Introduction: why children matter to global conflict

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Just over 1 billion children under the age of eighteen live in countries or territories affected by armed conflict; that is, almost every second child, or one-sixth of the total world population.[1] Of these, approximately 300 million are under the age of five.[2] In 2012, an estimated 17.9 million children were among displaced and vulnerable populations, of which there were around 5 million refugee children and 9 million internally displaced children.[3] In terms of sheer numbers and need, children clearly matter a great deal to global politics.

In recognition of this, the United Nations (UN) declared 2001–2010 to be the International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for the Children of the World. Given that the numbers of war-affected and displaced children remained largely constant over this period, it is worth

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[1] A similar number of children live in poverty with there no doubt being a significant overlap in these populations. UNICEF, 'Children Living in Poverty'. Available at www.unicef.org/sowc05/english/poverty.html; UNICEF, *Machel Study 10-Year Strategic Review: Children and Conflict in a Changing World* (New York, NY: UNICEF, 2009). Available at www.unicef.org/publications/files/Machel_Study_10_Year_Strategic_Review_EN_030909.pdf.

[2] UNICEF, *Machel Study 10-Year Strategic Review* (2009), 10.

[3] These figures do not include Palestinian refugee children who are registered by the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian refugees and do not necessarily fall under the 1951 UN Refugee Convention definition of a refugee. While there is a lack of comprehensive and reliable data with respect to Palestinian refugee children, one NGO estimates that close to half the 4.9 million Palestinian refugees registered with the UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) are under the age of eighteen. UNHCR, 'Global Trends 2012: Displacement: The New 21st Century Global Challenge', 5. Available at http://unhcr.org/globaltrendsjune2013/; Badil Resource Center, 'Palestinian Refugee Children: International Protection and Durable Solutions', Information and Discussion Brief, 10 (January 2007), 5. Available at www.childmigration.net/Badil_07; Manara Network for Child Rights, 'Mapping Child Protection Systems in Place for Palestinian Refugee Children in the Middle East', (August 2011), 21. Available at http://mena.savethechildren.se/PageFiles/2131/Mapping%20Protection%20Systems%20August%202011.pdf.

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looking back and asking some fundamental questions about what might be done to assist children in conflict zones. Are children any more or less deserving of peace than adults? Are they instinctively peaceful? Do they only become violent when raised improperly or within a conflict-ridden environment? Should campaigns for peace and non-violence incorporate children as a means of sustaining that mission across generations? How do we, as adults, scholars and policymakers meaningfully talk about and make representations for 'the children of the world'?

These types of questions go to the core of *Children and Global Conflict*. Put succinctly, this book is concerned with the confluence of children, armed conflict, and the international responses to both. It illustrates how children can represent both the reason for waging war and the reason to move towards peace. The first half of the book focuses on the philosophical, theoretical and legal debates over how to conceptualise war-affected children. The second half applies these ideas to major issues relating to children and global conflict; namely, child soldiers, forced migration, peace building, justice and advocacy. The book considers the impact of these issues on children and how they in turn shape these issues in their own interests, according to their own principles, and for the sake of their own communities.

The central argument of *Children and Global Conflict* is that children are customarily viewed by international actors as victims whose lives have been shattered by war; when they are acknowledged as active participants, they are primarily deemed wayward and dangerous. Along with being narrow and simplistic, this perspective does little to address the marginalisation and disempowerment of children, or to prevent the spread of conflict. While many children are undoubtedly traumatised by violence and combat, they also commonly endure hardship and resist persecution and external persuasion. Conflict-affected children often care for themselves, each other and for adults. They find ways to survive amid deprivation, create their own worlds when surrounded by destruction, and maintain a sense of identity in the face of indoctrination. In the aftermath of war and discord, they can serve as exemplars of peace and visionaries of post-conflict societies. Increasingly, it is becoming apparent that children have much to teach us. They should thus be recognised as actors who contribute in positive, less than positive, sometimes unique and enlightening ways to conflict, peace and security. Like everyone else, they should not be silenced or ignored.

Children and Global Conflict demonstrates the relevance of children to the disciplinary study of international relations (IR), and provides IR with an analytical framework that incorporates children's experiences. More specifically, it accounts for the marginalisation and at times complete absence of children within mainstream IR thinking and critically engages the assumptions made about them in the practice of global politics. This is done primarily through an assessment of how children are regarded in relevant fields of IR such as conflict analysis, IR theory, peace studies, security studies and international law. Beyond that, it offers readers an analytical-political framework that not only makes children visible in IR, but also enhances the discipline's capacity to understand conflict and its resolution. This framework incorporates the following objectives:

1. It examines the variation of children's experiences and notions of childhood in conflict zones across regions, cultures and time, while distilling common elements of those different experiences and notions.
2. It explores the complex interplay between the creative agency of children and their distinct vulnerabilities in the face of violence.
3. It promotes approaches to children's rights and security in global politics that are both protective and empowering.
4. It advances a meaningful place for children in the adult-centric study of IR and the practice of global politics.

The opening chapter of this book maps the conceptual terrain of its three core concerns: children, armed conflict and the engagement of international actors with conflict-affected children. In so doing, it demonstrates how childhood is socially constructed and challenges dominant understandings of children as politically passive or inconsequential. The chapter then examines children's experiences in armed conflict and how they are uniquely affected by it. In exploring the international community's responses to this issue, the chapter analyses each of the 'six grave violations against children during armed conflict' that are the current focus of the UN Security Council. It critically reflects upon how these 'six grave violations' reinforce an orthodox conceptualisation of children and conflict, while advancing a narrow and potentially detrimental liberal humanitarian agenda. It is increasingly recognised that children are agents in both their own and international affairs. Chapter 2 on

'Children and agency' considers the debates over protection and responsibility that arise from this recognition and which are particularly important in conflict zones. If children are autonomous and competent are they any different from adults? When are they victims and when are they villains? How do we assess and deal with children who are both? Responses to these questions amass around two conflicting positions. The caretaker position asserts that children are vulnerable, innocent, dependent and irrational; because of these deficiencies, they should as far as possible be shielded from public affairs, moral corruption and violence. On the other hand, free-rangers view children as beings in their own right, with their own identities and values. To declare that there is a universal notion of childhood is, according to free-rangers, to subjugate and silence the children and societies who fail to abide by that notion. This chapter examines these positions, touching upon how they are manifested in philosophy, literature, politics and law, while always returning to the question: 'What place should children have, if any, in global conflict?' It asserts that de Certeau's notion of the Practice of Everyday Life (PEL) can help to reconcile the caretaker and free-ranger positions by providing an appreciation of children's creative and resilient qualities without overriding the need to protect and nurture them.

The discipline of IR is centrally concerned with the causes and conduct of war, the prospects of peace, and the conditions of security. Yet with few exceptions, this discipline has ignored the one billion children who are affected by armed conflict. Chapter 3 asks why IR has such a blind spot. To this end, it focuses upon the three major IR schools of thought: realism, liberalism and critical approaches to IR. Drawing from Chapter 2's discussion of caretakers and free-rangers, this chapter argues that realism and liberalism, which together constitute the orthodox way of thinking and acting in IR, take an often implicit caretaker view of the role of children in political spaces. Specifically, children are assumed to be protected within the domestic sphere of the home, family and community, and are not equipped to influence international affairs. These traditions do not ignore the fact that children are caught up in conflict zones, but conceive of them as docile victims in an environment that they have not made and cannot remake. This gives rise to only a protection agenda, particularly within liberal discourses on children and conflict. Critical approaches, however, are more aligned with the free-ranger approach, which

acknowledges the agency of individual children and the potential role that they might play in shaping conflict, as well as being shaped by it. In this sense, this chapter argues for a need to balance the protection agenda with one that includes a consideration of the capacity for some children to be meaningful participants in conflict and its resolution.

Chapter 4 on 'The rights of the child' argues that the protection offered to war-affected children by the international legal framework is limited. This is because it is based on an outlook and agenda that is far removed from the complex processes that shape, rupture and reshape global conflict. The first section of this chapter outlines the prevailing liberal humanitarian outlook and how it is implemented to protect children's rights in conflict zones. It then goes on to detail some of the key tensions in international law over children's rights and the social and cultural meaning of childhood, tensions which are also reflected in academic disciplinary divides. This chapter considers the extent to which the global language of children's rights has permeated down through local and state-based settings to communities and families that are affected and transformed by armed conflict. It draws upon and re-examines the history of children's rights in international platforms, paying particular attention to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and its specific provisions relating to armed conflict.

There is a voluminous amount of material on the problem of child soldiers. Chapter 5 distils and organises this literature using the caretaker and free-ranger positions introduced in Chapters 2 and 3. In the process of reconciling these two positions, the chapter develops an indirect approach to solving problems relating to child soldiers that concentrates not so much on demobilising individuals and demilitarising societies, but rather on improving the socio-economic and security milieu that are conducive to the use of child soldiers. This pre-emptive approach minimises the dangers of colonising interventions on behalf of children and can also facilitate deeper cultural engagement between advocates and child soldier societies. The chapter offers, as a case study of such engagement, a series of inter-connected stories about Vietnamese child soldiers – from ancient legends to modern heroes – and includes a biographical exploration of the author's father, who at the age of twelve trained to become a Viet Minh revolutionary.

Chapter 6 examines the twenty-first century crisis of forced migration and the critical role that children play within it. It delves into the global dynamics of forced migration, using explanations from Giorgio Agamben and Didier Fassin as to why liberal democracies demonise and dehumanise unauthorised arrivals, especially children. Despite this, as exemplified in Anne McNevin's work, many child forced migrants can retain and fashion a degree of political autonomy even in contexts where they are highly constricted, and the outcomes of their actions are deeply ambiguous. Children are thus able to navigate through the complex and often harrowing political currents that push, pull and enable forced migrants to move around the world and which make them so prominent in the media. The final section of Chapter 6 portrays the bio-political contest in Australia over the suffering and resistance of irregular migrant children and how it serves as the cornerstone of an intense struggle over what it means to be a liberal democracy in the contemporary world.

Chapter 7 explores the relationship between children and peace building, arguing that some children have demonstrated their capacity to be everyday peace builders. Whether it is informal everyday acts such as going to school, or formal organised activities such as participating in peace forums, children actively contribute to cultures of peace within their societies. Yet, the dominant practices of liberal peace building often focus upon top-down and institutionalised approaches, which fail to harness and foster children's contributions to peace. This chapter thus argues for a reconfiguration of the international posture and position towards children in post-conflict zones, from one primarily of advocate and protector to one that simultaneously promotes participation. It examines some of the recent efforts by international organisations and scholars to invest in children as peace builders, which serve as a reminder that any hope for sustainable and inter-generational peace requires investment in – and the commitment of – children.

A growing body of international literature calls for the need to come to terms with histories of violence in order to create a peaceful future. Chapter 8 on 'Children and justice' acknowledges this need while noting that there is significant disagreement about how to deal with the past and exactly what kind of healing is necessary for conflict-ridden nations and their children. This chapter asserts that there is a large gap in transitional justice scholarship when it comes to children's

experiences and their varying roles as victims, survivors, perpetrators and judges. It considers both the justice-oriented mechanisms for children and the children-oriented mechanisms for justice, and how they can contribute to the rehabilitation of traumatised individuals and their societies with a view to ending cycles of violence.

The final chapter on 'advocacy, activism and resistance' turns to the matter of norm-setting and agenda-framing on behalf of children in conflict zones. In particular, it follows the progression from the 1996 Machel Report on children in armed conflict to the UNCRC's Optional Protocols (2000) and the UN Security Council Resolutions 1261 (1999) (the first resolution to recognise children in armed conflict) and 1314 (2000) (which set out measures to protect children during and after conflict). This chapter traces the path from advocacy to law, and contemplates how this process might be extended and implemented for the benefit of children in global conflict. At the same time it addresses three questions: What factors mobilise global and local movements to respond to children's experiences in conflict zones? Secondly, what civil society initiatives protect children from abuse and exploitation? And thirdly, what political and policy tensions exist within the global and local advocacy discourse?

Children and Global Conflict articulates our desire to advance the scholarly understanding of children in conflict zones. We do so in order to advocate for their wellbeing, security and empowerment, and to promote sustainable peace for children and adults alike.

Being a child is often about living within categories and expectations based on age and development. Much of what is fun and vital about childhood involves playfully challenging and redefining those categories and expectations. In this vein, this introduction closes by challenging and redefining the traditional distinction between the subjectivity of the preface and the objectivity of the introduction; that is, by outlining why *Children and Global Conflict* matters to us, the authors. It matters because we three are the best of friends and because this book is born out of that camaraderie and our time together as postgraduate students at the Australian National University. More importantly, it embodies the commitment to one another that we have fostered as we have journeyed through the final years of our youth – defined in the broadest sense – and our experiences of work, teaching, learning, weddings, promotions, awards, relocations, childbirths and homecomings. Each chapter was written

by one of us, but also reflects the efforts, insights and encouragement of
the other two. We are grateful for the expertise and generosity of our
colleagues Anne McNevin, Donna Seto, Georgia Swan and Andrew
Watts. This book has taken a little longer than was intended. But as
much as we could force and shape it, it has come together in its own
time and is better for it. Perhaps the same can be said of our children.

1 Children and armed conflict: mapping the terrain

KATRINA LEE-KOO

Introduction

Children live in the world's most violent places. Children do not start wars, yet armed conflict affects and devastates their lives in many ways. Armed conflict can lead to disruption of their schooling and everyday practices; the loss of family members; forced displacement; poverty and health concerns; and brings physical, structural and psychological violence into their lives. There is no doubt that conflict victimises children and hinders their futures. Yet children have demonstrated the capacity not only to be shaped by conflict, but also to shape conflict in ways that are both predictable and surprising. In short, children have complex and distinctive relationships with conflict. These relationships are produced by the nature of the conflict around them, the investment that stakeholders in conflict make to their protection, and the capacities and decisions of children themselves.

This opening chapter examines the relationship between children and armed conflict by focusing upon the three core concerns of this book: children, armed conflict and the responses of international actors. It begins by mapping the conceptual terrain of these three concerns, highlighting the debates that arise in response to key questions regarding what it means to be a child, how armed conflict shapes children's experiences, and what responsibilities the international community has to child protection. Based upon recent research by the global child advocacy network, the chapter then turns to an empirically based overview of some of the impacts of conflict on children. It does so via 'the six grave violations against children during armed conflict' that are the focus of the UN Security Council. It then critically engages these six grave violations in order to reflect upon how they construct and reinforce conceptualisations of children, conflict and the international community's responses towards them. Furthermore, in demonstrating the complex relationship that exists between these three themes, this

chapter highlights the role that children themselves play in shaping conflict and their own experiences of it.

The social construction of childhood

The 1989 UNCRC has been ratified by 194 states, and therefore provides the most broadly accepted definition of childhood. It defines a child as 'every human being below the age of eighteen years unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier.'[1] While the idea that a child is any person under the age of eighteen is widely accepted, it is nonetheless important to recognise that it is a social construction. It is not based upon universal biological certainty, but rather is developed through distinct cultural and social values and practices. It is based upon the notion that a child is a person who has yet to develop fully the fundamental features – be they physical, intellectual or social – that are necessary for achieving independent, active and responsible input into a community.[2] Thus, the process by which children develop into adults is an interplay between biological traits and social stimuli.[3] The end of a person's eighteenth year therefore provides a convenient, yet somewhat arbitrary, marker for the expectation that that person should exhibit the physical, intellectual and emotional maturity to fulfil the social expectations of adulthood.

The UNCRC's reference to the age of majority demonstrates an understanding that childhood has developed in ways that are socially and culturally specific to a society. The age of majority is determined by what a society thinks the responsibilities and expectations of a child should be when compared to an adult. This can be determined by historical practice, cultural norms, social attitudes, religious values, legal dictates or the needs of a society. For instance, western liberal democracies generally agree that young children should be denied the right to consume alcohol, drive automobiles, marry, have sexual intercourse or watch violent films. However, even though these values are reasonably consistent, there are legal inconsistencies in their application. For instance, age restrictions on drivers' licences

[1] UNCRC Article 1.
[2] See Tamar Schapiro, 'What is a Child?', *Ethics* 109(4) (July 1999), 716.
[3] Jason Hart and Bex Tyrer, 'Research with Children Living in Situations of Armed Conflict: Concepts, Ethics and Methods', Refugees Studies Centre Working Paper No. 30 (May 2006), 8.