Jareg, follows a certain pattern:

When participating in armed forces involved in active combat, children have completely different modes of behaviour and social interaction imposed upon them. Their behaviour becomes driven by military considerations, fear and aggression, all within a strictly hierarchical context. Soldiers will have to obey orders often on peril of death or torture. Rewards will be given on the basis of their performance in destroying others who are perceived as 'the enemy', be they civilians or opposing armed forces.

(2005:3)

Thus, one gets the picture that children in war do not exercise their own will. Being a soldier is not compatible with the image of childhood as a carefree phase, and even less with the essential innocence and passivity of the child. Hence, the deeds they perform are horrible because the perpetrators are children. For adult soldiers on the other hand, it is not such a taboo since they are seen to exercise agency and can be held accountable for what they do. In order to make the discourse of children as innocent and passive viable, an alternative conceptualization for the existence of child soldiers is needed: one cannot imagine such an unsettling concept as 'child soldier' being the same as us and it is therefore dehumanized and made 'the other'. The dehumanization is particularly obvious in the metaphor of being forced to carry out repeated atrocities as crossing "a threshold of 'no return' in terms of what human beings should and should not do" (ibid.:4). Crossing that line, however, seems to be mitigated, then, by the fact that "many children have deep qualms of conscience about their acts, forced or not. Many wish to seek forgiveness..." (ibid.:4). Forgiveness is, however, an interesting contradiction to the assumption that the child is fundamentally innocent. The statement reveals that some children, too, see themselves as guilty of the acts they have performed. Thus, the whole discourse of child as an innocent, passive and vulnerable victim is countered by the personal experience of the child.

4.3 The frames of rehabilitation

As we have seen, the definition of who is a child for the NGO varies and is sometimes contradictory. This points to the assumption that the former child soldiers are without exception being rehabilitated as children. According to Jareg, 'rehabilitation' can be defined as restoring "the child's functioning to 'as it was' before their experiences – but this will be a well-nigh impossible task in the case of those who have been with armed forces for many years" (2005:2). Restoring, here, implies returning back to something one used to be. It is admitted that this may be impossible, but the direction of returning to something will still colour the rehabilitation. Additionally, the former child soldiers are always referred to as 'children', even though, as mentioned above, some of them may be well over 18 and may have, for example, become mothers or married during their captivity (Chrobok & Akutu 2008:19; Jareg 2005:4,9). It could be pointed out here that concerning marriage and parenthood, only girls are mentioned in the documents and the stigmatization of child mothers is, rightly, addressed. For example, "girls who have suffered sexual violence will be less acceptable, particularly if they return home with children born as a result of that violence" (Chobok & Akutu 2008:2). However, a source of the stigmatization of the returning 'child mothers' in Northern Uganda has to do with the fact that they return into a patrilineal society. Thus, the mother would normally be expected to go to live with the father's family but instead they are rehabilitated as children who should go back to their family. The community may, however, view them as wives of rebels rather than abducted children (Akello et al. 2006:240). Nothing is, on the other hand, said in the reports about the boys who have become fathers or married and the impact of parenthood on their status and self-image is not acknowledged.

The consequence of rehabilitating the returnees as children and getting them to think of themselves as children is that they will be reproduced in the image of child the implementers have. That would be the image described in the discourses about childhood above. Thus, the focus of rehabilitation is both on the individual child and his/her self-confidence and on the child as an innocent victim. All of the NGO documents stress the fundamental innocence of the children, such as Jareg concluding that "some children's difficulties will be compounded by feelings of guilt or shame, and taking the blame for what happened" (2005:6). These feelings, in the context of rehabilitation of psychological problems, are renounced as illegitimate and something that the child should be cured of. The result is that by propagating a certain image of childhood, an identity is being imposed on the child. This is also a factor that leads to controversies. For example, the former child soldiers themselves take advantage of this situation: even though "some return as adults, they quickly find out that to register as a former child soldier is a 'safe option' since they will then automatically be presented to the

community as an innocent victim who was forced to carry out horrendous acts” (Akello et al. 2006:240), and in some situations they even get financial benefits or other entitlements by embracing the identity of a child soldier (Cheney 2005:37f). It is not unheard of in other contexts, either, that former child soldiers embrace different identities depending on the context and shift between portraying themselves as agents or victims (Utas 2003:23).

Moreover, in Ugandan rehabilitation centres, especially the ones facilitated by World Vision which is a Christian organization, the themes of vulnerability, innocence and victimhood are mixed with Christian values of repentance and being forgiven (Akello et al. 2006:233). The aspect of forgiveness is, as noted above, a source of controversy if the children are both innocent and need to seek forgiveness. There is, additionally, a “discrepancy between the well-meant efforts of NGOs to reintegrate child soldiers with their communities, and the compelling need of these children and their communities to come to terms with accountability, and feelings of guilt and revenge” (ibid. 2006:230). The problem is being traced by Chrobok & Akutu (2008):

younger children (both boys and girls) reported finding reintegration easier than older boys and girls. Thus pre-adolescent girls found reintegration easier than older girls who had suffered sexual abuse, while older boys [...] reported longstanding suspicion and hostility towards them. One explanation [...] could be that older boys were regarded by their communities as more culpable for their actions than younger boys.

(2008:27)

As I have already mentioned, the community views and stigmatization are discussed in the documents, especially in Chrobok & Akutu (2008:2,8,15,29,30), but not seen as a fundamental cause of unsuccessful reintegration but rather an obstacle on the way that can be changed. This is most transparently revealed in the statement that “community views of child/youth culpability seemed to fuel rejection of returning children, and these views remain targets for effective intervention” (ibid.:33).

The unwillingness of the communities to welcome the formerly abducted children is not completely unreasonable, since it is based on the “refusal to accept the idea that such children are not accountable for the crimes they have committed” (Akello et al. 2006:235). The idea of culpability is combined with that of being contaminated by bad spirits, or the spirits of killed that haunt the killer. If the symptoms of the spirits (that would in psychiatric terms be symptoms of depression and anxiety) do not disappear after performing certain rituals, the child is seen as guilty of killing

(ibid.:237). What is more, not even all the children are ready to subscribe to the identity of an innocent victim. Even though the dominant discourse is that abducted children have always been 'forced' to commit atrocities, some of them have admitted having voluntarily hurt people or joining the struggle. Some also have felt allegiance to Kony or felt like staying with the LRA (Survey of War Affected Youth 2006:5). Moreover, some of the rescued children may become involved in harassing and looting in absence of any other income (Akello et al.:234ff). This obviously undermines the image of innocence reproduced by the NGOs.

Another aspect, concerning the role of those implementing the rehabilitation, is the way they make themselves useful and needed. For example, 'rehabilitation' for Jareg is "a process of re-orientation, rest, recuperation and reflection which needs to take place in a safe setting, in interaction with people who have received special training to facilitate the re-adjustment process" (2005:2), and 'reintegration' as "the process of reuniting a child with his/her family and facilitating their community membership" (ibid.:2). The focus in both definitions, especially the latter one, is on the facilitator. Hence, the existence of both concepts requires the existence of outside 'helpers' facilitating the processes, thus justifying the presence of NGOs. Moreover, the goal of these reports is to improve the practice of NGOs, but they see the creation and improvement of 'programmes' as the only alternative: "a central issue in helping children readjust is to fully engage their participation in developing programmatic responses" (ibid.:6), "specialized provision for the emotional, physical and sexual or reproductive health of such children [...] should be an integral part of future reintegration programs" (Chrobok & Akutu 2008:2) and "agencies [...] must be willing to self-evaluate critically and revise their programmes accordingly" (Castelli et al. 2005:5). Clearly, these are all well-meaning strategies but I am suggesting that as the concept of 'rehabilitation' is dependent on the facilitators, it also needs rethinking. This issue was also discussed above: childhood is supposed to be a safe phase, and a child is perceived as in need of protection. Here, the legacy of colonialism can be seen in the trend towards 'child-saving' and exposing the perceived neglect of children. Scheper-Hughes and Sargent call this "the late 20th century version of 'white man's burden'", that is, creating another arena for the transfer of Western social values, technologies and professional forces (1998:8). This is admittedly not the aim of the NGOs, but the discursive practices involved in structuring the programmes are marked by Western imagery of childhood. The implementers might not even be aware of these, but the result is a tendency to impose certain values or discourses on the societies where they work.

There is another aspect to rehabilitating children in the circumstances of war: it is admitted in the documents analysed that the 'normal' order is disrupted by war.

When these children escape or are rescued and return home, they re-enter family and community life and attempt to rebuild a future for themselves. Most of them, however, return to environments that are heavily affected by conflict and where socio-economic structures have severely deteriorated.

(Castelli et al. 2005:1)

It is very important that the deterioration of socio-economic structures is addressed. This is done also in Chrobok & Akutu: "The reality of a returned child in the context of a severe humanitarian crisis and dire poverty is that an extra child needs to be fed, clothed and sent to school" (2008:25). Now, as we have seen, the NGOs subscribe to a particular notion of 'childhood' and rehabilitate the child soldiers as children. Thereby, that notion is applied to the conditions of extreme humanitarian crisis and this is another source of controversy. The underpinning tenet of the UNCRC is that children should exercise a freedom of choice while their 'best interests' must be protected by adults, but "these concepts are very much based on UN-proliferated Western notions of ideal childhood which presume a certain level of security and infrastructure usually absent from war zones" (Cheney 2005:38). The universal discourse of childhood as an innocent, safe phase is therefore hardly applicable in Uganda or any other situations of war. Moreover, with the 20-year conflict and extreme poverty in Northern Uganda, this notion of childhood is something that the children have never, in fact, experienced. Thus, rehabilitation as a recovery of such a form of childhood is deeply controversial (ibid.:39f).

Several authors have tried to explain the use of child soldiers as a crisis of social reproduction and nationhood, and thus originally as a crisis of the postcolonial state (Cheney 2005; Honwana 2007; Wells 2009). I will not go deeper into the reasons for using child soldiers, suffice it to say that "war itself is a crisis of social reproduction which children are caught up in because of their specific modalities as children in a particular cultural context" (Wells 2009:164). The phenomenon cannot be explained by Africa's precolonial history or cultural traditions, because war always disrupts normal life and people then try to cope by drawing upon their entire cultural repertoire. Thus, "recruitment of children into the military represents a real rupture of historical continuity, a profound disruption of social order" (Honwana 2007:45). This explanation can be applied in the case of Uganda, too. The generational and social hierarchies of the Acholi were upset already under colonialism, when young Acholi were recruited into military and rebel movements instead of the traditional way of letting clan elders decide when and why to wage war (Finnström 2001 in Cheney 2005:31). Now, it is Kony who is "violating culturally sanctioned justifications for and conduct in

war [and] thus using children to destroy Acholi culture and rebuild it according to his own design” (Cheney 2005:31f). The circumstances make it difficult to care for the children as well to discipline and guide them, thus breaking down traditions and intergenerational structures (ibid.:32).

It is in these circumstances that the rehabilitation and reintegration programmes work to 'restore normality' and recreate the child according to a specific notion of childhood. This strategy is questionable in the case of Uganda, where 'normality' is in constant change. Therefore, it is crucial to see the origins of the problems and readjust the programmes and policies according to them. It is especially in working for sustainable peace that the international community can do its part.

4.4 Rehabilitation as reproduction of dichotomies

From the answers to my sub-questions we can gather that the children are rehabilitated according to a certain image of childhood. Firstly, the child's self-confidence is boosted in order to make him/her survive as an individual. However, the society they re-enter to may not hold such values high and deem group cohesion as more important. Secondly, the discourse of innocence and victimhood is clashing with the local conceptions on child culpability, as well as the views of the children themselves. Also, NGOs do not trust the capacity of the local community enough. The assumption that outside help is needed to reintegrate the child soldiers colours the concepts of rehabilitation and reintegration, thus justifying the NGO's own presence. Moreover, the structural causes of the conflict are not paid enough attention to, which is a further source of controversy when trying to rehabilitate the child according to this image of childhood in circumstances of poverty and war.

Rehabilitating the child by reproducing him/her according to a specific norm may not be done intentionally, but is happening because of discursive practices. The NGO discourse relies on binary oppositions: those of childhood/adulthood, innocent/culpable, victim/perpetrator, passive/active. This is part of the nature of language, but it could be argued that the NGO discourse relies on a simplified picture of the situation. One of the characteristics of these oppositions is that they are reductionist and allow no grey zones or alternative interpretations (Eriksson et al. 2005:18). My study indicates that the division between these characterizations is steep in the NGO discourse and the child soldiers are seen as either one or the other. As we have now seen, the ideas of NGOs and the local communities collide in some of these and this is the inherent problem. Thus, the NGO programmes need critical rethinking of the discourses they use. Even though it is not completely possible to get rid of such dichotomies since they are an inherent part of language, it would be advisable to allow for a middle ground and the chance that the child soldier is necessarily not either-or but can be between (or beyond) these dichotomies. This applies to the reintegration work with

the communities, too: it must be acknowledged that the local discourses may differ from those of the NGOs, and the local knowledge must be taken into account.

5 Conclusion

I will in this concluding chapter first summarize the answers to the sub-questions I had and then summarize the conclusions I drew to answer the main research question. Then, I will identify the shortcomings of this research project and make suggestions for further research.

The first one of my sub-question was: “How are 'children' and 'childhood' described in the publications?”. I found out that the reports rely on a discourse of childhood as a safe, carefree and happy phase, during which children are entitled to the best possible care and support. This results in a paternalistic approach from the side of the NGOs, and there is a tendency to renounce the capacity of the local community to take care of the child. It is seen as the responsibility of the international community to take care of these children. Children are also described in terms of 'needs', but one should be aware that the needs, too, are constructed. Defining children's needs universally may also undermine the capability of the local community to define the children's needs. Moreover, the individuality of the child is underlined by emphasizing the importance of self-confidence. It is not, however, taken into account how this will affect community reintegration. Childhood is also seen as fixed steps of development from immaturity to maturity. The 'child', in these reports, is inherently innocent and should not be held responsible for his/her acts. Moreover, the child is portrayed as a vulnerable victim. If this discourse is present during the whole rehabilitation process, the community views of child culpability may be undermined and stigmatization occur.

The second question was “How are the terms 'child', 'soldier', and 'child soldier' defined in the publications?”. When trying to find out how 'child' is defined in the texts, it became clear that even though the official position of the Coalition is that everyone under 18 is a child, there are inconsistencies in the use of the term. Here, again, the local and NGO's ideas of childhood, both who is a child and what the child is like, may be contradictory. Taking this factor into account would mean rethinking the notion of 'child' and changing the discursive practices concerning children employed by the NGOs. There is a difference between the use of the terms 'soldier' and 'rebel', but for a child, the term 'soldier' is applied even if they are in a non-state armed group. This deprives the child of agency since the term 'rebel' implies consciousness and rationality, whereas a 'child soldier' is 'forced to carry out atrocities'. Again, the child soldier is presented an innocent victim. The child soldier is also dehumanized in order to make the discourse of innocence viable.

Lastly, I discussed the question “What are the children being rehabilitated as and what are the

implications of this?'. It was obvious that the children are rehabilitated as children, which consequently means that they will be reproduced in the image of child the implementers have. Thus, the focus of rehabilitation is both on the individual child and his/her self-confidence and on the child as an innocent victim. There is, however, a discrepancy between this view and the communities' view on culpability, as well as the view of the children themselves. This undermines the image of innocence reproduced by the NGOs. It was also suggested that as the concept of 'rehabilitation' is dependent on the facilitators, it also needs rethinking. Lastly, it was acknowledged that rehabilitation as a recovery of an 'ideal' form of childhood is deeply controversial in circumstances of war. Rather, efforts should be made to address the causes of the conflict.

The main research question was "What is being done when rehabilitating child soldiers?". I found out that the children are rehabilitated according to an image of childhood as a protected phase where the child's individuality is held high and the child's self-confidence is boosted. Moreover, the children are rehabilitated as innocent victims. Reproducing the child in this image causes several problems. There is a discrepancy between the NGO's and the communities discourses concerning these matters, and the NGOs do not trust the capacity of the local community enough. Moreover, the structural causes of the conflict are not paid enough attention to, which is a further source of controversy when trying to rehabilitate the child according to this image of childhood in circumstances of poverty and war. The discursive practices in structuring the rehabilitation programmes rely on binary oppositions of childhood/adulthood, innocent/culpable, victim/perpetrator, passive/active. These oppositions need to be acknowledged, rethought and renegotiated in order to facilitate better cooperation between the NGOs and communities.

I have now answered the research questions I set and thereby, hopefully, fulfilled the aim of raising awareness of the implications of the construction of the 'child soldier' and 'childhood' on the work of NGOs. Some issues, however, still remain unanswered. As I have only focused on the NGO discourse, the discourses of other actors, such as the state of Uganda, were not accounted for. Moreover, as I claim that the circumstances of war and poverty are a factor in unsuccessful reintegration, the specific socio-political situation in Uganda would have required more attention. These shortcomings lead to suggestions for further research. Firstly, more research should be done to identify the specific differences between the discourses of the NGOs, local communities and the state. Secondly, the views of both the communities and the children should be researched in connection with each other. Lastly, the causes of conflict should be addressed, and the socio-economic conditions in Uganda as a factor in the reintegration process should be paid more attention to.

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