

‘Youth’: victim, troublemaker or peacebuilder?

Constructions of youth-in-conflict in United Nations and World Bank youth policies

By

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Abstract

Examination of how the United Nations ('UN') and World Bank construct youth affected by armed conflict and political instability (referred to as 'youth-in-conflict') in their respective youth policies reveals that the UN constructs youth-in-conflict as 'victims' requiring protection. This results in humanitarian/rights-based approaches to youth development. In contrast, the World Bank constructs youth-in-conflict as 'capital' that has potential to bring about economic growth, resulting in economics-driven policies.

Such divergent identity constructions are because 'youth' and 'youth identity' are fluid concepts used in various ways by different people in different contexts. In peace and conflict studies, the dominant discourses in relation to youth-in-conflict are that youth are either 'victims' of war or 'troublemakers'. Both discourses are contested by an emerging third discourse of youth as peacebuilders, which challenges the representation of youth-in-conflict as passive victims or as negative threats.

While the UN and World Bank's respective humanitarian/development and neo-liberal economic approaches shape these divergent youth-in-conflict constructions, both institutions are also influenced by the global trends in youth-in-conflict discourses. This 'discursive' relationship means that as the UN and World Bank engage in the global youth debate and are shaped by more complete understandings of youth-in-conflict, they will also have an influential role in perpetuating or challenging dominant discourses.

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This thesis is about words, and His words is what made this thesis possible.

Dedication

For my best 'pren', Andrew:
the best 'boogie' robot one can have.

You give me papa bear hugs, eat my food and crack *rosak* jokes. No Arduino
circuit board comes close to you (don't faint).

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

“The teenager seems to have replaced the Communist as the appropriate target for public controversy and foreboding.”¹

“You’re an adult when they want you to be, you’re a child when they want you to be.”²

1 Overview

Over the last decade, youth have received a surge of global attention and have been propelled onto the global development agenda with unmistakable urgency that cannot be explained purely by their growing numbers. Demography cannot be the sole cause of this phenomenon given that many national populations were proportionately younger in the past. Rather, as “the most highly educated generation in human history”, youth have become recognised as critical actors who can bring positive change to societies riddled by conflict and economic volatility.³ Similarly, the potential for youth to cause instability was most recently demonstrated by familiar news footage of youth rioting in the streets of Libya in February 2011. It is thus not surprising that in development policy circles, youth are now recognised as significant social actors whose input is vital to achieving effective and sustainable development outcomes.

¹ Edgar Friedenber, *The Vanishing Adolescent* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1960).

² Young, male prisoner, cited in Anita Williams’ chapter in Jannis K. Androutsopoulos and Alexandra Georgakopoulou (eds.) *Discourse Constructions of Youth Identities (Pragmatics & Beyond Series, 110)* (Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins. 2003).

³ United Nations, *World Youth Report 2005: Young People Today and in 2015* (New York: United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), 2005) p.13.

Despite their growing importance in world affairs, 'youth' is still a vague term that is defined in various ways by different people. 'Youth identity' is by nature a fluid concept that is constructed in multiple and contradictory ways, depending on the context. The dominant discourses in peace and conflict studies represent youth in two seemingly contradictory ways: either as passive 'victims' who witness violence and experience the traumas of war or as 'troublemakers' who have the potential to trigger or perpetuate conflict. When youth are constructed solely as troublemakers, particularly as perpetrators of war threatening national security, security and military responses follow; if constructed as passive victims, their contributions to their communities and their agency in influencing the course of their own lives are easily overlooked. Evidently, one construction results in drastically different policy outcomes from the other.

These constructions are based on limited understandings of youth and their experiences during conflict and do not provide a complete view of the nature of youths and the multiple identities they may possess. Formulating policy based on these dominant identity constructions therefore, without a more complete understanding of youth's multiple roles, can seriously impinge on the success of youth programming. For example, although much literature accepts the need to encourage youth participation in community decision-making, the positive roles youth play as peacebuilders are often disregarded. This is particularly worrying when persons under 25 in countries like Yemen, Rwanda and Sierra Leone make up over 60% the total population yet they do not have opportunities to contribute positively to their communities.⁴ If youth participation is necessary to build sustainable peace, policies solely based on the two dominant constructions will not be effective if they do not allow for youth's constructive contributions. Thus, how youth are defined and how youth identity is constructed is not just a matter of semantics but has direct implications on the success of development programmes designed to aid peace-making processes.

⁴ See UN World Population Prospects: The 2008 Revision (Population Database) <http://esa.un.org/unpp/p2k0data.asp>.

Given the discursive link between identity constructions and policy decisions, and the United Nations' ('UN') and the World Bank's ('Bank') roles in formulating international policy, the research question in this thesis is: ***“How are youth-in-conflict constructed within the United Nations’ and the World Bank’s youth policies?”*** ‘Conflict’ is defined broadly here to cover situations during armed conflict as well as immediately prior to or after armed conflict where economic and socio-political conditions make violent armed conflict a very real risk. Examples include war-to-peace transitions in Kosovo, Timor-Leste and Israel/Palestine as well as the early 2011 riots in the Middle East. ‘Youth-in-conflict’ refers to ‘youth’ living in such conditions.

Due to the UN and Bank’s influence in shaping international and national youth policies, it is important to understand which constructions of youth identity those institutions accept. This is because identity constructions directly impact on which theoretical frameworks are adopted when formulating youth-in-conflict policy.⁵ Yvonne Kemper’s research on youth organisations illustrates how the theoretical frameworks that lie behind youth programmes impact on their success in achieving effective youth development.⁶ Her findings demonstrate the importance of taking a holistic account of youth programming by ensuring it involves a rights-based approach, an economic approach and a socio-political approach to youth policy. Reliance on just one approach reduces the total effectiveness of the programme by overlooking youth’s other critical needs. Taking all approaches into account is why, according to Schwartz, the Search for Common Ground’s *Sisi Watoto* radio programmes are more effective as protection programmes than children’s advocacy programmes in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC).⁷ The former encourages youth participation in the

⁵ The discursive link between policy and identity constructions will be discussed later in this chapter.

⁶ Yvonne Kemper, ‘Youth in War-to-Peace Transitions: Approaches by International Organisations’, *Berghof Report* No.10 (2005).

⁷ Stephanie Schwartz, *Youth in Post-Conflict Reconstruction- Agents of Change*, (USIP Press, Washington, May 2010).

running of radio programmes and peace-making processes whereas the latter only focuses on protecting children without empowering them to work for community development. The DRC advocacy programme is based on the view that youth are vulnerable actors whose sole need is protection, resulting in rights-based approaches. Conversely, *Sisi Watoto* understands how young victims also need to fully participate in their communities and to seize leadership and training opportunities, and that holistic programming is required.⁸ These examples show that identity constructions influence programming decisions. If youth policies are to be relevant, they must be based on an appreciation of youth's multiple needs and identities.⁹

When youth policies focus on only one aspect of youths' needs and identities, the effectiveness of those policies are limited. Siobhán McEvoy-Levy claims that the sustenance of peace depends on "whether the next generations accept or reject it, how they are socialised during the peace process and their perceptions of what that peace has achieved."¹⁰ Youth will only support peace processes when they become their countries' leaders if they are given opportunities to participate in the development of those processes; however, it is not in their interest to do so if they are misrepresented and marginalised within the emerging structures.¹¹ Entrenching youth stereotypes and marginalising youth's perspectives in policy can have adverse effects on local youth-work by encouraging youth-workers to treat youth as objects rather than as heterogeneous social actors who adopt various identities during conflict.

⁸ See Search for Common Good's newsletter on Children and Youth, Vol.1 Iss.2 (June 2009).

⁹ Conversely, if all approaches are not used, aspects of youth's identities are ignored. As discussed later, there is a link between the victim and perpetrator construction and right-based approaches, youth-as-triggers and economic approaches and youth-as-peacebuilders and socio-political approaches.

¹⁰ Siobhán McEvoy-Levy (ed), *Troublemakers or Peacemakers? Youth and Post-Accord Peace Building* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006a).

¹¹ Steve Gillard, 'Winning the Peace: Youth, identity and peacebuilding in Bosnia and Herzegovina', *International Peacekeeping*, Vol.8, No.1, 2001, pp.77-98. Gillard's study of the *Mladi Most* project indicates that when youth are imposed with identities and roles by an external agency and have no sense of control over the project, the project is less effective.

Unfortunately, overcoming dominant youth stereotypes is no easy task, particularly as views of youth as ‘primitive’ and inclined towards violence are so pervasive:

“...primitive tendencies and psychopathic behaviours can be expected to increase in any population commensurately with its youthfulness.”¹²

“it is more productive to understand Al Qaeda in Europe as a youth movement, which shares many factors with other forms of dissent, either political (the ultra-left), or behavioural: the fascination for sudden suicidal violence as illustrated by the paradigm of random shootings in schools (the ‘Columbine syndrome’).”¹³

Youth are also constructed as vulnerable actors subjected to the trauma of war, where like children, they are “the innocent victims of conflict”.¹⁴ Both constructions are unhelpful if seen out of context and disregard youth’s insights into their own identities. In order to create analytical identity ideal-types,¹⁵ discourses often ignore how youth-in-conflict can be both perpetrators and victims of conflict at different points of their lives and in different contexts. This dichotomy of identities fails to acknowledge youth’s potential as positive agents of peace, which is likely to have been recognised if Kemper’s socio-political approach was used.

In analysing how the UN and Bank construct youth identity in their youth policies, this thesis does not aim to be prescriptive in defining ‘youth’. ‘Youth’ is a common concept that has been constructed in diverse and contradictory ways. Firstly, ‘youth’ are primarily defined according to age. For instance, many UN agencies define ‘youth’ as those between 15 and 24 in order to obtain some objectivity and to serve as an indicator of the ‘youth’ phase. Secondly, ‘youth’

¹² H Moller, ‘Youth as a Force in the Modern World,’ *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol.10 No.3,1968, p.257.

¹³ Olivier Roy ‘Al Qaeda in the West as a Youth Movement: The Power of a Narrative’, *MICROCON Policy Working Paper*, Brighton: Microcon, 2 November 2008.

¹⁴ Quoting Executive Director Ann M. Veneman, “Children ‘innocent victims of conflict’ says UNICEF chief on visit to Gaza”, 9 March 2009, [http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=30121&Cr=gaza&Cr1=\(9 December 2010\)](http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=30121&Cr=gaza&Cr1=(9 December 2010)).

¹⁵ Identity ‘ideal-types’ are “basic discourses” (discussed later) that articulate very different constructions of identity and policy, thereby separating the political landscape between them.

is defined as a social construct that relates to a transitional stage in life between childhood and adulthood. It has more to do with status and behaviour than age, so is contextually dependent.¹⁶ Given that the term ‘youth’ is employed by different people from diverse contexts in very different ways, it is hard to avoid the observation that ‘youth’ as a concept is ambiguous. Terms such as ‘adolescence’, ‘teenagers’, ‘young adults’ and ‘youths’ have arisen in recent years, making it unclear whether they are synonyms or reflect different stages of life in the widening divide between childhood and adulthood. Nevertheless, it is generally accepted that ‘youth’ occupy an ‘in-between’ space that society finds difficult to comprehend and have different needs and experiences from children and adults despite unclear boundaries with both groups.

For the purposes of this thesis, it is necessary to use both definitions to adequately discuss the multiple ways in which youth-in-conflict are constructed through discourse, why youth are constructed in such different ways and how those constructions impact on youth-in-conflict programming. These are important questions because research on youth is still novel compared to child research. Statistics indicate there are approximately 1.2 billion 15 to 24 year olds in the world and one billion live in developing countries.¹⁷ Thus, nine out of ten youths within that age range live in developing countries where conflict is more likely to have taken place.¹⁸ The Bank predicts this global demographic of people under the age of 25 will grow to three billion by 2015.¹⁹ ‘Youth’ are important as:

“young people have the potential to change negative societal patterns of behaviour and break cycles of violence and discrimination that pass from one generation to the next. With

¹⁶ Nicholas Alex and Argenti De Waal, ed. *Young Africa: Realising the Rights of Children and Youth* (Africa World Press, 2002). The definition of ‘youth’ will be discussed later in this Introduction.

¹⁷ UN World Population Prospects <http://esa.un.org/unpp/index.asp?panel=3>.

¹⁸ Ban Ki-Moon, Secretary-General's remarks on the International Day of Youth, New York, 12 August 2010. See <http://social.un.org/youthyear/docs/sgremarks.pdf>.

¹⁹ James D. Wolfensohn, President of the World Bank, ‘A New Global Balance-Address to the Board of Governors Dubai, United Arab Emirates, 2003. <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/NEWS/Resources/jdwsp-092303.pdf> (12 December 2010).

their creativity, energy and enthusiasm, young people can change the world in astonishing ways, making it a better place not only for themselves but for everyone.”²⁰

Regrettably, this potential remains untapped if youth’s concerns are neither researched nor prioritised in a government’s development agenda. Little attention is devoted to providing coherent policy frameworks and guidance for international and national action on youth issues, resulting in limited investment in youth programmes. Furthermore, there is little comprehensive research on youth development outside the ‘West’. Youth-focussed research is heavily dependent on ideas relating to children in North America and Europe making “their applicability and utility across cultures and social contexts highly questionable.”²¹ With these concerns in mind, and given the UN and Banks’ influence as ‘norm entrepreneurs’ in shaping how governments construct policy, this thesis seeks to further understanding of how youth-in-conflict are constructed in both institutions’ youth policies.

2 Organisation of thesis

The remainder of this introductory chapter outlines the theoretical framework adopted in this thesis. Due to its highly interpretive nature, this study draws on Lene Hansen’s recommendations on how to systematically examine the discursive relationship between policy and identity constructions through discourse analysis. This chapter summarises Hansen’s framework for identifying identity discourses before outlining the parameters put in place to ensure that this research was conducted systematically.

²⁰ United Nations, *Adolescence: A time that matters*, (New York: UNICEF, 2002).

²¹ Jo Boyden, ‘Children under fire: Challenging assumptions about children’s resilience.’ *Children, Youth and Environments*, Vol.13 No.1, Spring 2003, para 2.

Chapter two examines dominant discourses of youth-in-conflict as victims and troublemakers and the emerging discourse of youth-as-peacebuilders. These discourses reveal how youth identity in youth policies is not clear-cut and fixed but multifaceted and fluid over time and constructed in various and contradictory ways. Because youth-in-conflict possess multiple identities, formulating policies based on only some aspects of youth identities will undermine their effectiveness in building peace.

Having examined how youth are constructed in youth policies generally, chapter three examines youth policies published by the UN and the Bank. This thesis seeks to fill the gap in our understanding of how intergovernmental agencies such as the UN and the Bank ‘construct youth’ and how that impacts on programming for youth-in-conflict. In analysing the UN, analysis was confined to the UN Programme on Youth as it is the only UN unit with the explicit mandate to address youth issues. The term ‘UN’ is used hereafter in this narrow sense. Both the UN and Bank were chosen because of their roles in setting multilateral policy agendas and their influence on national youth priorities; their youth identity constructions impact on national constructions of youth identity and policy decisions.

Finally, the concluding chapter summarises youth-in-conflict identity constructions and suggestions for further research. Youth-in-conflict research is still in its infancy, and in order for the UN and Bank to respond effectively to youth needs, it is important that research continues on how youth are constructed in different contexts. Only by doing so and examining whether such representations are valid can youth development have a chance of success.

3 Theoretical framework

The aim of this study is to understand the relationship between identity and policy, which is at the centre of poststructuralism's research agenda. Poststructuralism seeks to understand the "constitutive significance of representations of identity for formulating and debating foreign policies" which goes to the core of this thesis.²² Because of the highly interpretative nature of this research, a theoretical framework is necessary as "adopting a non-causal epistemology does not imply an abandonment of theoretically rigorous frameworks, empirical analyses of 'real world relevance,' or systematic assessments of data and methodology."²³

Hansen's work provides an underlying framework for understanding identity constructions through discourse analysis. It is one of few texts that demonstrate how to systematically understand how identities matter for foreign policy through the adoption of a theory of discourse. Moreover, her work '*Security as Practice*' specifically examines identity construction in the context of post-conflict reconstruction.²⁴

Hansen defines discourse as "framings of meaning and lenses of interpretation, rather than objective, historical truths".²⁵ Discourse is not equivalent to 'ideas' but incorporates material as well as ideational factors, and so is "a complex entity that extends into the realms of ideology, strategy, language and practice, and is shaped by the relations between power and knowledge".²⁶ Analysing

²² Lene Hansen, *Security as Practice: Discourse Analysis and the Bosnian War*, (London: Routledge, 2006) p.5.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid. Hansen examines how world leaders were influenced by discourse in formulating foreign policies and how these foreign policies perpetuated or contested certain Balkan identities.

²⁵ Hansen (2006) p. 7.

²⁶ Liz Sharp and Tim Richardson, 'Reflections on Foucauldian discourse analysis in planning and environmental policy research', *Journal of Environmental Policy and Planning*, Vol.3, No.3, July/September 2001, 193-209.

discourse allows a researcher to make connections between power, identity and language.

Discourse analysis is important as language is ontologically significant and it is only through language construction that living beings and material structures are given meaning and imbued with particular identities.²⁷ Analysis provides insights into discourse, the texts and representations that directly influenced it, how discourse is presented as legitimate in relation to the larger public and how it is reproduced or contested.²⁸ Discourse analysis therefore highlights the importance and use of language by revealing its social and political context.

Discourse analysis is the best tool for this research in seeking in-depth insights into the values and perceptions of international policy-writers. It can reveal some of the ways in which power is exercised in the UN and the Bank, whether such agencies see themselves as superior to youths, and more importantly, why certain constructions of youth identity are preferred. Discourse analysis makes visible the underlying assumptions that go unquestioned such as views that youth identity is static and unchangeable. It can reveal unspoken and unacknowledged aspects of human behaviour and expose hidden or dominant discourses that maintain youth's marginalised positions in society, which in itself can be empowering to 'silenced' youth.

A Discursive link between identity and policy

Discourse analysis is also most suited to identity-research where causal relationships are hard to establish. For example, this study conceptualises 'identity' differently from social constructivists, who define 'identity' as a sense of 'Self' that helps actors know who they are and what their interests are in

²⁷ Hansen (2006) p.18.

²⁸ Ibid, p.63.

respect to others.²⁹ Social constructivists recognise that people are shaped by their identities and the collective expectations of their external environment such as a religious community, or internal factors such as one's gender, race, profession or age. Hansen argues, however, that people are not just shaped by their identities but can also shape identities through language. While identities are highly context-dependent, they are continuously rearticulated and contested by competing discourses. It is impossible to define identity as a variable that is causally separate from policy. Moreover, "representations of identity and policy are linked through discourse, but do not have a causal relationship with one another as representations of identity are simultaneously the precondition for and (re)produced through articulations of policy."³⁰ Identity therefore exists insofar as it is continuously rearticulated and uncontested by competing discourses.

Research methods like surveys and experiments do not fit well within a poststructuralist framework as policy and identity cannot be conceptualized in causal terms because they are performatively linked. For empiricists, the fluid nature of identity has been seen as a problematic research topic as 'identity' is a variable that is never static. 'Identity' cannot be used as an independent variable against which behaviour and non-discursive factors can be measured, which explains why research into understanding identity is not something that commonly falls within positivist's research agenda. Discourse analysis is not impeded by these challenges.

Hansen's framework provides guidance on how to study the discursive construction of identity in order to identify "basic discourses", which are identity ideal-types in a particular context. Basic discourses are first identified by situating an identity spatially (within space), temporally (whether it is static) and ethically (within values and sense of responsibility). By doing so and through a

²⁹See for example Amitav Acharya, 'Do norms and identity matter? Community and power in Southeast Asia's regional order', *The Pacific Review*, Vol.18, No.1, 2005, p.113.

³⁰ Hansen (2006) p.10.

process of “linking” and “differentiation”, one is able to identify how policy-writers construct their sense of “Self” as against an “Other”.

Firstly, identity is spatially constructed as it is dependent on territorial boundaries and the delineation of ‘space’.³¹ For example, identity can be understood within a ‘geographical space’ (for example, the ‘Malaysian identity’) or a ‘political space’ where people are given abstract identities such as ‘terrorists’, ‘savages’, ‘refugees’ and ‘youth’. This would suggest that youth from one geographical space (Malaysian youth) have different identities from those elsewhere (a Maori youth).

Secondly, identity is temporally situated in that it is ascribed with themes of development, transformation, continuity, change, repetition or stasis. Youth resist and reconstruct their identities in multiple and dynamic ways, and identify themselves differently, depending on contextual influences such as their physical environment and socioeconomic processes. Their identity is fluid. As discussed in chapter two, when youth identity is regarded as transformable, youth are seen as less threatening but when seen as static and negative, they may be considered ‘irredeemable’. If child soldiers are represented as transformable, other actors will be more inclined towards development perspectives; however, when constructed as incorrigible threats requiring suppression, security and military responses follow.

Thirdly, identity is ethically situated where discourses involve constructions of responsibility. For instance, if youth are represented as children rather than adults, they are regarded as the responsibility of adults, requiring state ‘disciplinarian’ action or adult assistance in advocating youth’s rights. Constructing youth-as-victims (and conflating youth into the child category), provides organisations like UNICEF with the mandate it needs to promote its child protection agenda. Yet, if regarded as young adults (conflating them into

³¹ Hansen (2006) p.47.

the adult category), they are deemed of sufficient agency to determine the course of their lives; youth are vested with the same rights and responsibilities as adults, like the right to vote and the responsibility to respect laws. Where they have contravened laws, they are subjected to the same treatment as adults.

B Linking and differentiation

Understanding how identities are situated spatially, temporally and ethically, provides the means to understanding a specific identity without taking into account other actors. Nevertheless, identities cannot be completely understood without an appreciation of how they relate to other identities. Identities are 'social' in that they are constituted in difference through the processes of "differentiation" and constituted through similarities by "linking" between the 'Self' and 'Other'. Thus, one must analyse how policy discourses articulate a 'Self' in respect to 'Other' identities. By linking identities together, one identifies the similarities between the identities examined; however, by differentiating identities, one notes the differences between them. Hansen explains how women's identities are differentiated from men's identities in that they are seen as secondary, subservient characters when men are seen as privileged, superior subjects, and vice versa. An identity cannot be fully understood without reference to an 'Other'.

In analysing identities, Hansen cautions against trying to form 'neat' constructions of "Other" versus "Self", as radical differences may not always exist. Instead of radical Otherness, the identities can be complementary, contending, negative or non-identities. Moreover, the "Other" can be radically different *yet* also part of the "Self". For example, the "Other" and "Self" may share similar ethnic, religious and/or national identities, the significance of each being context-specific and possibly resulting in conflicting loyalties. An allowance for *degrees* of otherness is sometimes required.

The concept of an “Other” has long been used in discussions of race and identity. In “*Orientalism*” Edward Said traces how the colonial “West” had constructed the “East” as unknowable, irrational, primitive and violent.³² By differentiating themselves from “Oriental” men of the East, white, colonial men constructed themselves as modern, rational, Christian men persuaded by thought rather than emotions. Likewise, Oriental men were also differentiated from their female counterparts. The angry, black, backward, emotional man was constructed as such through differentiation from their oriental, Eastern women who in turn were constructed as submissive, passive, ‘veiled’ women.³³ However, Eastern women and Western women were linked through their shared identity as women. While Eastern women were differentiated from Western women as sexually immoral while the latter was constructed as sexually chaste and pure, both identities shared similar experiences as subservient to men. A similar pattern emerges in youth-in-conflict literature, where academics and policymakers have constructed young males as irrational, frustrated, angry “Others” with the propensity for conflict, while young women are constructed as ‘veiled’, submissive women who experience conflict passively.

In this thesis, situating youth-in-conflict spatially, temporally and ethically will provide a deeper understanding of how the UN and World Bank construct them in their youth policies. Simply knowing that both institutions describe youth using the same words is insufficient without knowing whether there are gaps in meanings. Linking and differentiation of the youth identity to other actors in the policies provides an appreciation on how power and identity are connected through language.

³² Edward Said, *Orientalism*, (Vintage Books, New York, 1979).

³³ Anne Hendrixson, ‘Briefing 34: Angry Young Men, Veiled Young Women’, (Lancashire: The Corner House, December 2004).

C Basic discourses in context

While linking and differentiation processes provide the means to understanding identities, they are insufficient if they downplay the social and structured nature of language and the location of policy within a larger discursive and political field.³⁴ Hansen argues that one moves theoretically from individual texts to “basic discourses” in order to understand how policy converges around certain constructions of identity and policy options. “Basic discourses” are explicit articulations of identity and common themes around identity constructions that “construct different Others with different degrees of radical difference; articulate radically diverging forms of spatial, temporal and ethical identity; and constructs competing links between identity and policy.”³⁵ Each basic discourse is an analytical distinction that articulates ideal-type identities in order to achieve particular policy outcomes.

According to Hansen, the strength of each basic discourse is influenced by how closely-linked it is to official policy discourse. The goal of identity research is thus not only to understand official discourse (and the texts and representations which have directly impacted it) but also to analyse how this discourse is presented as legitimate in relation to the larger public. In her view, basic discourses articulated by heads of state and international institutions through official policies are often accepted as more legitimate than if they were articulated by the media and oppositional parties during parliamentary debates. That is because policy discourse ‘speak’ with authority by constructing authors or speaking agents through a dual logic of power and responsibility, where politicians have ability to take responsibility and deploy power.³⁶ Moreover, official discourse articulates policies and the means to address them by constructing problems and identities. Thus, “foreign policies rely upon

³⁴ Hansen (2006) p.51.

³⁵ Ibid, p.52.

³⁶ Ibid, p.67.

representations of identity, but it is also through the formulation of foreign policy that identities are produced and reproduced.”³⁷

On the other hand, discourses articulated by the media and opposition parties do not exist for the main purpose of articulating identities but are communicated for the purpose of gaining votes or to entertain. Nevertheless, policymakers are still situated within a political and public sphere, and their representations draw upon and are formed by representations articulated by other actors.³⁸ They influence what counts as proper representations within a particular policy issue and official discourse forms the basis for other discourses to argue a response. However, when other actors ‘speak back’ their representations of a policy issue, basic discourses may be modified and re-constructed over time.³⁹ Thus, the media, opposition parties and cultural representations of identity through film, music and travel writing can influence official discourse by either reproducing or contesting it.

In sum, basic discourses are useful in providing insights as to why particular policy decisions and outcomes are elected and are identified by locating the identities within a larger discursive and political field. In this thesis, only official discourse is examined. Nevertheless, the basic discourses of youth-in-conflict (discussed in chapter two) function as benchmarks against which the UN and Bank’s respective youth-in-conflict constructions are measured.

4 Practical considerations

Putting Hansen’s framework into practice requires an analysis of youth policy text, concepts that describe youth-in-conflict and recurring themes. Where

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid, p.7.

³⁹ Ibid, p.54.

ambiguity exists through vague concepts such as ‘youth’ and ‘identity’, questions are raised as to whether it is intentional, used to convey multiple meanings or based on a confused understanding of the topic. Given that the sample texts are official publications, they are analysed in terms of whether they achieve ‘authoritativeness’ by using objective, informational, neutral styles of writing or by drawing on subjective, personal testimonies through “intertextuality”. Intertextuality is when texts make references, explicitly or implicitly, to previous texts, thereby establishing their own reading. UN publications commonly quote or adopt key concepts in order to reinforce their arguments and authority through references to other texts. “In making links to older texts, new texts rely upon the status of the older, but this process of reading and linking also produces new meaning: references never reproduce the originals in a manner which is fully identical, but weave them into the present context and argument.”⁴⁰Analysing how intertextuality is used demonstrates how youth-in-conflict constructions gained legitimacy.

In conducting discourse analysis of youth policies, research parameters are required to improve reliability and results validity. The research focus is confined to studying official international publications produced or solely commissioned by the UN or the World Bank between 2000 and 2010 for a general international audience, including development specialists and government officials. Publications or reports jointly commissioned with other agencies are excluded so that research observations are clearly attributable to UN or the Bank. Sample texts are selected if they clearly articulate identities and if they either: 1) represent current global youth policy or 2) widely-read and with formal authority to define political position.⁴¹ A literature review and the UNPY and Bank’s respective youth websites assists with this assessment.⁴² Publications are only sampled if their publication or chapter titles used the words ‘youth’ and ‘conflict’. While it is recognized that choosing sample publications based on

⁴⁰ Ibid,p.8.

⁴¹ Ibid,p.85.

⁴² See www.un.org/youth and <http://go.worldbank.org/Z12D7RZVZ0>.

titles has its limitations, this is a necessary parameter in defining the research scope. Parameters ensure the research is conducted methodically, improving reliability and results validity.

In order to appreciate the UN and Bank's constructions of youth-in-conflict, chapter two outlines three basic discourses of youth-in-conflict: as victims, troublemakers and as peacebuilders. Reading these discourses collectively rather than individually demonstrates how youth-in-conflict's needs are varied and can only be met through policies that identify all their critical needs for protection, education, employment and participation. Providing for only one or a few of these needs limits the effectiveness of youth development which is why it is crucial to recognise youth-in-conflict's multiple roles and the fluid nature of their identities.

CHAPTER 2- LITERATURE REVIEW

Youth-in-conflict is a relatively new area of study. Much youth-in-conflict research is confined to Kosovo, Africa and Israel/Palestine, notwithstanding a growing youth demographic in other conflict zones such as Bougainville and Timor-Leste. Despite the urgency for youth-in-conflict research in ‘forgotten’ zones, it is slow-coming, making it difficult to provide effective development solutions to help youth complete their transition into adulthood.⁴³ While this thesis does not focus on specific geographic regions, it seeks to fill some gaps in our understanding of youth-in-conflict by exploring how youth are constructed within the UN and World Bank’s international youth policies. In so doing, insights can be drawn as to how dominant constructions of youth identity in ‘popular’ conflict zones such as Kosovo and Africa have impacted on youth constructions elsewhere.

This chapter outlines the dominant youth-in-conflict discourses of ‘youth-as-victims’ and ‘youth-as-troublemakers’. While both constructions enjoy a degree of semi-hegemonic status, competing constructions of youth-as-peacebuilders are emerging, challenging our understandings of youth’s identities and roles and identities during conflict. In order to appreciate these multiple identities, it is important to first canvas some of the difficulties with ‘defining youth’ as they go to the heart of why youth research comes with challenges. This next part of the chapter addresses these concerns.

⁴³ United Nations, ‘World Youth Report 2007: Young People’s Transition to Adulthood: Progress and Challenges (Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2007) xv.

1 Defining 'youth'

Youth are an influential demographic. They make up approximately 18 percent of the world's population, or more than 1.2 billion people.⁴⁴ Despite their growing influence in world affairs, defining 'youth' is problematic as it is a category that falls on the boundaries of childhood and adulthood. Nevertheless, defining 'youth' is not just a question of semantics. It has "concrete effects on the ways that reconstruction actors design and implement programs intended to serve this population".⁴⁵

There are two ways of defining 'youth'. The common approach is to adopt *age-based* definitions which provide a degree of much desired objectivity. The UN General Assembly ('UNGA') defines 'youth' as individuals between 15 and 24, while the World Bank conceptualises youth as between 12 and 24.⁴⁶ These are clearly inconsistent. This inconsistency is intensified at the international level where both age-definitions overlap with treaties such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989 ('CRC'), which defines "children" as persons under 18 years. Persons aged 15 to 18 are both children under the CRC and 'youth' according to the UNGA.⁴⁷ The issue becomes more obscured with calls for distinguishing between teenagers (13-19 years old) and young adults (20-24 years old), or in the case of the World Health Organisation, differentiating between adolescents (aged 10-19), youth (aged 15-24) and young people (aged 10-24) as the socio-psychological and health issues differ for each group. This makes it difficult to ascertain whether youth 15 and 18 years of age should be benefactors of CRC child protection or youth development programmes.

⁴⁴ United Nations, 'The World Programme of Action for Youth in the Year 2000 and Beyond', 1995.

⁴⁵ Schwartz (2010) p.4.

⁴⁶ See General Assembly resolutions A/36/215 and 36/28, 1981 and the World Bank's World Development Report 2007.

⁴⁷ United Nations, 'Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 1', A/RES/44/25 of 20 November 1989. African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, Article 2 (1990).

The second definitional approach is based on youth's unique *experiences*, be it cultural, biological (ie. puberty) or psychological (ie. when youth adopt adult responsibilities due to changes brought about by conflict). Definitions that favour *biological* markers consider 'youth' as the period between puberty and parenthood. The World Youth Report 2005 defines 'youth' as "an important period of physical, mental and social maturation, where young people are actively forming identities and determining acceptable roles for themselves within their community and society as a whole."⁴⁸ 'Youth' is also a social construct that is *culturally* dependent and more to do with status and behaviour than age.⁴⁹ Behaviour considered appropriate for youth varies between different societies, and like childhood, youth-hood is socially-constructed and sometimes not recognised as a meaningful category in some societies.⁵⁰ The idea of a single, gender-equal age of maturity is a Western product that does not adequately define youth, particularly when boys and girls experience being young differently. The West promotes an individualistic understanding of youth's development outside social context whereas other cultures define 'youth' based on community needs or rites of passage such as marriage or land ownership. A person is considered a 'youth' in Sierra Leone until his/her father dies,⁵¹ whereas for the *Kpelle* in Liberia, secret societies are what separate adults from youth.⁵² More interestingly, the concept of youth as a stage of development is unknown in places such as Darfur.⁵³ "Females are considered girls until they menstruate, at which point they become women".⁵⁴ The fact that female youth as a category in

⁴⁸ World Youth Report 2005.

⁴⁹ Alex and Argenti De Waal, Nicholas, (eds.) *Young Africa: Realising the Rights of Children and Youth* (Africa World Press, 2002).

⁵⁰ Dawn Chatty and Gillian Hundt (eds), *Children of Palestine: Experiencing forced migration in the Middle East*. New York: Berghahn Books, 2005, p.6.

⁵¹ Marc Sommers, 'Fearing Africa's Young Men: Male Youth, Conflict, Urbanization and the Case of Rwanda' in Ian Bannon and Maria Correia (eds.) *The Other Half of Gender: Men's Issues in Development*, (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2006).

⁵² William P Murphy, 'Secret knowledge as property and power in Kpelle society: elders versus youth', *Journal of the International African Institute*, Vol.50, No.2,1980, pp.193-207. Kpelle people are located in an area of central Liberia extending into Guinea.

⁵³ Sommers (2006).

⁵⁴ Lori Heninger and Megan McKenna, 'Don't Forget Us': The Education and Gender-Based Violence Protection Needs of Adolescent Girls From Darfur in Chad (New York: Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children, July 2005).

many cultures barely exists, if at all, poses difficulties for those conducting youth programming. Therefore, definitions must take into account cultural markers where 'youth' is only sometimes a distinct social status with accompanying roles, rituals, and relationships; without a cultural understanding of age, one cannot appreciate how 'youth' in one cultural context differ from other 'youth' elsewhere.

Understanding youth as a social construct also means it is important to recognise how conceptions of childhood and adulthood are altered through personal experiences in conflict. During times of upheaval, children are forced to 'grow up' and lose their 'innocence' by becoming heads-of-households, thereby collapsing the phase of 'youth' that normally would have taken place. Personal identities as 'youth' change with experiences as soldiers, rebels, refugees, and sexual slaves; traumatic experiences forces youth-in-conflict to become independent faster than peers in developed countries who typically gain 'independence' at 18 years. Youth-in-conflict are forced into an adult's world even though they may not have satisfied common criteria of adulthood such as financial independence, marriage, initiation rites, or full criminal liability, which has the effect of intensifying the state of limbo where youth assume greater responsibilities without the reciprocal rights normally wielded by adults. Hence, youth-in-conflict programming can only be effective if policymakers take into account the double transitions youth face from war to peace (or vice versa) and from childhood to adulthood.

Unfortunately, acknowledging that 'youth' is a social construct opens the concept to the criticism of *what is it not*. 'Youth' is a "problematic, intermediary and ambivalent category, chiefly defined by what it is not: youths are not dependent children, but neither are they independent, socially responsible adults".⁵⁵ Furthermore, the fact that 'youth' are a very heterogeneous group

⁵⁵ Alex De Waal, 'Realising Child Rights in Africa: Children, Young People and Leadership' in De Waal and Argenti (2002).

encompassing people of various ethnicity, religion, race, gender, and class amplifies the risk that youth issues and perspectives during conflict will be overlooked. Apart from a few paragraphs on youth-in-conflict in *'The World Programme of Action for Youth'*, there is no commonly agreed framework from which youth-in-conflict issues can be addressed.⁵⁶

The remainder of this chapter examines how youth-in-conflict are constructed as victims, troublemakers or peacebuilders. Generally:

"The tendency is to equate children with victimization and youth (usually defined as teens or adolescents) with perpetration. But often these classifications refer to the same age groups and to related if not identical pursuits (for example, a youth rioter may also be a child of poverty and war displacement) and reveal not empirical categories but assumptions about what is acceptable or unacceptable for "our" children and "their" children, assumptions that may be tied to foreign policy interests or gender stereotypes."⁵⁷

Using Hansen's framework, it is clear that each of the basic discourses (ie. victims, troublemakers or peacebuilders) differ when situated temporally, spatially and ethically. For instance, the 'victim' construction exists within the context of armed conflict in the non-West, particularly in Africa, and youth identity is represented as static and requiring 'adult' protection. Conversely, the more changeable 'troublemaker' construction is situated within the non-Western developing economic space where armed conflict exists or is expected to 'explode' through the youth bulge. Like the 'peacebuilder' construction, the troublemakers' identity are presented as less static than 'victims' and so 'redeemable' if their potential and agency is channelled effectively through economic and development policies. The next part examines each construction in greater detail before turning, in chapter three, to how these drastic differences can result in very divergent policy responses.

⁵⁶ The World Programme of Action is examined in more detail in chapter three.

⁵⁷ McEvoy-Levy (2006a) p.4.

2 Youth as victims

“[A] soldier came well-armed at the door calling, ‘Everybody out!’ Then they picked [me]... There the man got serious and knifed me on the head. I became helpless and started bleeding terribly, and that was how I got involved into sex at the age of 14, because death was near.”- Jennifer, 19, northern Uganda.⁵⁸

Youth are commonly constructed as victims of conflict (“youth-as-victims”) and from the above testimony it is easy to see why. Constructions of youth-as-victims are often reinforced by graphic, emotive, horrific testimonies employed to attract international attention, increase public horror and obtain funding to combat violence against the powerless. Unfortunately, while victim constructions aid humanitarian work by drawing on stereotypes of youth’s victimhood and passivity in the face of violence, they entrench such stereotypes as accepted ‘truths’, making it harder to contradict.⁵⁹ Consequently, youth-in-conflict become “captive to various sorts of stereotyping, both academic and popular. They have been objectified, like their parents and grandparents, as passive victims.”⁶⁰

Youth are also constructed as victims because much research draws upon dominant Western notions about childhood that require children’s lives to be conducted within safe places, set apart from the harsh realities of adult existence. Youth are framed as ‘older children’ rather than ‘young *adults*’ and so, while understandings about the complex ways in which youth are affected by conflict are still partial and sketchy,⁶¹ anything that prevents the dichotomy of child/adult worlds is considered adverse and oppressive. Conflict and “the hard world of violence violates the once-protective shell of childhood, as the child is thrust into

⁵⁸ Quote taken from Jane Lowicki, *Youth Speak Out: New Voices on the Protection and Participation*, Women’s Commission for Refugee Women and Children, January 2005.

⁵⁹ Jason Hart and Bex Tyrer, *Research with Children Living in Situations of Armed Conflict: Concepts, Ethics & Methods*, University of Oxford Refugee Studies Centre Working Paper No. 30, May 2006, p.9.

⁶⁰ Chatty and Hundt(2005) p.2.

⁶¹ Hart and Tyrer(2006) p.11.

the horrors of war.”⁶² Thus, Western conceptions of childhood often regard youth as “vulnerable, passive beings who need to be protected and cared for” rather than active community members.⁶³

This youth-as-victims discourse has enjoyed continued popularity, particularly since the release of Graça Machel’s 1996 landmark report ‘*Impact of Armed Conflict on Children*’ to the UNGA.⁶⁴ Constructing youth as traumatized victims of war, the report proposed comprehensive actions for the international community to improve the protection and care of children affected by armed conflict, and placed the responsibility for action on the state and international agencies. This child protection discourse was reinforced in the Machel Strategic Review 1996-2000 follow-up study that claimed that “children spared the direct experience of violence in armed conflict still suffer deep emotional distress” and that all youth “who have lived through conflict need psychosocial support”.⁶⁵ Since the release of these reports, a Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict has been appointed with the mandate to protect children affected by armed conflict. The discourse that emphasizes youth’s vulnerability rather than resilience continues to enjoy dominance.

Yvonne Kemper claims that this dominant discourse of youth as vulnerable victims has grown in popularity due to greater reliance on ‘rights-based approaches’ to addressing youth issues during war-to-peace transitions. Such approaches focus on youth-as-victims in antagonistic situations that undermine their human rights and therefore result in preventive policy and child protection programming that emphasise reunification with families. There are several

⁶² Kenneth Bush and Diana Saltarelli, *Two Faces of Education In Ethnic Conflict: Towards A Peacebuilding Education for Children* (Florence: UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre) 2000, p.29.

⁶³ Carola Eyber and Alastair Ager, “Researching young people’s experiences of war: Participatory methods and the trauma discourse in Angola” in Jo Boyden and J De Berry (eds.), *Children and youth on the front line* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2004) p.189.

⁶⁴ Graça Machel, ‘Impact of Armed Conflict on Children: Report of Graça Machel, Expert of the Secretary General of the United Nations’ (New York: United Nations, 1996).

⁶⁵ Graça Machel, ‘The Impact of War on Children: A Review of Progress since the 1996 Report on the Impact of Armed Conflict on Children’. (London: Hurst and Company, 2001).

reasons why rights-based approaches to youth programming have gained popularity.

Firstly, youth are seen as mentally and physically weak. Much literature depicts youth as more susceptible to severe physical and mental health problems and injuries than adults. For example, reports on young combatants in Sri Lanka and Burma/Myanmar include testimonies of how they were given drugs such as amphetamines to blunt fear and pain, and used for "human wave" attacks that resulted in massive casualties.⁶⁶ Many studies also claim that the most significant indicator of the extent of trauma on youth is when they exhibit symptoms associated with post-traumatic stress disorder ('PTSD').⁶⁷ For example, Sait claims that approximately 72.8% of Palestinian children exposed to trauma from the on-going Israel/Palestine conflict experience PTSD, such as feelings of alienation, impotence, confusion, bedwetting, nightmares, aggressive behaviour and hyperactivity.⁶⁸ If youths exhibit any of such symptoms (which are not uncommon during adolescence generally), they are constructed as traumatized victims of conflict.

Secondly, youth suffer from social upheaval in addition to risking injury, death and gross violations during times of conflict. Armed conflict generally disrupts national and local governance and every institution that plays a part in youth's lives. The family home may well be the scene of abuse and neglect by adults who are battling despair due to the impact of conflict on their regular economic and social roles. Furthermore, armed conflict can leave many youth displaced and orphaned, forcing them to live in refugee camps where they are vulnerable to exploitation. Such instability is very unsettling, exposing youth to high risks of mental and physical harm.

⁶⁶ Mike Wessells, 'Child Soldiers', *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, (Chicago, Nov/Dec 97).

⁶⁷ Hart and Tyrer(2006) p.4.

⁶⁸ Siraj Sait, 'Have Palestinian children forfeited their rights?' *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, Vol.35, No. 2, 2004, pp.211-28.

Thirdly, youth-in-conflict are constructed as victims because conflict increases the risk of gender-based violence. Rape is often used as a strategic weapon of war, calculated to maximize horror and demoralization on an entire population: Young women are often not armed; they pose no physical threat; and the younger the victim, the greater the impact. Forced impregnations have been deployed in Timor-Leste, Kosovo and Rwanda, where tens of thousands of girls have suffered the trauma of being raped repeatedly, impregnated by their violators, and becoming girl mothers. In Rwanda, babies born from rapes are labelled “enfants du mauvais souvenir” (children of bad memories) or “devil’s children”. In Kosovo, they are called “children of shame.” Young female combatants, particularly those who bear children, face unique health issues because of the sexual violence they experience. They are more prone to contracting HIV and other sexually transmitted infections and health complications arising from pregnancy, delivery, abortion or miscarriage, often aggravated by the absence of any health care, are common. Consequently, young women are represented as particularly susceptible to sexual violence and diseases as demonstrated by this young Northern Ugandan woman’s testimony:

“I choose to sleep with a soldier who is HIV-positive who provides me with food. I know eventually I would contract HIV but at least I continue to live another few years with food in my stomach.”⁶⁹

Lastly, youth are constructed as passive victims because they are assumed to have limited agency. The degree to which youth have rational maturity to understand the causes and implications of their decisions is a contested area. In conflict literature, youth are deemed to be unable to navigate their personal contexts and chart their own individual choices as they are regarded as only involved in conflict due to coercion or indoctrination. Wessells would go so far as argue to that youth have so few real choices that it is unrealistic to see young fighters as rational decision makers.⁷⁰ They are easily exploitable resources

⁶⁹ Lowicki (2005).

⁷⁰ Michael Wessells, ‘Recruitment of children as soldiers in sub-Saharan Africa: An ecological analysis’, in Dr Fredrik Engelstad (ed.) *The Comparative Study of Conscription in the Armed*

mobilised by charismatic leaders into violence, and so should not be personally accountable for the decisions to fight.⁷¹ Based on such views, research into how armed conflict has adversely impacted on youth mentally and physically has perpetuated an image of youth as hopeless, frightened and violated. They are perceived to lack agency to determine the course of their lives, resulting in the belief that youth “who have experienced political violence either start to believe that there is no future, or are able to think of the future in negative terms”.⁷²

The youth-as-victim discourse is problematic for several reasons. Firstly, there is evidence that youth, and even children, are not inherently vulnerable. While it is important to not deny their experience of suffering during conflict, it is important to take into account the many productive ways youth can ‘cope’ with adversity. Constructing young people as passive victims distracts from the ways in which they manifest strength and blinds people to the ways in which their vulnerability is based on unhelpful stereotypes. Moreover, it implies that youth get involved in conflict only because of coercion or brainwashing rather than because it is the most desirable option within the range of choices available. As Boyden maintains:

“Notions of children’s passivity and susceptibility disregard the important emotional, social, economic and political contributions children make to family and community during periods of political violence, as well as trivializing their coping efforts. The perception of the child as vulnerable victim may have powerful emotional appeal for adults, but can in many circumstances be quite detrimental to children since it renders them helpless and incompetent in the face of adult decisions and actions, many of which may not be in children’s best interests.”⁷³

Secondly, classifying an entire demographic of youth as vulnerable overlooks the fact that no group of youth are homogenous in terms of the risks they face.

Forces: Comparative Social Research, Volume 20, (Emerald Group Publishing Limited, 2002) pp.237-254.

⁷¹ Sabine Kurtenbach, ‘Youth in conflict and peace-building – between protection and neglect’ (INEF, University Duisburg-Essen) Paper presented at the ISA conference in San Francisco 26-29 March 2008.

⁷² Ed Cairns, *Children and Political Violence* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996) p.183.

⁷³ Jo Boyden, *Children under fire: Challenging assumptions about children’s resilience. Children, Youth and Environments*, Vol.13 No. 1, 2003, para.61.

Youth live in different contexts, shaped by their age, gender, class, education, and face different risks and opportunities with regards to conflict. Classifying youth as traumatized oversimplifies the issues and denies a broad range of culturally-specific experiences. At the same time, it is important to avoid the notion that because some youth show resilience and resourcefulness in the face of extreme adversity, then all youth can and should do so. This runs the risk of both stigmatising youth who are simply overwhelmed by adverse circumstances and relieving adults of some measure of their responsibility for youth's safety and wellbeing.

Overall, the 'youth-as-victim' discourse largely ignores the roles of youth in contributing to conflict or building peace. While it is an effective narrative for garnering support to protect vulnerable youth affected by conflict, it ignores youth's needs for participation in peacebuilding and decision-making processes at all levels, perpetuating the structural violence where decisions are often made for but not with youth, thus losing their useful insights.⁷⁴ Moreover, it overlooks the role youth play in contributing to violence as soldiers or in demanding political change when their respective governments fail to provide for their needs. The next part of the chapter examines the competing discourse of youth-as-troublemaker, whether as perpetrators, triggers-of-conflict or as spoilers-to-peace, before turning to the relatively new discourse of youth-as-peacebuilder. Taking both competing discourses into account not only affirms the fluid nature of youth identity but also ensures that policymakers formulate policies that allow for such range of identities.

⁷⁴ Celina Del Felice and Andria Wisler, 'The Unexplored Power and Potential of Youth as Peace-Builders.' *Journal of Peace, Conflict and Development*, No.11, 2007, p.9.

3 Youth as troublemakers

A competing discourse to the rights-based, youth-as-victim identity is that of ‘youth-as-troublemaker’. It presents youth-in-conflict as perpetrators and triggers-of-conflict and ‘spoilers’ to peace processes. Youth are seen as a destabilizing force because “when young people are uprooted, jobless, intolerant, alienated, and have few opportunities for positive engagement, they represent a ready pool of recruits for groups seeking to mobilize violence.”⁷⁵ Depicted as young unemployed men with few opportunities for positive engagement, youth are deemed a ready pool of recruits for violent groups. A closer examination of this dominant discourse reveals three sub-types: youth-as-perpetrators during conflict, triggers-of-conflict and spoilers-to-peace. The first and third are prevalent in policies targeting youth *during* armed conflict in the non-West while the second construction is common of youth in developing countries where they have potential to cause or continue conflict. These discourses are grouped under the category of ‘youth-as-troublemakers’ as they present youth as negative change-agents who must be contained if society is to function peacefully.

A Perpetrators

The most dominant construction within the youth-as-troublemaker discourse is of ‘youth-as-perpetrators’. Literature on youth’s roles as armed combatants are littered with images of child fighters from Sierra Leone and Uganda, engaged in brutal acts and unfettered by social constraints or morality. Images of youths bearing AK-47s with no remorse for their brutality have heightened public fears, making direct research with child soldiers less attractive than relying on secondary sources. Although the concept of ‘child soldiers’ only gained popularity in the late-1980s, the discourse of youth as instruments of war has

⁷⁵ USAID, *Youth and Conflict: A Toolkit for Intervention*, (Washington, DC, United States Agency for International Development, 2005,p.3.

achieved dominance alongside youth-as-victims constructions. Quotes such as below give credence to the discourse itself:

*“You got like a buzz when you done it, like I don’t know, all the adrenaline and all. Like when you pick the gun up”.*⁷⁶

While it is accepted that youth are not born violent, they are commonly observed as having potential to *become* violent actors, with young males often exposed as the main protagonists of criminal and political violence. ‘Child soldiers’ literature examines youths’ involvement in warfare, the roles they play as spies, cooks, couriers, the induction processes into armed groups and their rehabilitation needs once fighting ceases.⁷⁷ It documents how youth are forced into service or volunteer for reasons such as poverty, obtaining a pecuniary benefit, the need for community, lack of education, limited employment, self-defence, culture and political ideology.⁷⁸ Membership in rebel groups becomes enticing since members are guaranteed food, camaraderie, power and education.

Using Hansen’s framework, it becomes clear that literature and policies on child soldiers generally represent them as irrational agents of violence. By situating their identities spatially, one sees how child soldiers are phenomena occurring within specific sociocultural contexts; their constructions are racialised and framed within the context of the non-West. The only exception is research on young combatants in the Northern Ireland ‘Troubles’. Young combatants are typically situated in African conflict zones, where they are assumed to be poor, frustrated and uneducated. Much like Said’s study of ‘orientalism’, such youth are constructed as uncontrollable and frustrated, looking for an outlet to unleash their violent passions.

In terms of situating their identity temporally, evidence depicts youth-in-conflict as a lost generation in limbo as the social and economic statuses required for

⁷⁶ Billy, Northern Ireland, cited in Rachel Brett and Irma Specht, *Young Soldiers: why they choose to fight*, (Geneva: International Labour Organisation, 2004).

⁷⁷ Peter Singer, *Children at War* (New York: Pantheon, 2005).

⁷⁸ Brett and Specht (2004).

adulthood are increasingly unattainable for youth.⁷⁹ Sommers' work on "youthmen" in Rwanda,⁸⁰ research on "waithood" in the Middle East,⁸¹ and studies of youth violence in Sri Lanka all emphasise a blocked transition to adulthood emerging as a result of a complex combination of demographic, economic, social and political factors.⁸² Similarly, the Women's Refugee Commission's 2008/2009 case studies of youth in Darfur, Burma, Iraq and Liberia suggest that few educational and skills-building opportunities and a growing youth population can result in youth living in an elongated state of 'limbo'.⁸³ Where youth have access to school but limited opportunities to apply their education, they risk becoming a "lost generation", resulting in rising disenfranchisement and negative coping behaviors including alcohol abuse, violence, and endangering both themselves and their communities.⁸⁴

However, unlike the youth-as-victims discourse that constructs youth as static actors trapped within their particular circumstances, youth-as-perpetrators are constructed with a greater degree of agency and transformative power. When their needs and expectations are not met by their communities, whether in respect of healthcare or job opportunities, youth are more inclined to demand change. Sometimes, they do so in a destabilising way by joining rebel forces as conflict enables them to escape restrictive customs and lowly statuses. For example Schafer studied the involvement of young men in RENAMO across Mozambique and concluded that some saw participation in the insurgency as a viable economic activity in the face of rural poverty, low-paid, back-breaking

⁷⁹ Lyndsay McLean Hilker and Erika Fraser, 'Youth exclusion, violence, conflict and fragile states' (Report prepared for DFID's Equity and Rights Team), 30 April 2009, p.18.

⁸⁰ Marc Sommers, Youth and Conflict: A Brief Review of Available Literature, USAID/Equip3, May 2006.

⁸¹ Djavad Salehi-Isfahani and Navtej Dhillon, 'Stalled Youth Transitions in the Middle East A Framework for Policy Reform', *Middle East Youth Initiative Working Paper*, Dubai School of Government, No.8, October 2008.

⁸² Hairi Amarasuriya, Canan Gündüz, Markus Mayer, 'Rethinking the nexus between youth, unemployment and conflict – Perspectives from Sri Lanka', *Strengthening the Economic Dimensions of Peacebuilding Case Study Series*, International Alert (2009).

⁸³ See <http://womensrefugeecommission.org/programs/youth/79-untapped-potential-displaced-youth> for a list of recent studies conducted on this issue.

⁸⁴ Women's Commission for Refugee, Women and Children, *Untapped Potential: Adolescents Affected by Armed Conflict* (January 2002).

work and potential harassment by government troops.⁸⁵ Sometimes youth exercise agency paradoxically through their claims of wartime non-agency.⁸⁶

What this means ethically is that governments do not possess the same sense of ethical responsibility as they do for youth-as-victims needing human rights protection. While child soldiers are sometimes constructed within the victim discourse as forced into violence due to circumstance, the youth-as-perpetrators discourse constructs youth as a large cause for the growing arms trade and thus, a major security threat. For this reason, the international community has a sense of responsibility based on security concerns rather than human rights concerns towards child soldiers, who are now firmly established as part of the international security agenda.

Convinced that youth's role in armed conflict has serious implications for international peace and security, the Security Council has been actively seized of the issue of youth and small arm proliferation since 1999.⁸⁷ There are now calls for the end of recruitment of under-18 youth into armed conflict, with greater monitoring by the Secretary-General of warring parties that recruit or use children in violation of international obligations. Overall, the narrative of such resolutions suggests that if youth are prevented from joining armed conflict, small-arms trade would be curtailed, and if small-arms trade was weakened, youth's contributions during conflict would be minimised. Such resolutions present youth-as-perpetrators as security concerns requiring containment rather than protection, casting youth as an 'Other' to be feared.

⁸⁵ Jessica Shafer, 'Guerrillas and Violence in the War in Mozambique: De - Socialization or Re-Socialization?', *African Affairs*, Vol.100, No.399, 2001, pp.215-237.

⁸⁶ Susan Shepler, 'The Rites of the Child: Global Discourses of Youth and Reintegrating Child Soldiers in Sierra Leone', *Journal of Human Rights*, Vol. 4, 2005, p.200.

⁸⁷ Seven Security Council Resolutions have been passed on the matter of children and armed conflict, three of which (resolutions 1460, 1539 and 1612) note the importance of controlling illicit trade in small arms light weapons due to assumption that there is a causal link between small arms trade and the use of child soldiers.

Although not explicitly crafted as ‘Self’ in international security policy, international institutions assume a role of responsibility for limiting the threat posed by young combatants. This is because they have the resources to do so; for instance, the UN has hard power in terms of finances and a military, soft power in terms of official legitimacy and international influence, and is shielded from the direct effects of conflict because in essence, it is not human. They present themselves as politically neutral, impersonal and with an interest in global democratic peace and harmony. Despite criticisms that they are ‘Western’ structures that exist for the interests of Western states and are driven by realist concerns for power (all under the guise of safeguarding human rights), the UN and the Bank present their ‘Selves’ as rational, neo-liberal institutions explicitly sanctioned by the international community to act on matters of security through the Security Council. They exist for the common good of humanity.

In comparison, young combatants are represented within security policies as young, angry men with few resources. Barker and Ricardo’s study of young men in Uganda, South Africa, Botswana and Nigeria, demonstrates how male socialisation and constructions of manhood and masculinity in Africa are often key factors in the production of violence and conflict.⁸⁸ By equating power with violence, young men are more inclined to use violence. Moreover, when elders and “big men” wield power to decide when younger men may marry or can access property, younger men are incentivised to engage in violence in order to obtain empowerment and status.⁸⁹ ⁹⁰ Youth-in-conflict gain meaning not only through differentiation from the UN and the Bank’s ‘Self’ construction but also from “big men” as a secondary ‘Other’.

⁸⁸ Gary Barker and Christine Ricardo, ‘Young Men and the Construction of Masculinity in Sub-Saharan Africa: Implications for HIV/AIDS, Conflict, and Violence’, *Social Development Papers*, Conflict Prevention & Reconstruction Paper No.26 (World Bank, June 2005)

⁸⁹ Gary Barker, *Dying to be Men: Youth, Masculinity and Social Exclusion*, (London: Routledge, 2005).

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

Overall, the youth-as-perpetrator discourse has achieved a disproportionate amount of dominance than is justified. Most youth-in-conflict are not soldiers: there are approximately 300,000 soldiers aged 25 or under; they form 0.001percent of the 300 million young people under 25 living in countries affected by armed conflict.⁹¹ Furthermore, not all combatants are men. One in three soldiers under 25 is female. Human Rights Watch estimates that between 1990 and 2003, girls were part of fighting forces in 55 countries. In Colombia specifically, up to 20percent of paramilitary forces were child soldiers- roughly 11,000 to 14,000 children -and anywhere from one quarter to one half of them were ‘recruited’ girls, some as young as eight years old.⁹² These statistics are surprising as prevailing discourses have largely been silent on the role young women play. They also demonstrate the need for a gendered perspective of youth’s involvement in war so that young women are not stereotyped as just victims of conflict.

Given the evidence that youth-as-perpetrators only account for a small part of the youth-in-conflict demographic, alternative youth identity discourses have recently emerged. The next section examines the construction of ‘youth-as-triggers’ of conflict in developing countries with a growing youth demographic.

B Youth as triggers-of-conflict

This section examines ‘youth bulge’ theories which construct youth as social and economic destabilisers within their communities (“youth-as-triggers”) and the factors that arguably cause youth to trigger change and conflict. The ‘youth bulge’ is defined as “extraordinarily large youth cohorts relative to the adult population” which raise security threats as population pressures create resource

⁹¹ Lowicki (2005).

⁹² Human Rights Watch. How to Fight, How to Kill: Child Soldiers in Liberia (2004).

scarcities and strained social institutions.⁹³ Because youth-as-triggers are forced to compete for limited educational and employment opportunities, they are represented as discontented youth (particularly men between 15 and 24 years old) with the potential to spark civil unrest and political violence in urban areas.⁹⁴ The following newspaper commentaries reveal how the threat of the youth bulge is the most emotive argument to submit to policy makers:

“Dangerous demographic trends typified by a massive youth ‘bulge’ - an extraordinarily high proportion of young people among the population - all but guarantee increased social instability that few regimes will be able to withstand.”⁹⁵

“You’ve got a lot of young men. You’ve got a lot of poverty. You’ve got a lot of bad governance, and often you’ve got greed with extractive industries. You put all that together, and you’ve got the makings of trouble.”⁹⁶

This ‘youth-as-trigger’ construction differs from youth-as-perpetrators constructions as it is typically situated outside armed conflict. Nevertheless, it falls within this thesis’ broad definition of conflict where socio-economic conditions make conflict highly probable or where war-to-peace transitions are taking place; it relates to youth living in developing countries where recession, inequalities, poor governance, urban overcrowding and poverty abound.⁹⁷

Such construction of youth has appealed mostly to economists and national security analysts attracted by causal theories such as “greed and grievance” arguments and the scientific manner in which youth bulge theories predict which countries are most at risk of violent conflict. For instance, Bank analyst Henrik Urdal claims there is “robust support for the hypothesis that youth bulges

⁹³ Henrik Urdal, 'The Devil in the Demographics: The Effect of Youth Bulges on Domestic Armed Conflict, 1950-2000,' in *Social Development Papers 14* (Washington DC: Conflict Prevention and Reconstruction Unit, World Bank, 2004) Vol.7,p.13.

⁹⁴ Henrik Urdal, 'A Clash of Generations? Youth Bulges and Political Violence', *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol.50, 2006, pp.607–629.

⁹⁵ Gary E Fuller, "Demographics = Mideast Turmoil," *Newsday*, 29 September 2003, A21.

⁹⁶ William L. Nash, a retired Army major general who directs the Center for Preventive Action of the Council on Foreign Relations. See <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/04/04/world/04youth.html?ex=1333339200&en=594deefbf1424a63&ei=5124&partner=permalink&exprod=permalink>

⁹⁷ Urdal (2007) pp.90–100.

increase the risk of domestic armed conflict, and especially so under conditions of economic stagnation.”⁹⁸ Moreover, “for each percentage point increase of youth in the adult population, the risk of conflict increases by more than 4percent. When youth make up more than 35 percent of the adult population...the risk of armed conflict is 150 percent higher than in countries with an age structure similar to most developed countries.”⁹⁹ It is thus important to explore the relationship between the youth bulge and conflict.

“Greed/grievance” theories examine how youth’s decision-making is impacted by economic, socio-political factors, like limited employment and social progression, by providing macro-level perspectives.¹⁰⁰ Grievance (or ‘motive’) perspectives stress the *relative deprivation* and social, economic and political exclusion youth suffer as a motivation for their engagement in violence. Youth are constructed as *aggrieved* actors who form a latent pool of conflict easily triggered by structural factors. For instance, during periods of economic development, a rapid increase in the supply of educated youth creates ‘bottlenecks’ in labour markets with already limited absorbing capacity. This increases the sense of relative deprivation experienced when youth perceive a gap between what they believe they deserve after years of education and what they actually have; strong grievances and disillusionment follow, eroding confidence in the political system’s legitimacy and stability. Without access to employment or livelihood opportunities, youths cannot afford accommodation, cannot marry and have little prospect for advancement, thereby prolonging their transition to adulthood. In extreme cases, unemployment can make involvement in criminal activities, such as drugs-trafficking and armed groups, an appealing livelihood opportunity.

⁹⁸ Henrik Urdal, 'The Devil in the Demographics: The Effect of Youth Bulges on Domestic Armed Conflict, 1950-2000,' in *Social Development Papers 14* (Washington DC: Conflict Prevention and Reconstruction Unit, World Bank, 2004),p.1. His dataset is available at <http://www.prio.no/CSCW/Datasets/Armed-Conflict/UCDP-PRIO/>.

⁹⁹ Henrik Urdal, 'The Demographics of Political Violence: Youth Bulges, Insecurity and Conflict' in Lael Brainard & Derek Chollet, eds, *Too Poor for Peace? Global Poverty, Conflict and Security in the 21st Century* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2007), p.96.

¹⁰⁰ Urdal (2004).

Grievances need not always be economic. Youth can have political grievances founded on political ideology and identity politics which do not in themselves cause conflict but can provide powerful discourses for mobilising youth towards perpetuating violence. From interviews with youth from the Gaza strip, Bucaille found that the experience of living under a repressive military occupation and with continuous political violence left many young Palestinians with extremist views.¹⁰¹ She described her interviewees as “radically nationalist” with most thinking that “Israel should be wiped off the map”. This is unsurprising given their experiences of violence at the hand of Israeli soldiers created “no recipe for moderation [when] many of these young people have seen death up close”.¹⁰² Equally, for the young male Palestinian suicide-bombers of 2002, violence was an appealing option despite their middle-class, educated and relatively well-off backgrounds. For such youth, ideological reasons rather than economic factors incited feelings of grievances. A similar pattern emerges from research on North Ireland’s Troubles, where perpetrators were often well-off youth from stable families who believed in their cause and the cult of heroism.¹⁰³ While it may be tempting to consider suicide-bombers as irrational and fundamentalist, an alternative reading of these accounts indicates that youth have chosen self-inflicted violence as the only credible outlet for expressing their sense of hopelessness. They perceive the personal cost of committing suicide to be outweighed by the benefit of drawing attention to their repressive political circumstances. With limited alternatives, suicide is a rational choice.

Similarly, greed (or ‘opportunity’) perspectives represent youth as *rational* decision-makers who choose conflict only when it is in their interests to do so. They emphasize the *benefits* that engagement in violence offer (like protection), particularly for poor, uneducated youth for whom opportunity costs for

¹⁰¹ Laetitia Bucaille, *Growing up Palestinian: Israeli occupation and the Intifada generation*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004) pp.133-134.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ Ed Cairns, *Children and Political Violence* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1996) p.119.

engagement in violence are low. In predicting the potential for conflict, Collier and Hoeffler uses a cost-benefit analysis when examining the opportunities for violence; they argue that the availability of finance through illegal trade of primary commodities (such as diamonds and minerals) makes joining rebel groups an attractive option for youth with few alternatives in a constrained labour market.¹⁰⁴ Conversely, youth living in countries with large youth cohorts such as Asia may not be motivated towards rebellion when opportunities for higher levels of education exist, thus raising their personal opportunity cost of joining rebellions. This is supported by Barakat and Urdal's research linking countries with (male) youth bulges and low educational opportunities with a rise in risk of conflict.¹⁰⁵ Limited educational or job opportunities and minimal access to political avenues for being heard reduces the cost for engaging in conflict; conflict becomes a more effective means for generating income and demanding change.¹⁰⁶ Overall, the youth-as-trigger construction represents youth-in-conflict as aggrieved yet rational triggers-of-conflict.

However, unlike youth-as-victims, youth-as-triggers do not possess a static identity. Situating their temporal identity reveals that, similar to (and more than) youth-as-perpetrators, youth-as-triggers are constructed as having a fluid identity, albeit a negative one. Driven by a natural urge for change and attracted by new ideas, they are more willing to participate in violent conflict and challenge traditional forms of authority, particularly when the status quo fails to meet their needs.¹⁰⁷ With fewer family and work responsibilities, they are "simply free, to a unique degree, of constraints that tend to make activism too

¹⁰⁴ Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler, 'Greed and Grievance in Civil War' *World Bank Policy Research Working Paper*, No.2355, May 2000, p.5.

¹⁰⁵ Bilal Barakat and Henrik Urdal, 'Breaking the Waves? Does Education Mediate the Relationship Between Youth Bulges and Political Violence?', *Policy Research Working Paper 5114*, (Post Conflict & Social Development Unit, Africa Region, The World Bank, November 2009).

¹⁰⁶ Urdal (2006).

¹⁰⁷ Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York, Simon & Schuster, 1996),117; Jack A Goldstone, "Demography, Environment and Security", in Paul Diehl and Nils Petter Gleditsch, eds, *Environmental Conflict*, (Boulder, CO: Westview, 2001) p.95.

time consuming or risky for other groups to engage in.”¹⁰⁸ Because of their potential to challenge structures that benefit current leaders, youth are constructed within this discourse as ‘negative’ change-agents.

This construction has been perpetuated through historical discourse. Historian Jack Goldstone, a leading theorist on youth’s role in political violence, claims:

“Youth have played a prominent role in political violence throughout recorded history: and the existence of a ‘youth bulge’ (an unusually high proportion of youths 15-25 relative to the total population) has historically been associated with times of political crisis).”¹⁰⁹

The youth bulge effect has also been blamed for the Nazi movement in the 1930s and the Islamic resurgence since 9/11. According to Moller, the rise of Nazism in Germany in the 1930s is linked to the economic depression affecting Germany’s largest youth cohort ever.¹¹⁰ Likewise, *Newsweek* editor Zakaria blames the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the youth bulges in the Middle East and the Islamic resurgence in the Arab world caused by slow economic and social change.¹¹¹ Popular culture, media clips of riots across the Middle East in February 2011 and historical ‘evidence’ have reinforced this youth-as-trigger discourse.

What this means ethically is interesting. Compared to youth-as-victims and youth-as-perpetrators, youth-as-triggers do not possess the same needs for protection nor pose an immediate security threat. Youth in developing countries are represented as having more (albeit constrained) opportunities than youth living in fear of violence, whether for retraining or meeting their basic needs for survival through employment. Nonetheless, governments still bear responsibility

¹⁰⁸ Jack A Goldstone, quoted in Henrik Urdal, "The Devil in the Demographics: The Effect of Youth Bulges on Domestic Armed Conflict, 1950-2000," in *Social Development Papers 14* (Washington DC: Conflict Prevention and Reconstruction Unit, World Bank, 2004).

¹⁰⁹ Jack A Goldstone, “Demography, Environment and Security”, in Paul F Diehl and Nils Petter Gleditsch (eds), *Environmental Conflict* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 2001) p.95.

¹¹⁰ Herbert Moller, ‘Youth as a Force in the Modern World’. *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol.10, 1968, pp.238–260.

¹¹¹ Fareed Zakaria, ‘The Roots of Rage’. *Newsweek*, Iss.138, 2001, pp.14–33,24.

for realising youth's economic and productive potential, in realising their goals for 'good governance' and economic development. Moreover, for security analysts persuaded by youth bulge arguments, recent demographic trends are a cause for worry. In Kosovo, one-half of the population is aged under 20; in Northern Ireland, 40% of the population is under 24; in Guatemala, 20.3% of the population is aged 15-24 and the percentages are on the rise.¹¹² Such youth bulges pose a future security threat and only by drawing on society's fears that youth are potential triggers-of-conflict are wide-ranging security and economic interventions warranted.

While security responses are justified when youth are constructed as idle, discontent, "social Molotov cocktail[s] ready to be ignited",¹¹³ some critics have expressed concerns about how youth bulge discourse risk stigmatising youths, the majority of whom avoid violence.¹¹⁴ Moreover, youth are constructed as highly racialised 'Others'. For example, Kaplan famously characterized male youth in urban West Africa as "out of school, unemployed, loose molecules in an unstable social fluid that threatened to ignite".¹¹⁵ Personified as discontent, 'coloured', angry young men with a predilection for terrorism, youth bulges are seen as unpredictable, out-of-control forces in the global South, with Africa, the Middle East, and parts of Asia and Latin America all considered hot spots.¹¹⁶ 'Linked' to this male 'Other' is his female counterpart, the 'veiled young woman' who is represented as victim of repressive regimes that control future population growth rates. The implied dual threat in policies - of explosive violence and explosive fertility - reinforces gender, race and age hierarchies by embodying 'threats' in the racially 'Other' figures of the young male predator

¹¹² Del Felice and Wisler (2007).

¹¹³ Sommers (2009).

¹¹⁴ Schwartz (2010).

¹¹⁵ Robert D Kaplan, *The Ends of the Earth: A Journey at the Dawn of the 21st Century* (New York: Random House, 1996) p.16.

¹¹⁶ See Anne Hendrixson, 'The Youth Bulge Concept: Defining the Next Generation of Young Men as a Threat to the Future,' *DifferenTakes*, No.19, Spring 2002, http://popdev.hampshire.edu/projects/dt/pdfs/DifferenTakes_19.pdf.

and the veiled young woman.¹¹⁷ This all raises questions as to: *against whom do these racialised ‘Others’ (ie. youth-as-trigger) derive meaning* (in other words, who is the ‘Self’ and are there other ‘Others’ involved?) *and how are they differentiated?* Generally, the ‘Self’ are white, adult academics and policy-analysts who contribute to youth bulge research, and implied in their work are ‘hidden Others’ in the form of American-Eurocentric youths who embody younger versions of the ‘Self’; like Western adults, Western youths are represented as rational and civilised. With economic stability and political democracy, such youth have no need to revolt violently.

While youth bulge discourse is popular amongst economist and national defence officials, the youth-as-triggers construction is still highly contested. Firstly, the existing correlation between youth bulges and higher risk of violence is not yet proven to be causal, with Urdal’s statistical analysis on youth bulges depicting high numbers of youth as a blessing and a curse.¹¹⁸ Youth bulges and economic stagnation were insufficient factors to trigger conflict in areas with autocratic governance like the Middle East until only very recently.

Secondly, youth bulge research is still inconclusive. The lack of good cross-national time-series datasets makes it difficult to examine contextual factors in quantitative studies – in particular youth employment/economic opportunities.¹¹⁹ Moreover, youth bulges are “negatively related, although statistically insignificant, to armed conflict for the post-Cold War period, while positive and clearly significant for previous decades.”¹²⁰ On balance, while the youth-as-trigger construction has gained popularity within some policy circles, it is still contested by others who appreciate the need to understand youth using all of

¹¹⁷ Anne Hendrixson, *Angry Young Men, Veiled Young Women- Constructing a New Population Threat*, Corner House Briefing 34, 2004. <http://www.thecornerhouse.org.uk/resource/angry-young-men-veiled-young-women> (1 November 2010).

¹¹⁸Urdal (2004).

¹¹⁹ Henrik Urdal, (2009), p.6

¹²⁰Urdal (2004) p.16.

Kemper's suggested approaches, being rights-based, economics and socio-political approaches.

C Spoilers-to-peace

For the sake of completeness, it is worth mentioning that a new construction of youth-in-conflict's identity is of "youth-as-spoilers" to peace processes. "Spoilers" to peace are elites who are party to conflict and decide whether to cooperate with peace processes or contribute to conflict based on cost-benefit analyses that consider structural and situational capacities.¹²¹ While spoiler theory typically focuses on elites, a large youth cohort can be understood as a "latent spoiler" as they are "determined but weak actors who would oppose the implementation of a peace accord, if only they had the material wherewithal to do so."¹²² Youth-as-spoilers may thwart peace processes for multiple reasons. They may be incentivised to disrupt peace-making processes when low opportunity costs issues remain, such as lack of access to political and economic structures.¹²³ As a former child soldier cautioned, "I am asking you to help us, or we are going to become rebels again, or thieves."¹²⁴ If policies provide opportunities for youth to transition to civilian life (such as vocational training), the opportunity cost of ceasing violence are lowered, making peace more attractive to youth.

McEvoy-Levy describes how youth at the forefront of anti-apartheid activism in South Africa became spoilers when they were suddenly asked to stand down from their leadership positions while older generations took over. Youth who

¹²¹ The term "spoiler" was coined by Stephen J Stedman. See Stephen Stedman, 'Spoiler Problems in Peace Process', *International Security*, Vol.22, No.2, 1997.

¹²² Kelly M Greenhill and Solomon Major, 'The Perils of Profiling: Civil War Spoilers and the Collapse of Intrastate Peace Accords', *International Security*, Vol 31, No 3, 2006, pp.9-10.

¹²³ Schwartz (2010) p.21.

¹²⁴ Stephen Swankay, a Sierra Leone cub reporter who was captured at age 12 by the Revolutionary United Front and freed a couple years later. Quoted in http://www.sfcg.org/programmes/sierra/sierra_child.html (10 January 2011).

once held influential roles during wartime did not find the new power structures appealing as they were centred on adult-leadership. Their expected utility of continuing to fight outweighed the perceived benefits of integrating into the peace regime, particularly when the prospect of being shunned by their families and looming unemployment increased the opportunity cost of giving up violence. Consequently, many youth 'spoiled' the peace through violence, rioting, joining street gangs and rejoining rebel groups.

This demonstrates two points. Firstly, youth have agency to change their circumstances and do so within their perceived alternatives. Secondly, youth participation during peace processes is crucial to achieving a sustainable resolution to conflict. If peace policies are to be effective and owned by future leaders who will inherit the political and institutional reigns, youth's needs and perspectives must be taken into account. Otherwise, youth have few incentives to promote peace.

Given the little there is written about youth as latent spoilers, it is too soon to deem such construction as a 'basic discourse'. Rather, it confirms how youth are not always victims who passively accept their lot in life but can alter their circumstances as negative change-agents, whether as perpetrators, triggers-of-conflict or spoilers-to-peace. Even so, this only provides a negatively skewed understanding of youth's identity during conflict. The next section examines the many ways youth are constructed as peacebuilders, providing a dynamic understanding of how they bring positive change to their communities.

4 Youth-as-peacebuilders

“If youth can be such a powerful force that can destroy a whole nation, why do people overlook this resource in building peace?”-Rwandan Youth Movement Leader¹²⁵

The literature on youth-as-victims and as troublemakers, while prolific, does not provide comprehensive understandings of youth-in-conflict’s identity, roles and behaviours in that they only adopt rights-based and economic-based approaches to youth development and overlook youth’s positive participation during peace processes. A third and competing discourse is of “youth-as-peacebuilders” that constructs youth as agents who contribute positively during and after periods of conflict.

While much hearsay exists of youth’s positive contributions to peacebuilding, the single most glaring gap in youth-related research is the lack of attention to youth’s role as peacebuilders.¹²⁶ The youth peacebuilding literature is not extensive, consisting of few broad-ranging academic studies, country-specific studies and international agencies reports. Despite the slow uptake of research on this topic, academic studies have emerged over the last five years documenting youths’ roles as peaceful agents of positive social change. Siobhàn McEvoy-Levy, Marc Sommers and Stephanie Schwartz have criticised current peace and conflict frameworks for adopting limited conceptions of youth roles that are inadequate and require more holistic constructions of youth identity. McEvoy-Levy argues:

“Neither children nor youth appear as important variables in the literature on peace processes. Nor, authors of important UN reports admit, have adolescents been separately or well

¹²⁵ Interview by Peter Sampson, United Nations Development Programme. ‘Youth and Violent Conflict- Society and Development in Crisis?’(2006).

¹²⁶ Dennis Rodgers, ‘Youth Gangs and Violence in Latin America and the Caribbean: A Literature Survey’, *LCR Sustainable Development Working Paper No. 4*, Latin America and Caribbean Region, Environmentally and Socially Sustainable Development SMU (World Bank, 1999).

considered even in studies of war-affected children. A neglect of adolescents and older young people is short-sighted and counterproductive in terms of peace building particularly in the crucial post-accord phase with its twin challenges of violence prevention/accord maintenance and societal reconciliation and reconstruction. Youth embody essential elements of both challenges: posing at once potential threats to peace and peace building resources.”¹²⁷

Studies on youth-as-peacebuilders construct youths as leaders with innovative approaches to resolving conflict peacefully, but also acknowledge youth’s other identities during conflict, whether as victims or troublemakers. McEvoy-Levy represents youth as dynamic agents who can be both positive and negative agents during peacebuilding.¹²⁸ She describes how youth in post-conflict zones like Kosovo have educated peers about conflict resolution, organised community service projects, started a union of taxi and motorbike drivers to serve their community and organised sports competition to encourage cross-cultural reconciliation. At the same time, they have also started street gangs, joined rebel groups and rioted on streets. They can affect their communities through violence or peacebuilding.

Elsewhere, youth have also actively been involved in grassroots peacebuilding through: “Shministim”, created to resist compulsory conscription in Israel when members resisted to take part in Israel’s occupation; “Otpor”, which opposed Milosevic’s regime in Serbia; “Peace Links” which empowers marginalised youth in Sierra Leone through music and dance; and the “United Network of Young Peacebuilders”, a global network of youth peacebuilding organizations.¹²⁹ These are all youth-led initiatives developed according to youth preferences.

¹²⁷ McEvoy-Levy (2001a) p.25.

¹²⁸ McEvoy-Levy (2001a)

¹²⁹ Del Felice and Wisler (2007).

Examples of adult-led initiatives with extensive youth input include programmes where youth have performed in street theatre shows;¹³⁰ ran radio programmes for youth,¹³¹ and directed children television programmes such as *Nashe Maalo* in Macedonia.¹³² The “Talking Drum Studio” in Sierra Leone is a well-known example of youth being engaged in all aspects of a project, with youth working as producers, reporters and actors as well as identifying issues for and about youth.¹³³ This demonstrates youth’s ability to employ music and dance as an alternative mode of engaging in dialogue and resolving conflict.

While research generally focuses on youth’s involvement in grassroots initiatives, some international agencies accept the importance of youth participation in developing a sustainable, peaceful future.¹³⁴ In many international meetings and in youth-led civil society, youth are constructed as leaders. For instance, youth input was incorporated into many high-level policies, including UN Security Council Resolution 1460 on sexual exploitation of youth in Sierra Leone by aid workers. Furthermore, the Kosovar Youth Councils and Youth Congress are examples of how youth have positively impacted their communities through their advocacy and engagement with local authorities.¹³⁵ Most impressively, the 2005 Women’s Refugee Commission’s research on youth-in-conflict was conducted by 150 youths in Kosovo, Northern

¹³⁰ Gila Svirsky, *The Israeli Peace Movement since the Al-Aqsa Intifada*, ed. Roane Carey, *The New Intifada: Resisting Israel's Apartheid* (New York: Verso, 2001). See <http://www.childrenyouthaspeacebuilders.ca/pdfs/youth/youth-action.pdf> (22 November 2010) to read about a theatre group in the Philippines.

¹³¹ Lena Slachmuis, 'Unsung Heroes: Studio Ijambo in Burundi' in Paul van Tongeren, et al (eds), *People Building Peace 2: Successful Stories of Civil Society* (London: Lynne Rienner Publishing, 2005).

¹³² Eran Fraenkel, *Changing Attitudes through Children's Television: Nashe Maalo in Macedonia*, Paul van Tongeren, et al (ed), *People Building Peace 2: Successful Stories of Civil Society* (London: Lynne Rienner Publishing, 2005).

¹³³ Lowicki (2005).

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Valon Kurhasani, 'Young Kosovars Help Themselves: The Kosovar Youth Council' in Lena Slachmuis, 'Unsung Heroes: Studio Ijambo in Burundi' in Paul van Tongeren, et al (eds), *People Building Peace 2: Successful Stories of Civil Society* (London: Lynne Rienner Publishing, 2005).

Uganda and Sierra Leone on 3,000 of their peers in order to assess the needs of youth-in-conflict and how best to meet them.¹³⁶

These accounts of youth represent youth as transformative and dynamic, which is vastly different from youth-as-victim's temporal identity as static and unchanging. They are more akin to youth-as-troublemaker discourses that focus on structural factors and effective programming that 'redeem' youth from their destabilising potential and incentivise them to seek peace. However, the peacebuilder construction allows for the dual identities of youth as potential troublemakers and peacemakers and places a much greater emphasis on the dynamic understanding of youth identity in conflict. Through effective programming, their identities can be transformed.

For instance, Schwartz's research on youth in Mozambique, the DRC and Kosovo examined the effects of local and international policies on the emergence of youth participation during post-conflict reconstruction.¹³⁷ Her findings confirmed that youth's identities are "largely contextual, based on the efficiency of reconstruction programs in meeting youth needs, on how and in what sequence these programs are implemented, and on how well reconstruction actors understand the situation on the ground."¹³⁸ Peacebuilding programmes are effective in shaping youth's roles during post-conflict periods only if they successfully altered the decision-making structures that lead youth to destabilising behaviour.

The unfortunate consequence of understanding youth identity as dynamic is that international institutions are less inclined to feel ethically responsible for youth-as-peacebuilders. Youth-as-peacebuilders are constructed as fully formed social actors who are ultimately responsible for their own lives. Compared to other discourses' ethical identities, there is neither a sense of ethical responsibility

¹³⁶ Lowicki (2005).

¹³⁷ Schwartz (2010), pp.63-152.

¹³⁸ Schwartz (2010), p.155.

based on protection of their human rights nor the perception that youth pose a security threat (as with perpetrators). Moreover, they pose little economic threat (unlike the youth bulge) by furthering their peacebuilding efforts and acting as productive economic actors.

This could be due to how youth-as-peacebuilder's spatial identity is situated in post-conflict settings where there are no immediate threats to youth's physical safety. Moreover, youth-as-peacebuilder as an 'Other' in international policies is viewed using 'adult-lenses' and constructed as rational, level-headed, politicized but peaceful actors. In stark contrast to other discourses of youth-as-victims or troublemakers, international policies construct youth-as-peacebuilders as not rivals but partners, creating large degrees of overlap between international institutions' sense of 'Self' and youth-as-peacebuilder as 'Other'. Instead of a terse relationship where youth are dependents competing for resources and support, youth-as-peacebuilders provide extra human resources, innovative ideas and youthful idealism when rebuilding their communities. There is accordingly less sense of urgency in funding development programmes that empower youth-as-peacebuilders than there is for humanitarian programmes that protect young victims and reintegrate child soldiers back into their communities.

While the peacebuilding discourse provides much needed balance to the negative construction of youth-as-victims and troublemakers and helps policymakers design multi-disciplinary frameworks that better understand youth's multiple identities and needs, it faces difficulties in gaining hegemonic status. As a discourse without a sense of urgency, it does not provide humanitarian agencies with the necessary emotive narratives to secure funding. Additionally, it is unable to justify policy decisions and mandates that undergird UN and the Bank's youth development work. As a development agency promoting youth's human rights, the UN is biased towards the victims discourse, and as a Bank advocating neo-liberal values, the Bank constructs youth as economic actors

whose energies must be channelled towards ‘productive’ activities. While their policies may allude to youth’s potential for peacebuilding, they do so minimally.

5 Conclusion

This chapter has compared the emerging discourse of youth-as-peacebuilders against other constructions of youth-as-victims and troublemakers, whether as perpetrators, triggers-of-conflict or as spoilers-to-peace. Each identity differs spatially, temporally and ethically. While the oldest discourse of youth-as-victims represents youth’s identity as static, the others recognise that youth’s roles and identities change over time and can either contribute actively or passively to peace or instability. Youth identities are more accurately seen as dependent variables which are not predetermined but guided by how well youth’s needs are met.¹³⁹

This understanding is important for two reasons. Firstly, constructing youth identity as fluid emphasises the discursive relationship between policy and identity. Just as policies have the power to shape identity constructions held by people, youth identity constructions ‘speak back’ to policymakers and shape what choices they make. Secondly, it emphasises the need to obtain a comprehensive, context-specific understanding of youth’s multiple identity. Ignoring youth’s potential for various roles and identities may not be fatal to the reconstruction and peacebuilding process, but can cause prolonged instability, particularly when peace depends “on whether the next generations accept or reject it, how they are socialized during the peace process and their perceptions of what that peace has achieved.”¹⁴⁰ Understanding youth’s needs and issues in a given context are central to fostering a sustainable peace as identity constructions shape policy decisions.

¹³⁹ Schwartz (2010) p.163.

¹⁴⁰ McEvoy-Levy (2001a) pp.5-6.

While youth programming typically emphasises the rights-based and economic approaches, the socio-political youth programming has shown to have the most potential to “rebuild war-torn societies through and by youth”.¹⁴¹ It was critical in helping ex-combatants in Liberia and South Africa exercise their leadership skills positively by volunteering in crime patrols and community peace programmes.¹⁴² Nevertheless, it is important to capture all approaches as each provides only partial understandings of youth’s needs and identity and must be taken together to provide a more complete view of youth.¹⁴³

Using only economic-based approaches result in programming that focuses on short-term reintegration of youth into productive economic activities through job placements and vocational training. It reduces youth to being merely a resource available for manipulation and “inadvertently accepts th[e] narrow view of those who exploit them and carries on myths of youth’s inherent violence.”¹⁴⁴ It must be complemented with a rights-based approach that allows for youth protection but also a socio-political approach that regards youth as “vital members of civil society and understands the precarious long-term dynamic whereby youth can be active agents in the community, both as potential spoilers and as peacebuilders.”¹⁴⁵ Policies that make it more rewarding for youth to work with the peace process will not only make joining conflict a less attractive option but also encourage youth to contribute to the security of their communities.

For example, Schwartz’s study demonstrates that what matters in determining whether youth become a positive force for stability is how effectively youth-in-conflict’s critical needs are met, irrespective of who meets them. Youth-in-conflict can only transition into civilian life successfully when there are

¹⁴¹ Kemper (2005) p.36.

¹⁴² Steve Seigel, Frederick Barton and Karin Von Hippel, *Engaging Youth to Build Safer Communities: A Report of the CSIS Post-Conflict Reconstruction Project* (Washington DC: CSIS Press, 2006).

¹⁴³ Kemper (2005) p.25.

¹⁴⁴ Kemper (2005) p.27 and Schwartz (2010) p.16.

¹⁴⁵ Schwartz (2010) p.17.

programmes that meet their needs for psychological and social support, educational and empowerment opportunities, and social reintegration. Meeting all these critical needs are what assisted young ex-combatants in Mozambique to successfully reintegrate into civilian life; failure to do so is why youth in the DRC are presumably more susceptible to re-recruitment into armed forces. Despite the importance for youth policies to be founded on an appreciation of youth's multiple identities, research on youth-in-conflict is still limited.

This thesis furthers our understanding of how identities of youth affected by conflict are constructed in UN and Bank youth policies. It is important to do so not only because of the strong link between policy and identity but because of the major influence those institutions' policies have on national youth policies and youth programming in general. In order to understand some of the assumptions and messages concerning youth identity, a discourse analysis was conducted on youth-in-conflict policies published by the UN and the Bank. The following chapter outlines the results of that analysis.

CHAPTER 3- EXAMINING THE UN AND WORLD BANK'S YOUTH-IN-CONFLICT IDENTITIES

1 Introduction

In this chapter I examine to what extent UN and World Bank youth policies represent youth-in-conflict as victims, troublemakers or peacebuilders. By doing so, I demonstrate how both institutions do not just react to the issue of youth-in-conflict but have the power to actively shape youth identities through language. This is because identities, while highly context-dependent, are continuously rearticulated by the UN and Bank through their official policy. This relationship between international policy and youth identity is important as how both institutions construct youth-in-conflict will influence how youth-in-conflict are constructed nationally.

Hansen's theoretical framework is useful for understanding identity constructions through discourse analysis; it helps identify "basic discourses", which are identity ideal-types in a particular context. Basic discourses are first identified by situating an identity spatially (within space), temporally (whether it is static in time) and ethically (within values and sense of responsibility). By doing so and through a process of "linking" and "differentiation", one is able to identify how policy-writers construct their sense of "Self" as against an "Other".

Before examining the UN and Bank's respective youth-in-conflict constructions in detail, I will briefly introduce their two frames. In formulating policy, the UN has preferred a human-rights approach while the Bank has emphasized economics, resulting in varied constructions of youth identity.¹⁴⁶ This is

¹⁴⁶ For a more detailed examination of the different youth programming approaches within the UN and World Bank, see United Nations, *Adolescent Development: Perspectives and Frameworks*- a summary of adolescent needs, an analysis of the various program approaches and

unsurprising given that the UN's mandate is to maintain international peace and security by promoting human rights while the Bank exists to enable sustainable economic development by providing financial and technical assistance to developing countries.

The Bank tends to represent youth as potential economic actors whose human resources must be channelled into productive activities if conflict is to be avoided. For instance, when examining Colombian youth, it suggests that long-term employment programmes enables youth to abandon violent activities through gang involvement.¹⁴⁷ Rather than youth-as-victims, the Bank has constructed youth-in-conflict as potential contributors to the economic system (ie. human capital) who, with proper investments (training opportunities and employment), can encourage economic growth in conflict zones. In its report on Argentine youth, it claims that “youth are a huge, but to a certain extent untapped, resource for development. If youth are educated and skilled, they can be a tremendous asset. If not, they can burden society and public finances.”¹⁴⁸ While very similar to the youth bulge thesis, the Bank's construction is decidedly more positive, and rather than emphasising youth's potential for conflict, it stresses their potential to bring economic growth. This discourse does not adopt a child perspective but instead uses ‘adult-lenses’ as youth are conceived as economic *agents*.

Conversely, the UN is influenced by its existing legal frameworks such as the CRC that provides protections to young people under 18 years of age. Without legal frameworks distinguishing between the context and needs of children versus youth, the UN has formulated youth policies using child-related narratives and human rights approaches, thereby constructing youth as victims requiring protection. For example, the World Programme for Youth describes youth-in-

general recommendations for adolescent programming. Learning Series No. 1, Adolescent Development and Participation Unit Programme Division (New York: UNICEF, May 2006).

¹⁴⁷ Dennis Rodgers (1999).

¹⁴⁸ World Bank, *Argentine youth: an untapped potential* (Washington DC: World Bank, April 2009) p.1.

conflict as the “main victims of armed conflict” who are “killed or maimed, made orphans, abducted, taken hostage, forcibly displaced, deprived of education and health care and left with deep emotional scars and trauma.”¹⁴⁹ While young victims do require protection, representing youth’s needs as solely based on protection issues ignores their social, political and economic needs to become productive and empowered actors within their communities.

It is thus important to understand how youth-in-conflict are constructed and the type of discourse employed in both institutions. Identity constructions impact on the type of policies and programmes adopted, and a failure to acknowledge partiality to certain representations of youth problematically narrows the policy options both development agencies are able to present. For this reason, the next section examines in greater detail how youth-in-conflict are constructed in UN and World Bank youth policies using Hansen’s framework so that hidden assumptions about youth-in-conflict are revealed.

2 The UN’s Youth-as-Victim Identity

Since its inception, the UN has understood the crucial role youth play in bringing global peace and prosperity and the need to encourage such potential by improving youth’s wellbeing. In 1995, the UNGA adopted a cohesive global policy in relation to youth. This was consolidated as ‘*The World Programme of Action for Youth*’ (‘WPAY’) and sets ten priority areas for national action and international support to foster conditions to promote youth’s wellbeing. The WPAY was significant for its cross-sectoral standard for policy-making and programme design and delivery and reflected the UN’s inter-agency approach to youth development. Admittedly, work on ‘young persons and armed conflict’ gained serious momentum only after the submission of the ‘*Machel Report*’ to

¹⁴⁹ United Nations, *The World Programme of Action for Youth* (1995) p.55.

the UN in 1996. The Report depicted the “terrible reality of children in war” and led to the swift adoption of Resolution 51/77 which appointed the first Special Representative of the Secretary General for Children and Armed Conflict (SR). The SR’s role was to coordinate the UN effort with regards to youth and children in armed conflict and articulate ideas and initiatives to be implemented by appropriate operational actors like UNICEF. The issue of ‘children and conflict’ is now mainstreamed into much of the UN’s humanitarian work.

Notwithstanding the groundbreaking work on children-in-conflict, little of it is specific to youth.¹⁵⁰ For instance, youth above 18 years of age are not protected by the CRC’s legal framework even though many youth were children during the period of conflict. Standards of humanitarian practice also rarely make explicit references to youth’s rights and needs. It was not until 2007 that the UNGA finally acknowledged that youth-in-conflict presented different issues to children-in conflict, and only in 2010 when the WPAY was republished to include ‘youth and conflict’ as one of the five new priority areas in the WPAY. Only in the last year has there been a coherent agenda on youth-in-conflict available.

While the WPAY touches on youth-in-conflict, it is not the sole source of UN policy on youth-in-conflict. The Programme on Youth (‘UNPY’), of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, has published two ‘*World Youth Reports*’ (‘WYR’) that articulate international policy on youth-in-conflict. The biennial WYRs provide an overview of social and economic situations of youth in the 15 WPAY priority areas, but only WYR2003 and WYR2005 specifically address youth-in-conflict.¹⁵¹ Additionally, the UNPY has published a three-paged factsheet setting out the UN’s approach to youth-in-conflict, as part of the

¹⁵⁰ Youth are only protected by humanitarian and human rights standards that apply to people of all ages.

¹⁵¹ World Youth Report 2007 was not examined as it only provided regional overviews of trends in each continent while World Youth Report 2010 addresses youth and climate change.

2010/2011 International Year of Youth ('IYY factsheet').¹⁵² These policies met the research sample requirements noted in chapter one in that they clearly articulated identities, represented current global youth policy, were widely-read and with formal authority to define political position. They also possessed the words 'youth' and 'conflict' in their chapter titles. As the UNPY is the only part of the UN Secretariat with the explicit mandate to address youth issues, only the WPAY, the two WYRs and the IYY factsheet were analysed for this research.¹⁵³

Analysis of these policies reveals several themes. Firstly, the UN accepts that 'youth' is a fluid but distinct category with special needs and potential different from those of adults and children. Rather than a single demographic entity, youth are not a homogenous group but a broad category comprising various subgroups. Nevertheless, they are bound by the common aspiration to fully participate in the life of society by seeking education, employment and opportunities to participate in decision-making.¹⁵⁴ Secondly, youth is represented as "both a major human resource for development and key agents for social change, economic development and technological innovation. Their imagination, ideals, considerable energies and vision are essential for the continuing development of the societies in which they live."¹⁵⁵ Despite such lofty declarations of youth-in-conflict's potential, youth policies still "tend to be driven by negative stereotypes of young people, in particular in the context of drug abuse, violence and delinquency."¹⁵⁶ While the UN accepts the need to "transform the public perception of young people from neglect to priority, from a problem to a resource, and from suspicion to trust",¹⁵⁷ its youth policies reinforce the two dominant discourses of youth-as-victims and youth-as-troublemakers, and

¹⁵²United Nations, International Year of Youth 2010-2011 Factsheet: Armed Conflict (New York: UNDESA, 2010), <http://social.un.org/youthyear/docs/youth-armed-conflict.pdf>.

¹⁵³ The UN Youth Flash was not examined as it does not articulate policies but rather is an information sharing resource.

¹⁵⁴ Preamble, p.1

¹⁵⁵ World Programme of Action for Youth, p.10

¹⁵⁶ See Joint Statement by Heads of UN Entities for the Launch of the International Year of Youth, http://www.unicef.org/media/files/IYY_Joint_Statement.pdf.

¹⁵⁷United Nations, *Guide to the Implementation of the World Programme of Action for Youth* (New York: United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), 2006).

generally mentions youth-as-peacebuilder almost as an afterthought. The WPAY devotes three pages to the dominant discourses and only one sentence to that of youth-as-peacebuilder.

The most dominant youth-in-conflict discourse in the UN's youth policies is of youth-as-victim. This is unsurprising given the influence of the Machel Report in perpetuating the construction of young people as victims requiring protection during wartime. With specific reference to youths, WYR2003 notes how "[as] victims and witnesses, they cannot help but be affected by the grim realities surrounding them."¹⁵⁸ Youth are described as "the main victims of armed conflict" and more at risk than children because they can be "recruited into fighting forces; become targets for sexual violence; need and lack reproductive health care; contract sexually transmitted infections, including HIV; head households; be forced to generate a livelihood for themselves and others; and miss out on education opportunities".¹⁵⁹

The victim discourse comes through clearly. Using the example of the International Year of Youth ('IYY') factsheet that summarises youth-in-conflict policy, the following terms (or variants thereof) appear frequently: "violate" (four times); "protect" (eight times); "victim" (four times); "maim" (four times); "kill" (four times); "abusing" (twice); and "suffer" (twice). Through a series of juxtaposed signs that Hansen theorises as constituting processes of linking and differentiation, the UN constructs youth-in-conflict as 'victims' requiring the assistance of child protection advisors as a moral voice and to give prominence to their needs. Without such processes, the 'youth' sign does not automatically lead to protection because there is no direct relationship between identity and policy.¹⁶⁰ Rather, the UN links 'youth' to 'victimhood' and differentiates them from 'Others' who have the power to 'maim', 'abuse' and 'kill' youth, thereby

¹⁵⁸ World Youth Report 2003, p.371

¹⁵⁹ United Nations, Guide to the Implementation of the World Programme of Action for Youth (2006).

¹⁶⁰ Hansen (2006) p.214.

building a dominant narrative where youth require protection because they are generally ‘witnesses’ to conflict rather than active participants.

While youth are explicitly constructed as victims in the IYY factsheet, both WYRs are less forthright in their identity articulations. The authors of both reports achieve balanced, impartial views of youth-in-conflict by examining their multiple roles as victims, perpetrators and peacebuilders and the factors that impact youth-in-conflict. Through ‘intertextuality’, links are made to other texts such as official statistics of youth-in-conflict, making the authors assume an unbiased, objective and authoritative ‘voice’. Moreover, in the WYR2003, subjective forms of knowledge are made to sound authoritative by expanding on personal encounters and experiences and weaving personal testimonies such as below into the narrative:

“Some of us were traveling on donkeys [to the market]. ... Suddenly, the Janjaweed attacked us... I was taken with my younger cousin to the wood... One of them forced me on the ground ...They started raping me. I was bleeding heavily... It was so painful... Four of them raped me.”¹⁶¹

The above testimony of Nyala, a 16-year-old female from South Darfur is used in WYR2005 to reinforce the youth-as-victim discourse that many young women are in situations of great danger during conflict because they are often alone, helpless and without recourse to protection. The use of personal accounts, Hansen argues, provides policy with a sense of authoritativeness and legitimacy: UN policy gains legitimacy from quoting Nyala’s testimony while Nyala’s account gains legitimacy from being quoted.

Policymakers have constructed a dominant narrative of youth-as-victim based not only on what is included in the text of the policies (through intertextualising) but also on what is excluded. In some ways, the victim discourse has gained dominance due to confused understandings of ‘youth’ as neither child nor adult,

¹⁶¹ Recounted February 2005, cited in World Youth Report 2005, p.146, taken from Human Rights Watch, ‘Sexual violence and its consequences among displaced persons in Darfur and Chad’, *Human Rights Watch Briefing Paper*, 12 April 2005.

resulting in a default reliance on ‘child-lenses’ when considering youth issues. For instance, while the WPAY is intended to act as a global standard on youth matters, much of its text on youth-in-conflict refers to children(10 times) and young persons(12) in general rather than youth(15). Similarly, the IYY factsheet uses the words “child” and “children” 41 times in the main text while “youth” was only employed 20 times. As a result, this ‘silence’ on a separate ‘youth’ group prevents ‘youth’ from fully materializing as embodied subjects in their own right and hinders them from speaking against identity constructions that fundamentally ignore their youth-specific needs.

Even though the youth-as-victim construction is the UN’s principal youth-in-conflict discourse, it differs from the ‘youth-as-victim’ basic discourse described in chapter two. This is unsurprising as basic discourses are analytical ideal-types that intentionally articulate radically different constructions of identity and policy options.¹⁶² The ideal-type and the UN’s construction are linked by the fact that both represent youth-in-conflict but they are differentiated by the degree to which youth are represented as ‘helpless’. The basic discourse presents youth as passively vulnerable whereas the UN identity portrays youth as resilient and possessing agency, albeit limited. Although the latter is by no means the active agent as within the peacebuilder discourse, it is marginally less powerless than the ideal-type. Both youth-as-victim constructs are not radical opposites of each other but, rather, draw on more ambiguous constructions of difference.

The UN’s construction is also differentiated from the ideal-type as it allows for the inclusion of competing discourses. When discourse is understood as “framings of meaning and lenses of interpretation, rather than objective, historical truths,” it is easier to understand how discourses are not analytically ‘neat’.¹⁶³ What appears at first to be a competing discourse of ‘youth-as-perpetrators’ is in fact a secondary discourse *subsumed* into the victim discourse.

¹⁶² Hansen (2006) p.213.

¹⁶³ Hansen (2006) p.7.

This inclusion of a contending discourse is possible because, like the differentiation that exists between the UN's youth-as-victim construction and its equivalent basic discourse, the subsumed youth-as-perpetrator identity is differentiated from its youth-as-perpetrator basic discourse. Child soldiers are, in their most radical form, constructed as inherently dangerous agents who pose security threats, whereas the subsumed child soldier identity is situated within a 'victim' discourse that implies that youth engage in conflict unwillingly. Thus, youth-in-conflict's roles as combatants do not diminish their identity as victims.

This explains why a noted highlight for the UN in 2010 was the signing of an agreement with the Unified Communist Party of Nepal-Maoists resulting in the discharge of about 2,000 minors.¹⁶⁴ This was seen as momentous as the perceived violators of conflict (the adults) agreed to cease recruitment of child soldiers. No suggestion was made that some youth voluntarily join rebel forces for nationalistic motivations; rather, youth were constructed as "uniquely vulnerable to involuntary military recruitment" because they are "easily indoctrinated, manipulated and influenced by heroic notions of masculinity and power".¹⁶⁵ Young soldiers were also represented as vulnerable victims and passive recipients of "grave violations", recruited by "persistent violators" who sexually abuse, maim and kill, rather than as aggressive, irrational hot-blooded war veterans.¹⁶⁶ The rationale behind this argument is that, "[r]egardless of how they are recruited, child soldiers are victims."¹⁶⁷

Ex-combatants are consequently represented as victims of their past experiences, making them "more likely to turn to black markets for survival and use armed conflict as a way to vent their anger."¹⁶⁸ WYR2003 asserts:

"Historically, those who have become rebel leaders felt victimized and humiliated during an earlier period of their lives.

¹⁶⁴ See International Year of Youth factsheet (2010).

¹⁶⁵ See <http://www.un.org/children/conflict/english/root-causes-of-child-soldiering.html>

¹⁶⁶ See <http://www.un.org/children/conflict/english/themostgraveviolations.html>

¹⁶⁷ See <http://www.un.org/children/conflict/english/childsoldiers.html>

¹⁶⁸ World Youth Report (2003).

They may have experienced repression, human rights violations, deprivation of needed resources and/or alienation. Their aggression appears to be a form of retaliation deriving from past feelings of indignity and degradation.”¹⁶⁹

While policies note that some youth join conflict voluntarily, youth’s decisions to do so are framed as decision-making constrained by limited alternatives during wartime. Outside the conditions of conflict, youth are unlikely to voluntarily choose violence as means of generating income. This is why two out of the three WPAY proposals in relation to youth-in-conflict address issues of ‘opportunities’, calling upon governments to criminalise recruitment of child soldiers and to provide ex-combatants with opportunities (for retraining and education), thereby allowing for their successful reintegration into society.

Simply put, while the youth-as-victim construction is the UN’s main youth-in-conflict discourse, it is intrinsically unstable as it incorporates the youth-as-perpetrator construction, blurring the boundaries between ‘perpetrator’ and ‘victim’. This results in a dual ‘reading’ of child soldiers as passive youth forced into the horrors of war as well as violent perpetrators who “imitated well-known action heroes such as Rambo, placing bandanas on their heads, reciting lines from the movies and adopting the names of heroic characters.”¹⁷⁰ Such identity instabilities in the UN’s policies are only further confused by references to other competing identity constructions, such as youth-as-triggers-of-conflict (in relation to the youth bulge) and youth-as-peacebuilders. In a WYR2003 case study of youth in Sierra Leone, youth are represented as “active agents” who played crucial peacebuilding roles in NGO initiatives such as the ‘Talking Drum Studio’ and public awareness workshops led by the ‘Search for Common Ground’.

This ‘confused’ discourse of youth as victims, perpetrators and peacebuilders can be explained by the growing trend within youth studies to recognise youth’s

¹⁶⁹ Ibid, p.378.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid, p.383.

inherent agency so that the “role of youth is now recognized as critical in creating long-term stability, producing effective outcomes within communities, and offering protection from future conflicts.”¹⁷¹ By including oppositional identity discourses in its youth policies, the UN is rearticulating and reconstructing youth-in-conflict’s identities so that youth are not just represented as victims or perpetrators but also as peacebuilders. WYR2005 speaks about the need to explore youth’s multiple roles:

“In the context of young people and armed violence, the attention of policymakers and researchers is often focused on the involvement of large numbers of child soldiers in armed conflict and on the established link between youth bulges, youth unemployment and conflict eruption. While these issues are of great importance to young people and society as a whole, the excessive attention they receive means that the needs of the vast majority of young people who demonstrate constructive coping skills and do not become involved in the hostilities are often ignored. The diverse roles and experiences of youth during and after war, which go well beyond youth as perpetrators or victims of violence, must be further explored and addressed through diverse policy and programming approaches.”¹⁷²

Given the intrinsic instability within the UN’s construction of youth-in-conflict, it is useful to better understand such a construct within Hansen’s theoretical framework which situates identity spatially, temporally and ethically. When considering the aspect of ‘space’, it is important to consider factors such as race, gender and age. In terms of race, the UN has constructed a youth-in-conflict identity that is both racialised and framed within the context of Africa and other non-Western zones of conflict. Tellingly, WYR2007, which adopts a regional approach to highlighting the issues that hinder youth’s transitions to adulthood, only addresses the issue of conflict in the chapters on youth in Africa and the Middle East, even though Colombia, Timor-Leste and Bougainville are or have been major conflict zones. Moreover, pictures used in reports portray youth-in-conflict as forlorn, poor, passive African victims. In fact, apart from two photos of a Middle Eastern, disabled boy and a blond young woman- the WYR2005 only utilizes photos of passive ‘veiled young women’ and black youth in its

¹⁷¹ Ibid, p.371.

¹⁷² World Youth Report 2005, p.142.

sections on youth-in-conflict. While the UN constructs youth-in-conflict as generally African, it represents youth bulges as mainly Asian or Latin American youth. In WYR2007, the youth bulge is only discussed in relation to Asian and Latin American youth who live in developing countries facing rapid globalisation and continual socio-economic and political change.¹⁷³

Another significant factor that forms part of youth-in-conflict's spatial identity is that of gender. While the UN, in WYR2005, accepts that a lack of gender analysis risks "stigmatizing all male youth as potential violent actors and female youth as passive victims", it unintentionally perpetuates the belief that youth-as-victims are usually women by only using women's testimonies of sexual abuse.¹⁷⁴ Moreover, the visual representation of youth is gendered: pictures of combatants are of young men while pictures of (rape) victims are of young women. Nevertheless, the UN's call for further research on the gendered dimensions of conflict points to its desire to reconstruct both identities as belonging to both male and female youths.

A third factor that impacts on youth's spatial identity is the critical aspect of age. As discussed earlier, 'youth' is a fluid social construct that is generally understood by reference to childhood or adulthood. Because of its vague nature, it is difficult to design an international legal framework that protects youth-in-conflict as well as programmes that are universally appropriate. In order to ensure youth-in-conflict are protected, the UN has in the past adopted 'child-lenses' and constructed youth as 'older *children*', allowing youth to benefit from the existing child-rights regimes. Whether intentionally or not, terms like 'youth' and 'children' have often been used interchangeably in UN publications (like the IYY factsheet and the Machel Report), confusing the boundaries between

¹⁷³ Although the youth bulge is not examined in great detail in World Youth Report 2003 and 2005, it is in World Youth Report 2007. However, to ensure that this study was conducted systematically, the latter was not analysed in-depth as it did not have the words 'youth' and 'conflict' in either the title of the publication or chapter titles.

¹⁷⁴ World Youth Report 2005, p.154

childhood and youth-hood. This elongates youth's transition to adulthood and confines them to a longer term of being 'in limbo'.

As a result of growing awareness that youth have different needs from children, the UN is slowly shifting towards the view that youth are 'young *adults*' and social agents while still using some of its child-lenses. By reconstructing youth-in-conflict through 'adult-lenses', greater allowance is provided for non-rights based approaches to programming as well as youth's multiple identities and propensity for change. Overall, "applying a youth analysis exposes the need to systematically support the rights of youth so that their distinct roles and capacities for survival, community recovery and conflict prevention are not sidestepped or subsumed under programmes for children or adults."¹⁷⁵

The reason the UN has not needed (nor wanted) to choose between either lenses is because youth-in-conflict's temporal identity is changeable. As youth-in-conflict face a double transition from childhood to adulthood and from conflict to peace, the UN benefits from choosing lenses that best achieves its desired outcomes. At the same time, the concurrent use of both lenses has resulted in a mixture of programmes providing for protection/reintegration of ex-combatants as well as youth's active participation in local peace processes. Overall, while a youth-as-victim ideal-type is typically static and only uses child-lenses, the UN's youth-as-victim is more fluid and changeable due to shifts towards greater use of adult-lenses. This creates room for the UN to reconstruct youth-in-conflict's identities so that youth are not just represented as victims or perpetrators but also as peacebuilders and dynamic agents of change.

When situating youth-in-conflict's identity ethically, it becomes apparent that the UN's youth-as-victim discourse and continued reliance on 'child-lenses' has promoted strong protection and reintegration policies. The WPAY's first proposal regarding youth-in-conflict seeks to protect youth from direct

¹⁷⁵ World Youth Report 2005, p.147.

involvement in armed conflict while the second proposal provides for “reintegration of youth ex-combatants and protection of non-combatants”. While the sequencing of proposals indicates UN bias towards the victim discourse (followed by the perpetrator discourses), it is odd that the humanitarian agenda is accorded first priority and discussed by far the most when there are only approximately 300,000 child soldiers in the world. Youth peacebuilding, an issue that can benefit developing and developed countries alike, is only discussed in a one-line ‘Proposal three’.

Although the UN is aware that humanitarian and development approaches are equally important, humanitarian/protection work is prioritized because “for young people, survival takes precedence over education, environmental protection and other development issues”.¹⁷⁶ By strategically placing Proposal 1, policymakers have drawn readers’ attention to the urgent need to protect youth-in-conflict, who are fighting for their lives. The unfortunate consequence of successful humanitarian campaigns is that youth peacebuilding programmes are less likely to receive financial assistance as their needs appear less urgent to that of dying child soldiers; moreover, it is difficult to convince governments of the need to protect youth who are perceived to have the capacities to protect themselves. When someone is “constructed as a threat to ‘national security’”, according to Hansen, they take on “an objective character and a particular rhetorical and political urgency.”¹⁷⁷ Such political urgency is not accorded to the work of youth peacebuilding as peacebuilders pose no immediate security threats, unlike child soldiers. On balance, characterizing youth as victims supports the UN’s humanitarian agenda at the cost of its youth development agenda.

Putting aside extraneous factors such as the impact of humanitarian efforts on the effectiveness of youth development work, the UN accepts that youth

¹⁷⁶ World Youth Report 2003, p.371

¹⁷⁷ Hansen (2006) p.35.

programmes must appreciate youth-in-conflict as both subjects and effective beneficiaries of development, respect youth's multiple positive and negative roles during conflict, and most importantly, involve youth in programme design, implementation and evaluation. General development programmes do not automatically benefit youth if they are not based on context-specific analysis of youth's circumstances. In order to meet youth-in-conflict's critical needs for protection, opportunities and participation, the UN is shifting its frame to a more fluid and dynamic understanding of youth-in-conflict so that it captures as wide a spectrum as possible of youth-in-conflict's experiences. Youth is a fluid concept and so it is only fitting that the UN's youth-in-conflict discourse mirrors current trends in knowledge about youth-in-conflict. The increasing intrinsic instability within the UN's youth-as-victim construction suggests that this is indeed happening.

Overall, the UN constructs youth-in-conflict as victims and it does so by differentiating youth (as 'Others') from its 'Self'. Hansen argues that identities gain meaning when juxtaposed against other identities. Accordingly, youth-in-conflict identity is best understood in relation to how the UN constructs its Self. In terms of the 'Self', the UN is a development agency authorised by the international community to act on realist concerns of security and liberal goals for peace. It has hard power in terms of financial resources, soft power in terms of official legitimacy and international influence; it is well-positioned to provide comprehensive, specialized assistance in support of global youth development. In comparison to the UN, who exemplifies power, youth appear less resourceful, less autonomous and consequently less powerful (ie. 'power-less').

The UN also constructs youth as weaker actors by differentiating them from secondary 'Others'. These 'Others' include legitimate elders of the community who define the structures and customs that govern youth's lives and 'illegitimate' leaders such as rebel commanders who coerce or recruit youth into conflict. Youth-in-conflict are linked to these 'Others' by common

circumstances but are differentiated by age. By virtue of their race (generally 'black') and age ('old' compared to youth), these 'Others' are constructed as more 'backward' than their younger counterparts when they (elders) entrench traditions that repress youth or more 'primitive' because they (rebel leaders) create anarchic conditions. By presenting these 'Others' as more powerful as they create conditions that empower only themselves, the UN strengthens the youth-as-victims construction, thereby justifying its humanitarian work.

According to Hansen, "the Self is constituted through the delineation of Others, and the Other can be articulated as superior, inferior or equal. It might be constituted as threatening, but it might also be an ally, a stranger, or an underdeveloped subject in need of help."¹⁷⁸ Youth-in-conflict clearly fall into the last category, where power is the defining factor that differentiates 'Self' from 'Other'. This power relationship permeates the UN's youth-in-conflict identity and the policies that follow, which is why understanding the relationship between power and identity is at the heart of poststructuralist research. It is therefore worth noting that a third hidden 'Other' in youth policies is that of the reader. The target audience of these policies are government ministries, parliamentarians, agencies that serve youth, and local and regional governments. In reading policy, readers have power to either challenge or accept the UN's constructions of 'Self' and of youth as 'Other'. In challenging discourse, readers can 'speak back' to policy by choosing to interpret the policy as they wish (thereby giving the text a new meaning that its authors did not intend) or actively contesting identity constructions when new policies are formulated. Given that youth-in-conflict's identities are continuously rearticulated, their identities are constantly being 'interpreted' and 'reinterpreted'. This reveals youth's roles in policy as objects of interpretation rather than social actors who can respond to the interpretations that affect them.

¹⁷⁸ Hansen (2006) p.76.

The goal of this research was to uncover how the UN constructs youth-in-conflict in its youth policies. By examining how the UN differentiates its Self from youth and how it links youth to the 'child' sign, we can see that youth-in-conflict are constructed as victims. The UN's victim discourse is not identical to the youth-as-victim basic discourse described in chapter two. It is less stable because it blurs the boundaries between youth-as-perpetrators and youth-as-victims. Therefore, child soldiers are situated within the victim discourse and not represented as intrinsically violent but take part in conflict because it is the best means of survival.

3 The World Bank's Youth-as-Capital Identity

The previous section examined how the UN's youth-as-victim construction is differentiated from the basic youth-as-victim discourse, which uses radical identity constructions founded on rights-based approaches to justify protection-based policies. In this section, I look at how the Bank constructs youth-in-conflict as 'capital' who contribute to economic growth. As an economic development institution, the Bank's youth-in-conflict construction differs from that of the UN. Firstly, the Bank is influenced by youth bulge theories rather than humanitarian concerns, although it constructs youth as making more positive contributions than what is often suggested in greed/grievance theories (discussed in chapter two). Secondly, the singular focus on economics results in a more stable youth-in-conflict construction that is not confused by subsumed discourses. This means the Bank is less adaptable to trends in youth-in-conflict discourse and unable to accommodate a wider range of youth identities. While both institutions are international organisations with similar historical roots, they have very divergent approaches to youth development.

The Bank's focus on meeting youth's critical needs during their transition from childhood to adulthood only gained momentum in the last decade; working with young people is now seen as integral to it achieving the Bank's goals for global poverty reduction. In response to growing demands from country 'clients', donors and civil society seeking to take advantage of the growing global youth bulge and the unprecedented opportunity it presents, the Bank has expanded its work on youth to allow for strategic investments in this 'newfound' reserve of 'human capital'. The growth of Bank investments in projects with youth components has been surprisingly rapid: in 2000, the Bank invested USD752million in 15 projects with youth components and this increased to 46

projects by 2004 with a total investment of USD1.5billion.¹⁷⁹ Additionally, the types of Bank investments have changed from purely education activities to a broader range of issues, representing a significant shift in approach towards addressing youth issues in a multi-sectoral way. On balance, the Bank recognizes that youth can be a positive force for change, especially when the current global youth demographic is the largest in recorded history.¹⁸⁰

With youth-targeted programming becoming central to the Bank's work, the Children and Youth Unit was established in 2002 to manage the growing youth agenda. The Unit's work largely centers on the opportunities and risks posed by youth bulges globally, preferring economic lenses rather than rights-based and socio-political approaches to youth development.¹⁸¹ While it is hardly surprising that the Bank has a strong economic approach (it is, after all, a Bank), the belief that it "need not worry about questions of ideology, political economy, or relations of power between and within nations" is a dangerous one.¹⁸² Indeed "specifics of local history, culture, social relations and political conflicts are essentially absent from the World Bank's youth and development reports, or at best, visible only in the margins and background."¹⁸³ A non-contextualised approach is problematic when the Bank seeks to fix socio-political and economic problems experienced and caused by *all* marginalised, disaffected youth around the world. Youth is a fluid concept so all youth issues cannot be explained by a universal, standardised economic approach to youth development. However, this is what is being attempted by the Bank through its economic approach to youth development.

¹⁷⁹ World Bank, *Children and Youth: A Framework For Action* (Washington DC, World Bank, 2005).

¹⁸⁰ UN Programme for Youth, *Growing Together*. www.un.org/esa/socdev/unyin/documents/growing_together.pdf.

¹⁸¹ For example, World Bank, *Argentine youth: an untapped potential* (2009).

¹⁸² Mayssoun Sukarieh and Stuart Tannock, 'In the best interests of youth or neoliberalism? The World Bank and the New Global Youth Empowerment Project', *Journal of Youth Studies*, Vol.11, Issue 3, pp.301 – 312, 2008, p.305.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*

This research seeks to examine how the Bank constructs youth-in-conflict in its policy. Unfortunately, while youth are said to be of utmost importance to the Bank, it does not have an official policy in relation to youth-in-conflict. This is more concerning when one finds that youth-in-conflict is not even specifically addressed in influential Bank publications, including its *World Development Report 2007: Development and the Next Generation* ('WDR2007'), the Bank's only framework for youth investment across sectors, and the Bank's *Children and Youth Framework for Action* ('FFA'), an internal document that sets out lessons learnt in relation to youth programming.¹⁸⁴ Such silence in a youth-focused World Development Report ('WDR') is alarming as WDRs are highly influential publications that are consulted by international organizations and national governments to inform their decision-making processes, even though they do not in fact express official Bank policy. The issue of youth-in-conflict is also not expected to figure in the upcoming *WDR2011: Conflict, Security and Development* as, to date, no formal input papers were commissioned on youth's experiences of conflict. The Bank's online youth communities 'Youth2Youth Community' and 'Youthink' are equally silent on the matter of youth-in-conflict.¹⁸⁵

The only publication that addresses the issue is a four-paged *Youth Development Note-Youth in post-conflict settings* ('post-conflict-Note') from 2005.¹⁸⁶ It is examined here because it is widely read and contains the words 'youth' and conflict' in its title, as per the parameters set out in the methodology section of this thesis. Though not official policy, it shares research findings and lessons from the field in addressing the issue of youth-in-conflict. In order to derive as many observations as possible from the post-conflict-Note, its youth-in-conflict constructions were compared against general themes of youth identity

¹⁸⁴ World Bank, *World Development Report: Development and the Next Generation*, Washington D.C: World Bank (2007). <http://go.worldbank.org/HKLOVCRQ70> (10 January 2011) and World Bank, *Children and Youth: A Framework For Action* (Washington DC, World Bank, 2005).

¹⁸⁵ See <http://go.worldbank.org/CJPAEON1E0> and <http://youthink.worldbank.org/>.

¹⁸⁶ The World Bank, *Youth Development Note- Youth in post-conflict settings*, Vol.1, No.1, November 2005.

in the WDR2007. While WDR2007 does not discuss youth-in-conflict, it is nevertheless an influential document that "reveals the beliefs and ideological leanings of the Bank's management and principal shareholders—beliefs that filter perceptions of development, that modulate policy advice, and that overtly or subliminally shape the operational activities of the Bank."¹⁸⁷ It is thus crucial to pay attention to the discursive frameworks within WDR2007.

An initial observation of the post-conflict-Note reveals that youth-in-conflict is the first issue addressed in its series and is expressed as an “emerging” focus of the Bank. This is contrary to reality where, apart from reports on regional youth bulges, publication on youth-in-conflict has not progressed very far. A closer examination also reveals that the Bank's construction of youth-in-conflict is actually not one of those clearly identified in chapter two. Instead, the World Bank constructs another archetype, that of the ‘youth-as-capital’. Similar to the greed/grievance theories, the Bank's construction of youth-as-capital represents youth as economic actors requiring investment so that their human resources provide ‘value’ for their countries. The core difference between this construction and that of the youth-as-triggers basic discourse lies in how youth are seen as ultimately an economic resource rather than triggers-of-conflict; youth are represented in terms of their economic potential rather than the threats they pose to their respective economies. While it represents a narrow focus, youth-as-capital provides an alternative construction to the dominant literature that “tends to be overtly negative, focusing on the dangers posed by disaffected youth” (ie. the negative connotations of the youth bulge), and considers youth's capacity to contribute to their societies.¹⁸⁸

Hansen's process of linking and differentiation reveals that these divergent constructions emanate from different youth development approaches that impact on whether youth are treated as ‘objects’ or ‘human subjects’ of policy.

¹⁸⁷ Shahid Yusuf, *Development Economics through the Decades : A Critical Look at Thirty Years of the World Development Report* (Washington DC: The World Bank, 2009) p.1.

¹⁸⁸ World Bank, *Youth in post-conflict settings* (2005) p.2.

Economic approaches treat youth as capital that can be invested to obtain financial returns; youth are objectified, constraining youth's agency to just deciding *how* they will be productive (or not). This implies a causal relationship between education/training and economic growth. If youth are provided sufficient opportunities to work and re-train, they will provide positive contributions to the economy. Conversely, the youth-as-trigger basic discourse that regards youth bulges as security risks constructs youth as human agents of negative change. While greed/grievance theories utilize economic models to predict youth's capacities to trigger conflict, they also argue that there is no statistically significant, direct, causal relationship between youth bulges and conflict.¹⁸⁹ In addition to education and employment opportunities, ideological factors can impinge on whether youth choose to cause conflict. The youth-as-trigger basic discourse encourages the view that youth are human subjects who may *choose* conflict.

By using Hansen's framework to situate the Bank's youth-as-capital construction spatially, temporally and ethically, it is clear that youth-as-capital differs from the UN's youth-as-victims construction. Firstly, race, gender and age are contributing factors to youth-as-capital's spatial identity. In terms of race, youth-as-capital is heavily racialised. The post-conflict-Note takes a sweeping look across the entire developing world but only uses examples and case studies from the non-West. The descriptions attached to youth from those regions adopt a negative connotation and imply that 'coloured' youth lack initiative and productivity. For instance, the post-conflict-Note describes youth bulges that exist in predominantly non-West countries as "idle and disaffected youth" and Sierra Leonean youth as "lost youth", while the photo on page one, of a Middle Eastern boy daydreaming on a pile of rubble, reinforces the implicit message that youth-in-conflict are inactive and unproductive. These descriptions are personal attacks against youth-in-conflict's character, emphasising the Bank's view that 'idleness' is undesirable as it is 'linked' to laziness and regression that ultimately

¹⁸⁹ Urdal (2004).

results in economic dependency and poverty. Conversely, labour is intricately tied to progress, particularly when it is the “main asset of the poor” who has no other capital to invest and produce value.¹⁹⁰ When youth-in-conflict fail to secure employment (for whatever reason), they are represented as lazy, dependent idlers, especially when compared against a strict Western/Protestant work-ethic. This strongly reflects Said’s ‘Orientalism’ where Western man regarded his ‘Self’ as modern and progressive due to the West’s economic growth and industrial age that stemmed from its productivity; ‘Occidental man’ was the ‘Other’ who was represented as backward, ‘primitive’ and even ‘pre-modern’ because he was unable to produce and trade tangible products of economic value, leading to economic decline. Correspondingly, as ‘idle’ economic actors, youth-in-conflict represent a pool of “untapped potential” that is deemed ‘backward’ if they failed to invest their inherent human capital to produce economic value for their communities.¹⁹¹ Youth-as-capital is unquestionably a racialised construction.

Similarly, the Bank’s youth-as-capital construction has a gender bias as the Bank’s appreciation of gender perspectives is not well developed in its youth-in-conflict research. The post-conflict-Note claims that “the gender dimension tends to disappear in youth programming, especially in post-conflict settings” but provides no nuanced, gendered insights than merely noting that combatants are not only male.¹⁹² This failure to provide a gender perspective cannot be blamed on the limited space available in the post-conflict-Note as the shallow treatment of gender issues goes deeper. Looking at WDR2007, a one-and-a-half-page “spotlight” titled “*A gender filter on the youth lens*” very superficially introduces the topic; there is little attempt to integrate the treatment of gender into the individual chapters, with the notable exception of chapter eight. Furthermore, the Bank’s *Children and Youth Framework for Action* (‘FFA’) and associated

¹⁹⁰ World Development Report 2007, p.4.

¹⁹¹ For example, World Bank, *Argentine youth: an untapped potential*, (2009).

¹⁹² World Bank, *Youth in post-conflict settings* (2005) p.2.

Resource Guide are practically silent on the matter apart from noting that policymakers should be “gender-sensitive”.

There are two implications of this failure to mainstream gender well. Firstly, the fact that gender is ‘silenced’ (by the lack of evidence of male and female youths’ roles during conflict) makes it difficult to differentiate between a male and female youth-in-conflict. The gendered dimensions of youth are not developed sufficiently but collapsed under a singular youth-in-conflict identity, thereby making it difficult to use Hansen’s process of linking and differentiation and undermining any claims that youth-in-conflict are not just male but female as well.

Secondly, the general lack of gender perspective in youth publications has resulted in men’s work and roles being affirmed and valued over women’s work and identity. The Bank’s inclination towards economic approaches (at the cost of rights-based and socio-political approaches) is apparent in its explicit privileging of school attendance and paid work over informal work (domestic chores, childrearing) that does not create economic value. Just like youth-in-conflict’s racialised identity, girls who are not in school or paid employment are constructed as “idle”, their unpaid domestic work being marginalized and devalued despite their importance to maintaining crucial institutions such as family and schools.¹⁹³ Using Hansen’s process of linking, it becomes clear that this representation of young women as ‘idle’ is linked to the belief that “[h]aving young people sit idle is costly in forgone output”.¹⁹⁴ Productivity is defined in terms of economic value and women are represented as ‘idle’ if their domestic chores and unpaid economic activities do not provide a tangible output that has an easily measurable value. Strangely, the WDR2007’s representation of young women in developing countries as “idle” seems contrary to the evidence it relies on that “girls tend to work more hours than boys, spending long hours fetching

¹⁹³ World Development Report 2007, p.65.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid, p.30.

water and firewood, cleaning and cooking, and minding younger siblings. Time-use studies in Kenya, India, Nicaragua, Pakistan, and South Africa show that, on average, girls aged 15–29 work about one hour more a day than boys.”¹⁹⁵ We can therefore infer that such gender biases have resulted in the Bank adopting a youth identity that fails to account for female youth’s roles and identities during conflict. This is evident in the post-conflict-Note, which does not claim all youth are the same but downplays serious structural and gender differences.

The bias towards economic approaches not only impacts youth-in-conflict’s racial and gendered identity but also influences other aspects of their spatial identity, such as age. For instance, because the Bank constructs youth as economic actors, economic independence is linked to adulthood, resulting in the construction of youth as ‘young adults’ rather than ‘older children’. Unlike the UN’s youth-as-victim, which collapses the ‘child’ and ‘youth’ identity through ‘child lenses’ and justifies rights-based protection policies, the Bank’s youth-as-capital is differentiated by its use of ‘adult-lenses’, resulting in policies that seek to transition youth towards adulthood more quickly by helping them “acquire the right knowledge and skills to become productive workers, good parents, and responsible citizens.”¹⁹⁶

This is relevant to youth-as-capital’s temporal identity which is in transition yet also static. While the Bank claims that youth-as-capital experience a double transition from childhood to adulthood and from conflict to peace, their identity is in a state of limbo as they have fewer opportunities to become financially independent and enjoy rights typically associated with adulthood, such as marriage and political participation. Consequently, this revives the connotations of youth-in-conflict as “lost” and “idle”, which are assumed as personal faults rather than a result of structural inequalities. This works in the Bank’s favour as it relieves it of responsibility and accountability for the welfare of “lost youth”.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid, p.65.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid, p.68.

In short, while youth identity is fluid enough to realize the benefits of investment as youth-as-capital, there is the implicit belief that youth-in-conflict identity is fixed in that they are 'idle'.

What this means for youth-in-conflict's ethical identity is that the Bank's sense of responsibility for youth-in-conflict stems more out of economic goals rather than humanitarian concerns. Economic indicators are privileged so that investments in youth are represented as 'returns' for the market, advancing a discourse of youth in 'either/or' terms: as either economic actors or non-economic actors.¹⁹⁷ Its rationale for increased youth investments is based on youth-in-capital's greater economic return in terms of improved economic growth relative to equivalent investments in older individuals. Unemployed youth are not seen favourably as they 'waste' human resources thereby dampening the investment climate and raising the prospects of social unrest.¹⁹⁸ The Bank's main interest is to transform 'idle' youth from a youth bulge into productive civilians and to help youth "navigate the complex transition from combatant in, or victim of, conflict to being a civilian and productive member of society." However, because of policies that frame 'empowerment' in terms of paid labour and assumes that social change is prompted by economic growth, it sometimes overlooks the ways in which its policies oriented towards economic growth actually undermine or conflict with social policies necessary for enhancing capabilities and encouraging political empowerment. As the Bank's upmost interest is extracting youth's capital, it:

"groups all aspects of youth life and learning under a concept that is dominated by reference to employment, capital and productivity, and erases any hint of difference or conflict between various components of life, learning and education[...]youth are always identified as workers first, family and community members second. Indeed, it turns out that the World Bank is not primarily concerned with the lives of youth

¹⁹⁷ Mikaela Luttrell-Rowland, 'Gangs, Soldiers and 'Idle Girls': constructions of youth and development in World Bank discourse', *Research in Comparative and International Education*, Vol.2, No.3, 2007, pp.230-241, p.233.

¹⁹⁸ World Development Report, 2007, p.4.

per se, but with growing human capital – or, as it puts it, with ‘how human capital is kept safe, developed and deployed’.”¹⁹⁹

Put bluntly, “if there were a way to extract human capital fully and leave the rest of the person behind, a reader of the World Bank’s recent youth and development reports might legitimately wonder whether the Bank would not actually be fully supportive.”²⁰⁰

These representations of youth as ‘Other’ reflect how the Bank constructs its ‘Self’. As a neoliberal institution founded on principles of progress and democracy, the Bank constructs itself as impersonal, rational and driven by economic concerns, which explains why the youth-as-capital discourse has limited references to youth’s non-economic, emotional needs. Unlike the UN, the Bank assumes no responsibility for policing rights-abuses, and because it assumes that all individuals possess the capacity to ‘progress’ and improve their livelihoods through rational decisions, the ‘Self’ has limited responsibility for creating economic opportunities for employment. Thus individual welfare and success is each person’s own responsibility and economic growth can only be accomplished if youth are taught a “culture of responsabilisation and entrepreneurship through education, training and employment programs” where youth develop their employability, so as to meet the needs of an ever-changing labour market.²⁰¹ In sum, because the Bank constructs itself as an economic institution, it only recognises youth within a specific economic and output-focused view, overlooking important questions about the relationship between youth and development.

This constrained view of youth is said to receive its deeper motivation from a commitment to protecting the interests of capital by ‘scrambling’ to save the neoliberal system that suffered blows during the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis. Rather than abandon the neoliberal project in the face of these challenges, the

¹⁹⁹ Sukarieh and Tannock, p.306.

²⁰⁰ Ibid, p.306.

²⁰¹ Ibid, p.309.

Bank offered “more of the same basic set of policies and principles, but in different dress, making minimal, cosmetic, ameliorative changes – neoliberalism with a human face.”²⁰² Though the Bank’s global youth project was presented as progressive and empowering youth, it was in reality about serving the needs and interests of neoliberalism. Thus, “when the World Bank speaks of giving youth voice, it is precisely to replace, silence and contain these movements with the Bank’s own voice of neoliberalism, to be inculcated in global youth through a steady diet of Bank [prescribed] education, employment and development programming.”²⁰³ Far from being anything new, the Bank’s youth agenda represented “an old strategy of invoking youth in order to promote and secure support for elite political, social and economic interests.”²⁰⁴

In short, the Bank is not driven by a sense of humanitarian urgency but “invests” in youth-as-capital because it is economically ‘prudent’ to do so. When compared to the UN’s youth-in-conflict construct, the Bank’s youth-as-capital construct is more stable as it is only driven by economic concerns rather than multifaceted frameworks that take into account rights-based and socio-political approaches. Any competing discourses of youth-in-conflict, whether as combatants or as victims are incorporated into the Bank’s neoliberal economic system, and reconstructed so that when “youth stand inside this system as willing and enthusiastic participants, their identities and voices are to be welcomed and celebrated; standing outside this system, questioning or challenging its basic precepts and promises, they become framed instead as global society’s worst nightmare.”²⁰⁵

Even though the Bank has explicitly adopted a narrow approach, it has strategically improved its authoritativeness by differentiating itself from non-youth ‘Others’ in the text. That secondary ‘Other’ is NGOs and government

²⁰² Ibid, p.307.

²⁰³ Ibid, p.310.

²⁰⁴ Ibid, p.307.

²⁰⁵ Ibid, p.302.

elites who neglect youth issues by paying lip service to declarations that “youth are the future” or do not fully appreciate youth’s needs for multi-sectoral programming by focusing on protection issues only.²⁰⁶ In representing these ‘Others’ as doing more harm than good, the Bank constructs itself as self-aware and well-resourced to deliver holistic youth-in-conflict programming, thereby strategically improving its relevance to those working with youth-in-conflict.

Overall, this analysis of the Bank’s construction of youth-as-capital demonstrates how “youth policy, as always, tends to serve as vehicle for the dominant political and economic ideologies of the age.”²⁰⁷ As a neo-liberal institution, the Bank emphasises personal responsibility over organised state efforts and constructs youth-in-conflict as a source of human capital that requires investment if its productive base is to be tapped. Whereas the youth-as-trigger basic discourse provides a negative but dynamic representation of youth from a youth bulge, youth-as-capital tries to extract positive value from such demographic by emphasizing the need to provide jobs so that youth-as-capital can be productive, aiding economic growth. These two identity constructs are different sides of the same coin. However, the Bank’s failure to recognize the partiality in its approach to youth-in-conflict narrows the policy options it is able to present, leading to policies that many argue have been responsible for the deteriorating conditions of youth.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁶ See World Bank, *Youth in post-conflict settings* (2005).

²⁰⁷ *Ibid*, p.309.

²⁰⁸ Luttrell-Rowland (2007).

4 Conclusion

This chapter was devoted to an analysis of the UN and World Bank's constructions of youth-in-conflict and the role of international policy discourse in creating, maintaining and perpetuating such constructions. In youth policies generally, there are three basic discourses of youth identity- youth as passive victim, youth as frustrated troublemaker and, to a lesser extent, youth as hopeful peacebuilder. This is unsurprising given the fluid nature of 'youth', resulting in youth being constructed in various ways.

Drawing on Lene Hansen's poststructuralist theory of discourse to analyse the representations of youth put forward by the UN and the Bank, this thesis demonstrates how the UN privileges a rights-based approach while the Bank privileges an economics-based approach when constructing youth identity. The UN's youth policies show a strong preference, since the release of the Machel Report in 1996, to constructing youth-as-victims requiring protection from the horrors of war. Its sense of responsibility is driven by a strong development agenda and human rights ethic along with a 'child-lenses' perspective where youth are conflated with the 'child' category. The World Bank, on the other hand, constructs youth-as-capital as possessing potential to bring economic growth and stability. As a development bank with neo-liberal values, it privileges an economic vision of youth. Youth are economic actors, so investment in youth is discussed in terms of 'returns' for the market as well as in terms of the dangers for the market if youth make 'wrong choices'. Using 'adult-lenses', the World Bank regards youth as economic agents who can either aid or hinder peace by the extent in which they contribute to the economy.

How youth-in-conflict are constructed and the type of discourse employed is not just a matter of semantics. Identity constructions have very real impacts on the lives of those being 'constructed' and the policies that are designed to help them. Moreover, identity construction is a form of power that few possess to the level

of that of the UN and Bank, thus it is incumbent on both agencies to exercise such power responsibly, particularly when it has the potential to marginalize or assist youth in their communities.

The UN and Bank's constructions of youth identity impacts on the type of policies and programmes adopted, and a failure to acknowledge partiality to certain representations of youth problematically narrows the policy options they are able to present. For instance, the Bank's economic approach prefers youth programmes that enable economic growth, such as improving schooling rates and vocational training, even when there is the risk that youth's overall personal capabilities are undermined.²⁰⁹ The fact that the young Palestinian suicide-bombers of 2002 were educated, employed and successful presents difficulties for the Bank which fails to appreciate the influence of ideological dynamics but regards economic and political instability as stemming purely from 'greed' and 'grievances'. It is certainly crucial to question existing theoretical frameworks that underpin youth-in-conflict programmes, particularly if they perpetuate widely-held assumptions of youth that are proven by research to be biased or false. Revealing the assumptions behind UN and Bank youth policies can assist national policymakers in identifying the assumptions that underlie their own youth policy discourses. Where dominant discourses are found to be unsupported by evidence, academics and policymakers have a duty to challenge them if the goal is to help advocate youth issues and assist them in transitioning into adulthood.

This thesis has only touched the surface in demonstrating how theoretical frameworks and youth development approaches should not be adopted unquestioningly. Further scrutiny of theoretical frameworks as well as the practical implementation of youth programmes is necessary, particularly when many international and national actors devote scarce resources on programmes

²⁰⁹ Luttrell-Rowland (2007) p.233.

that have no proven, long-term, positive impacts yet. The concluding chapter offers some suggestions for further research.

CHAPTER 4- CONCLUSIONS

The ambition of this thesis was to examine the fluid concept of ‘youth’ and how it encourages the appreciation of multiple youth identity discourses in the conflict context. This concluding chapter therefore returns to the central question of how the UN and World Bank construct youth-in-conflict and ends by discussing the ways in which identity constructions and language have impacted on the effectiveness of youth programming and shaped people’s reality. How youth are defined is not just a matter of semantics but has direct implications on the success of development programmes designed to aid peace-making processes. This is because identity is intricately tied to language, which shapes the reality and experiences of both ‘the speaker’ and ‘audience’ of language. This sense of ‘reality’ also constrains the policy options a speaker of discourse is able to present, underscoring the discursive relationship between identity and policy. Before examining how discourse has impacted on policies and programme, I will revisit Hansen’s theoretical framework and link it to the analysis in chapter three. The ultimate goal, however, is not to just summarise the main points of this research but to present a series of suggestions for further research.

1 Discourse and identity

The main lesson from Hansen’s work is that youth-in-conflict identity is discursively linked to youth policy. The ontological starting point for post-structuralist discourse analysis, according to Hansen, is a conceptualisation of policy as dependent upon the articulation of identity. “Identity is simultaneously produced and reproduced through the formulation and legitimation of policy.”²¹⁰ Policy-makers generally present identities as though they were

²¹⁰ Hansen (2006) p.211.

objectively given, but such representations of objectivity are themselves “necessary reproductive performances”, where policies are articulated to legitimise particular actions and constrain agency.²¹¹

When analysing discourse, it is important to situate youth-in-conflict’s identity spatially, temporally and ethically. This provides an understanding of whether such identity is racialised, gendered or adopts child or adult ‘lenses’ as well as whether the identity construction is fixed or fluid. Taking these factors together enables one to judge whether the UN or Bank possesses a sense of responsibility towards youth-in-conflict. However, understanding how identities are situated spatially, temporally and ethically only provides the means to understanding a specific identity without taking into account other actors. Identities cannot be completely understood without an appreciation of how they relate to other identities. Identities are ‘social’ in that they are constituted in difference through the processes of “differentiation” and constituted through similarities by “linking” between the ‘Self’ and ‘Other’. Accordingly, one must analyse how UN and Bank policy discourses articulate their respective ‘Selves’ with respect to youth as ‘Other’. By linking identities together, one identifies the similarities between the identities examined; however, by differentiating identities, one notes the differences between them.

As identified in chapter two, there are three basic discourses of youth: youth as victim, troublemaker or peacebuilder. Each basic discourse is an analytical distinction that articulates explicit ideal-type identities in order to achieve particular policy outcomes, therefore it is unsurprising that the UN and Bank’s own identity constructions do not equate exactly to the radical identities proffered by any of these basic discourses. Putting Hansen’s framework into practice reveals that the UN’s youth-as-victim discourse is differentiated from the victim basic discourse on the basis that it is more nuanced and less ‘stable’; it includes a subsumed discourse of youth-as-perpetrators where ex-combatants are

²¹¹ Ibid, p.211.

located within a victim discourse so that their reintegration is aided by their abdication of responsibility. This subsumed discourse and apparent intrinsic inconsistency within the discourse is what Hansen calls “blank spots” that cannot be addressed.²¹² Nevertheless, taken holistically, the UN’s youth-as-victim construction represents youth as ‘older children’, thereby justifying a rights-based approach to youth development where youth-in-conflict’s needs for protection are prized over their other critical needs. Equally, the Bank’s youth-as-capital construction is differentiated from the youth-as-trigger basic discourse. Youth-as-capital are constructed as ‘objects’ that are invested in order to extract economic value whereas the youth-as-trigger basic discourse has a more dynamic view of youth as negative agents who can also be influenced by non-economic factors such as ideology and culture. Using adult-lenses that seek to transform ‘idle’ youth-in-conflict to productive citizens as quickly as possible, the Bank’s youth-as-capital construction is based on and results in economic policies.

Both agencies, to varying extents, have framed youth-in-conflict through a “crisis narrative” as a means to justify humanitarian and economic solutions to socio-political problems. The use of fear and moral concerns for the lives of helpless rape victims or the depletion of the economy constructs a group identity of youth in a fixed way; for the Bank, the economic benefits of youth’s participation in the formal labour market are presented with an undertone of fear and concern about the costs of lack of participation.²¹³ Like Roe’s example of policy discourse in Africa where development institutions created “crisis narratives” in order to maintain power and assert rights as stakeholders in the land, a crisis narrative exists within UN and Bank youth-in-conflict policy.²¹⁴ In the UN’s WPAY and Bank’s WDR2007, youth’s choices are framed as political,

²¹² Hansen (2006) p.145.

²¹³ Luttrell-Rowland (2007) p.234.

²¹⁴ See Emery M Roe, “Except-Africa: Postscript to a special section on development narratives”, *World Development*, Vol.23, Iss.6, June 1995, pp.1065-1069, 1066.

cultural and socio-economic “opportunities”, underpinned by moral undertones of fear for the market and local communities if youth make wrong choices.

In building such crisis narrative, both agencies have strategically adopted and employed language (ie. youth’s voices and testimonies) in ways other than originally intended. Similar to Cornwall’s (et al) argument that “when development actors seize upon feminist ideas they want them in a form that is useful to their own frameworks, analyses and overall policy objectives”,²¹⁵ the UN and Bank have seized upon youth’s testimonies and framed them in such a way that they emphasise a particular identity construction and desired policy outcome. Despite both using crisis narratives, the UN and Bank have ended up with different youth-in-conflict identities. The fact that two international development institutions can construct youth-in-conflict so differently emphasises not only how fluid youth identity is in practice but also how important it is to continue expanding our understandings of youth-in-conflict.

2 Further research

This thesis began with a call for more research into youth-in-conflict’s multiple needs and identities and how they impact on youth programming. An appropriate way to conclude this thesis might therefore be to offer some suggestions for further research. This thesis does not attempt to provide a comprehensive understanding of youth-in-conflict, much less an overview of youth identity generally. The results from this research cannot purport to be representative of the whole UN and Bank. While the UNPY has a specific youth mandate, other departments like the Women’s Refugee Commission conduct significant youth-in-conflict research. Even within the UNPY and Bank, only small samples of

²¹⁵ Andrea Cornwall, Elizabeth Harrison and Ann Whitehead, ‘Gender myths and feminist fables: the struggle for interpretative power in gender and development’, *Development and Change*, Vol 38, No.1,2007, pp.1-20.

text were analysed, requiring text selection to the exclusion of others. Research samples were chosen on the basis that they were either official youth policy or publications that are widely-read and have a central role in defining dominant discourses. This research's findings admittedly cannot be claimed to be representative of all UN and Bank departments, much less other actors such as NGOs and national governments. Despite the need to better understand youth identity, a review of the relevant literature reveals several gaps. Four suggestions for further research are examining in greater detail: what makes youth programming successful; the discursive relationship between identity and programming; youth's various roles during conflict; and how youth's perspectives can enrich our understanding of why they engage in conflict.

Firstly, we need to understand what makes youth-in-conflict programming work. Large amounts of public resources are wasted on youth programmes that do not work, that address the wrong problems or are poorly designed. In order for youth-in-conflict programming to be effective, it needs address the real issues youth-in-conflict are facing. Youth policies should be based on detailed research and good quality data which must include dialogues with youth-in-conflict on questions affecting their lives. Existing programmes and policies should be evaluated to identify why they are not working, in order to learn from experience and to identify the strengths and weaknesses of existing approaches.

Secondly, we must examine the relationship between youth identity and programming. While Kemper argues there is a link between effective youth programming and its underlying theoretical frameworks, greater evidence of the strength of the link between successful youth programmes and particular constructions of youth would be useful. Extraneous factors may mediate between identity constructions and the success of programming, making it hard to conclusively determine whether particular identity constructions lead to positive results in a given context. For instance, policies seeking to rehabilitate youth combatants may secure funding more easily as soldiers are security threats

posing immediate dangers to the community, whereas youth-as-peacebuilders do not present such hazards. Extraneous factors impede the success of good peacebuilding policies and are therefore important to understand. In order to obtain sufficient data to examine how youth identity is related to programming, future research should be extended to include ‘youth at risk’ and ‘youth in transition’, which do not specifically canvas youth-in-conflict but may nonetheless provide interesting insights into their identity. Relatedly, it would be useful to examine different types of discourse, such as parliamentary debates, pop culture, high culture and the media to determine whether they perpetuate or challenge official discourse.

Thirdly, the general dearth of research on youth’s roles during conflict and their multiple identities means that we still do not have a comprehensive understanding of what other roles youth-in-conflict possess. For example, the discourse of youth-as-spoilers is still not understood even though youth play a crucial role in undermining peace, and the literature on youth-as-perpetrators draws heavily on ‘child soldiers’ literature even when it is entirely possible that young adult soldiers have different experiences of conflict from their younger counterparts. Even more importantly, the field of youth peacebuilding and how youth use their agency positively is still glaringly under-researched. According to Oxfam’s International Youth Parliament Report “Highly affected, rarely considered”:

“an increasing number of young people are rejecting violence and becoming involved in peacebuilding efforts at the grassroots, national and international level. How are young people changing their societies? What is their specific power? How can their unique potential be harnessed? Extensive research is needed on innovative and spreading youth initiatives.”²¹⁶

Lastly, any research into youth issues would benefit from youth perspectives particularly because youth rarely have much input into their identity constructions at policy levels. Their ‘silence’ in policy prevents them from ever

²¹⁶Quoted in Del Felice and Wisler (2007).

fully materializing as embodied subjects and hinders them from expressing how the various identity constructions fundamentally endanger them. This silence has the potential to worsen current conflicts when youth feel disempowered and with no ownership of policy decisions and current peacebuilding efforts. For a start, youth-in-conflict research would benefit from a gender and race perspective. Research on youth-in-conflict generally focuses on young males and does not provide deep understandings on how conflict affects female youth. Furthermore, youth-in-conflict constructions perpetuate the assumption that youth-in-conflict are generally 'coloured' youth who are 'idle' and lazy. It is important to seek a range of youth-in-conflict voices to ensure that youth development models developed by international actors are effective and adaptable to youth's specific contexts. Montgomery's experience of research with young people reveals how obtaining youth insights can be both personally challenging but also very rewarding:

"...there is an enormous temptation to speak for them and to interpret what they say, so that it fits in with outsiders' preconceptions. Alternatively, there is a strong tendency not to listen to them at all....However, even these children have their own views and their own interpretations of their lives and these should not be ignored...The children in the community within which I worked...painted an infinitely more complicated picture of their world which challenged any simplistic dichotomies of good and evil, abused and abusers. It proved disturbing and disconcerting that their analyses of their lives were far more nuanced and far more sophisticated than mine."²¹⁷

These suggestions indicate that there is still much scope for further research on youth identity. Though youth-related research has existed in the fields of health and psychology, it has not yet forged a way in the study of international relations. This is disappointing. While it is now accepted that the study of international relations has greatly benefited from post-colonial and gender perspectives, an age perspective is still lacking. The young and elderly clearly have distinctive needs and view life differently, but their insights into world affairs has not yet been obtained. *Where are the youth?* In order to be relevant,

²¹⁷ Heather Montgomery, *Modern Babylon: Prostituting Children in Thailand* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2001) p.4.

international relations must take into account the views of future politicians and global citizens- the views of youth.

3 Conclusion

This research has used Hansen's discourse analysis framework to understand the discursive relationship between international youth policy and youth-in-conflict identity and has added to her work by expanding the relevance of her framework beyond the international relations field into the youth development arena. By using the processes of linking and differentiation, this research has uncovered power relationships and hidden racial, age and gendered assumptions in relation to the UN and Bank's emerging youth identities.

Although the UN situates youth-in-conflict within a victim/child discourse, its construction of youth identity is more flexible than that of the Bank, which objectifies youth-in-conflict as capital and situates them only within an economic discourse. The Bank's youth-in-conflict construction is more stable than that of the UN, which means there are less 'blank spots' within its discourse; however, this also means that it is less flexible and responsive to the emerging trends in youth-in-conflict discourse. Because the UN's youth-as-victim discourse is less intrinsically stable, it can accommodate emerging discourses such as youth-as-peacebuilder in order to provide a more holistic understanding of youth identity. This flexibility and appreciation of youth-in-conflict's multiple identities is important as identity constructions are not just a matter of semantics but shape people's understanding of reality.

For instance, Shepler's research from 1999 to 2001 of young perpetrators in Sierra Leone revealed how various actors relied on Western conceptions of childhood as 'innocent' and 'apolitical' for strategic purpose. She found that use

of the rights-based youth-as-victims discourse eased the reintegration of youth ex-combatants by “buttressing discourses of abdicated responsibility” in youth’s narrations of their war experiences, thereby facilitating forgiveness and acceptance. Shepler’s study revealed how a ‘constructor’, through discourse, can shape the realities of a ‘constructee’. Her research also demonstrated the crucial aspect of ‘constructees’ strategically manipulating the very frameworks that ‘construct’ them, thereby shaping their own realities. For example, young perpetrators “strategically adopted identities” across a variety of contexts: among fellow soldiers and peers (and for photographers) they represented themselves as rebels, wearing combat clothes and bragging about firing guns; with NGOs they adopt the persona of “traumatized innocent” and with community members, they acted like “normal kids, never mentioning the past”. Youth shaped their reality by perpetuating particular discourses in order to evoke specific responses and were “strategic users of different discourses as they move through different contexts”. Similarly, Shepler found that because NGOs represented themselves as knowing how to speak the language of human rights ‘the right way’, communities in Sierra Leone would mimic such language in order to receive child protection aid.²¹⁸ This was socialisation at work where people learned how to portray themselves in order to access material resources. These examples reveal the extent of power international institutions have in socialising ‘constructees’ to speak and act in particular ways- clearly not an insignificant source of power.

Discourse, identity, power and reality are intimately interlinked. The use of particular words to describe someone has power to shape their realities - how they see the world and how the world sees them in return. For this reason, it is important to ensure that policy is shaped by language that appreciates youth-in-conflict’s multiple needs and identities and advocates for their best interest. With limited understandings of youth-in-conflict based on evidence rather than gendered and racialised stereotypes, this can only mean more extensive research

²¹⁸ Shepler (2005) p.200.

is needed into youth's experiences of conflict. As noted by USAID advisor, Ignatowski:

“What is usually missing from our assessment work- and thus our program design- is any true sense of where youth innovation, creativity, and energy lie in a given country or region. If youth are the future-leaning trajectory of a society, then how do we uncover the direction they are leading us? If youth are the hinge between generations- the juncture at which a society's knowledge and skills are transmitted, reshaped, or in some cases, dropped entirely- how do we capture what youth are choosing to learn, and why?”²¹⁹

With the growing realisation that youth have immense capacities to bring down governments (as in Egypt in February 2011) or rebuild them (as in Kosovo), the call for more research is something that international relations researchers and policymakers must take more seriously than they have to date.

²¹⁹ Clare A Ignatowski, 'Framing Youth within the Politics of Foreign Assistance', *Research in Comparative and International Education*, Vol.2, No.3, 2007, pp.227.

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