

## Book reviews

***Culture, religion, and the reintegration of female child soldiers in Northern Uganda*, Bard Maeland (ed.) (2011), Peter Lang: New York. (314 pp).**

*Culture, religion, and the reintegration of female child soldiers in Northern Uganda* is a scholarly book on the effects of armed conflict on children, and, in particular, female children, in civil war. As such, it is significant contribution to the existing theoretical and methodological discussions on these issues.

The book is a comprehensive collection of 17 chapters that focus on various themes. The four main sections include: (1) perception, politics and peace; (2) social and cultural obstacles and resources; (3) the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) and the interpretation of the Old Testament; and (4) research, ethics and methodology to assess the experiences of girls formerly associated with armed conflict. The aim of this book is to examine and discuss major challenges related to the reintegration of female child soldiers from social, cultural, religious and moral perspectives. In order to do that, the book's content is composed of work from invited researchers, from a variety of fields, including: anthropology, psychology, ethics, religious studies and theology.

In part one, the authors analysed the perception of child soldiers, as well as the overall framework of politics and peace. The chapter by Milfrid Tønheim gives a summary of studies that document the reintegration of former girl soldiers, within an African context. In her analyses, the author recognises

that there are research gaps that need to be covered, such as the experiences and prospects of forced mothers (girl soldiers who become pregnant, against their will, during their time with armed groups) and their children. This section has also extensively examined the terminology and qualitative categories used, by scholars, in reference to children with direct experiences of armed conflict. For example, and in particular reference to girls, should authors use *forced wives*, *forced mothers*, *girl mothers*, *girls associated with armed conflict*, *formerly abducted girls* or *forcibly involved girls*?

In part two, the authors examine how stigmatisation and traditional rituals may support, or prevent, reintegration. It is argued that cultural norms provide productive resources, as well as obstacles to reintegration of female youths, and forced mothers with their families and communities. What cuts across all the articles in this section is the complex nature of female youth, formerly associated with armed conflict, who have children. Their life experiences, coloured by rejection, stigmatisation and suffering, are captured beautifully by Chris Coulter. In her concluding remarks, Coulter argues that *'many (formerly abducted girls) were afraid to return home, fearing rejection by their families and communities. With good reason, they were afraid of being punished for returning with rebel children, for not being virgins, and for being called rebels.'*

The next section (part three) examines how the Lord's Resistance Army interprets, or misinterprets, the Old Testament in attempts to justify their atrocities. One case that

was highlighted showed how narratives of Sodom and Gomorrah and quotations from Psalm 137 were used. In essence, authors believe that the LRA's selective way of reading and interpreting the bible has the aim of terrifying and indoctrinating abducted children, and that understanding this issue will facilitate reception and reintegration of the former child soldiers. I agree with Knut Holter that:

*'Rather than letting more or less accidentally selected Old Testament texts or motifs be used to legitimize oppression of female child soldiers, one could turn the whole thing around and ask how Old Testament texts and motifs describe oppression of women in war and warlike situations, can be used in today's' reintegration and healing processes vis-à-vis women with corresponding experiences such as in northern Uganda.'* (page 208)

Part four appropriately discusses the ethical and methodological issues raised in conducting research with children formerly associated with armed groups. Children need special research techniques and often experience research fatigue. Other salient issues surrounding research with this group of children include *where* and at *what stage* in the process of reintegration is the researcher doing their fieldwork, and if this affects the quality or nature of the data collected.

The editor manages to organise these, sometimes conflicting, themes in a systematic way to ensure that there is a logical flow in the book, and I highly commend his efforts. However, I do have a few comments to make. The struggle within academic scholarship regarding terminology is not particular to children associated with armed conflict. The fact that authors use a variety of terms like *'former child soldier'*, *'children formerly associ-*

*ated with armed conflict'*, *'forced mothers'* and *'formerly abducted children'* must be viewed as complementing each other and not in conflict, or that some are *'wrong'*. I believe it depends on the context and theoretical framework of the basis of the author's arguments.

Furthermore, whenever the authors refer to the work of Heike Behrend (1999), I am somewhat suspicious about subsequent arguments. Behrend's descriptions of the Acholi can be quite embarrassing for an attentive reader originating from northern Uganda. For instance, she makes the generalisation that the Acholi believe and depend on *jok* (translated as spirit, force or power) for success in agriculture, hunting and in times of war. Such sweeping statements are inaccurate. Probably some Acholi depend on *jok*, but to suggest that they are still a hunting community is outrageous. Behrend also suggests that there is no real Acholi ethnic identity, but only distinct clan identities. While chiefdoms were highly relevant in the distant past, the social lives of many Acholi today are hardly influenced by the practices organised by the chiefs. Christine Mbabazi Mpyangu, in her chapter on *'the Acholi world view'*, portrays the Acholi as a closed group with a static culture and homogeneous cultural views. While there are general characteristics that could be used to describe the social structure in this region, these structures are dynamic and are influenced by the political and educational levels of the Acholi people, as well as more global factors. A failure to recognise this makes the arguments presented in this chapter problematic. Mbabazi Mpyangu argues that reintegration processes of female ex-child soldiers fail because reintegration planners and programmers do not consider employing spiritually grounded methods involving *kaka* (clan leaders). This ignores groups

like the Gulu Support the Children Organisation (GSCO), which has since 2000 employed traditional methods of rehabilitation and reintegration of former child soldiers. Core problems with reintegration of ex-combatant are more often due to stigmatisation: the idea they are killers or wives of killers. Difficulties in promoting reconciliation in communities that experienced recent atrocities, sometimes perpetuated by the children/youth being reintegrated, are discussed elsewhere (Akello et al., 2009; Fish, 2009). Moreover, we should not lose sight of the fact that the prolonged civil war in northern Uganda affected the social structure and eroded traditional solutions for conflict resolution. Perhaps the war crimes committed by the LRA are beyond what could be resolved through traditional mechanisms.

Additionally, I am uncomfortable with some of the choices of opposing perspectives used throughout the book. In particular, in part three, where there is a reference to the 'authentic reading of the bible' (chapter 15) in comparison to the 'LRA way'. There is also a reference to 'modern bible scholarship' in comparison to supposedly primitive bible readership. As a reader, I would like to know

what is underpinning the 'authentic way' of reading the bible, without which such assertions may tell me more about the authors, than about the subject.

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***Broken Citizenship: Formerly Abducted Children and Their Social Reintegration in Northern Uganda, Margaret Angucia, Academic thesis, University of Groningen (2010). ISBN 978 90 3610 195 0***

Uganda has a long and bloody history of conflict between the national army and an armed group, the Lords Resistance Army

(LRA). The LRA is particularly known for their extremely violent ravaging of communities and the abduction of children, who are then exploited as soldiers, 'commanders' wives', human shields, etc. Margaret Angucia, a Ugandan, has written a dissertation focusing on the experiences of formerly abducted children and how can they be successfully reintegrated back into their

communities. She explores a variety of issues surrounding reintegration, such as the complexities inherent in it, the wide range of actors involved, and current methodologies in practice.

The thesis has 10 chapters. After an introduction and a historical/social overview of the conflict in Northern Uganda, a large chapter is dedicated to understanding the role of children in war and its impact, and to explore some of the issues surrounding reintegration. She does this by using the concept of reintegration to explain and understand the process, for both the children and the community involved. The experiences of other countries, such as Mozambique and Angola, are also discussed and compared to Uganda. There have been few systematic efforts to evaluate the determinants for successful reintegration. The chapter concludes that reintegration activities cannot simply be categorised as successful, or not, as it depends on how one defines *'successful reintegration'*; for example, a non-governmental organisation (NGO) worker may categorise an intervention as successful whereas the child, a care-giver or teacher may think otherwise.

The link between reintegration and the concept of citizenship is also examined. Citizenship is essential for reintegration because of its underlying concerns for participation, membership and agency. Additionally, processes, such as acceptance and relationship building are also very important. The analysis of the children's experiences shows that they have lost their place in the community, or had to forcefully destroy their place in it, which leads to *'broken citizenship'*. Appropriate reintegration, therefore, essentially moves towards a re-creation of this broken citizenship. Therefore, a child would be considered successfully reintegrated when he/she is accepted by the community,

and positively and actively participates in its daily routines.

The fourth chapter describes the qualitative methodology, based on action research. It was primarily exploratory, using in depth interviews, focus groups and informal discussions, held at various time intervals. Two hundred and fifty-five people participated in the study. There were a variety of participants' categories, such as: formerly abducted children (N = 97, of which 27 narrated their life story, the remaining 70 participated in focus group discussions); community based participants, such as elders and/or parents, teachers, and children who had not been abducted (N = 142 in total); and institution based participants, such as NGO workers (N = 16). Angucia raises the ethical dilemma of asking children to account their life story, while not being able to provide them with counselling support. According to the author, this is due to the absence of a counselling culture in Uganda. To partially overcome this dilemma, children are approached through their parents, caregivers, teachers, community leaders or NGO staff. It is believed that this social network is supportive in nature for the children. However, even though the author has carefully considered the inherent ethical dilemmas, and adopted a relationship building approach with her participants based on trust, openness and mutual agreement, I did miss a pre-interview *'check'* on this supportive assumption. It also raises the question: to what extent were the most vulnerable children included in this study, as it can be assumed that those children who have no supportive network are, by definition, the most vulnerable.

In chapter five, the children's war experiences are shared. During the research, the children shared how they have all undergone

and committed various forms of violence, suffered from hunger, set out on long marches and looted villages. However, their resilience, resourcefulness and courage are also evident. Nearly all of them have fled, knowing that a failed attempt would have been fatal, and they are all working hard to rebuild their lives.

The thesis continues to examine both the formal and the institutional forms of reintegration (often shortterm), and those that are community based in chapters six and seven. Formal methods of reintegration, such as: provision of temporary shelter and basic needs; facilitating the transition from armed group to normal life; short term support and care; and vocational skills training, generally offered by institutions and NGOs, are explored. The author continues by examining community based methods, including cultural and traditional rituals for welcoming and rehabilitation (such as cleansing rituals), but also reintegration methods to assist the children's return to school. Ideally, a reintegration process that combines both formal and informal aspects is considered to strongly contribute to a citizen re-creation process that develops (new) positive experiences, and relationships.

In chapter eight, the search for citizenship and reintegration practices is discussed, while chapter nine offers suggestions for social reintegration, with particular attention focused on restoring broken citizenship. The thesis shows that it is difficult to give an unambiguous categorisation of specific needs within the reintegration process. For example, a young child mother has very different needs than a 15 years old boy. Individual differences need proper focus in order to increase opportunities for success, although in practice it is not always possible. While more traditional and formal reinte-

gration methods often complement each other, practice shows that this potential for complementary methods is often hampered during the process, due to the high numbers of children, the complexity of their problems, and the limited availability of facilities.

The participatory methodology made use of the social network and the children themselves in order to analyse the findings of the research. More specifically, an extensive analysis on needs-competencies-problems-opportunities (NCPO-analysis) was conducted, with some of the children and their social network, which was then translated into concrete recommendations for reintegration. Unfortunately, a follow-up on the recommendations for (improved) reintegration practices, and a closer look at psychosocial support needs, were outside the scope of this study.

The major conclusion of this thesis is that social reintegration is a very long and complex process. The needs, competencies, problems and opportunities for the children and the communities need to be taken into account when designing long term programmes. To ensure sustainability, the commitment of not only NGOs and communities are needed, the government needs to be involved as well.

The thesis offers an extensive and comprehensive insight into the complexity of the reintegration of former child soldiers. I believe its strength lies in the accessibility and comprehensive socio-cultural focus, multi-actor approach and participatory analysis.

I know from my own long term experience, working with former child soldiers in eastern Congo, that reintegration can be facilitated by acceptance and understanding the children's direct surroundings, and the social-economic opportunities that match their individual needs and skills wherever

possible. Therefore, a reintegration process with long term commitment, ample attention to participation and involving different levels of actors is crucial.

However, there are always a number of children that need extra support and guidance, which could be psychological and/or psychosocial in nature. I do not subscribe to a public stereotype that *all* former child soldiers are traumatised. My own experience showed me that traumatic experiences do not necessarily lead to a barrier in the rehabilitation and reintegration processes. However, the thesis did leave me feeling somewhat uncomfortable on this point, as it was clear that there was no follow-up psychosocial support available. This was beyond the scope of the study, even when it was considered necessary by most stakeholders. The children were asked to share their life stories, which the author assumed was a healing process in itself; *'it is better to speak out than to*

*bottle it up'*, and that the evidence for healing was *'always a visible smile and a sign of relief'*. I can't help but wonder if her assumptions are adequate, or appropriate.

Additionally, even though the author clearly indicates that the opportunity to implement and follow up the concrete suggestions were not the objective, one could argue that they are very important. As a reader it leaves me with questions on how things have evolved. The extent to which the recommendations can, and will, actually materialise remains unclear. At the same time, the participatory process may have created hopes for a better future in some of the formerly abducted children that may never come to fruition.

I can imagine that the author shares the same questions on progress, and I personally hope that a follow-up is still possible to see how *'her'* children are doing. I cherish that deep wish myself to see how *'my Congolese children'* are doing.

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***Crazy Like Us. The globalization of the American psyche. New York, Free Press. (2010). Ethan Watters***

The proportion of mental disorders within the global burden of disease is significant (currently an estimated 13%) and is expected to rise dramatically in the coming decades (Bloom et al., 2011). A small but vocal *'global movement for mental health'* advocates the provision of scientifically-proven treatment to people with mental disorders. The potential negative impact of this advocacy is the main theme of *'Crazy Like Us'*, by American writer Ethan Watters. The core

of the book consists of four chapters, each of around 60 pages, in which the author explores the complex issues arising from the use of modern western psychiatric diagnoses in non-western settings: anorexia nervosa in Hong Kong, posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in Sri Lanka, schizophrenia on the African island of Zanzibar and depression in Japan.

One of the most relevant chapters for the readers of *Intervention* perhaps, looks at Sri Lanka. Watters talks to Sri Lankan experts who were present when the tide of aid workers arrived in Sri Lanka after the tsunami. This has been described extensively

elsewhere (including Wickramage (2006) and Galappatti (2005), and Watters also summarises the essentials in his sobering account, describing how *'trying to do good'* can so easily result in *'doing harm'*. For a mental health professional it is quite painful to see how well-intentioned colleagues sometimes arrived in Sri Lanka with an almost total ignorance of the local context. Based on lengthy conversations with experts (among whom US-based psychologists Gauthri Fernando (a native of Sri Lanka), and Ken Miller), Watters describes how western researchers looked one-sidedly for symptoms of PTSD and tended to overlook the cultural background for dealing with distress. Sri Lankans tended to see the negative consequences of disasters like the tsunami less in terms of *'internal states'* (anxiety, fear, numbing) and more in terms of the damage done to social relationships (loss of community/support, inability to fulfil a role in the family). By introducing concepts such as PTSD and disregarding its less than optimal fit with local culture, mental health professionals in fact contributed to pathologising a very-understandable distress. Or as Watters formulates:

*'By isolating trauma as a malfunction of the mind that can be connected to discrete symptoms and targeted by new and specialized treatments, we have removed the experience of trauma from other cultural narratives and beliefs that might otherwise give meaning to suffering' (page 121)*

The chapter on Sri Lanka is well written and makes fascinating reading, although it gives no voice to the survivors of the tsunami. The author talked to dozens of local and international experts and read hundreds of key texts in the field of transcultural psychiatry but apparently did not speak directly to

people who could have given personal accounts of what they went through. Nevertheless, the conclusions of this chapter are convincing: there are now thousands of Sri Lankans who are trained in trauma counselling and use the Western conceptualisation of PTSD, while, in the words of Sri Lankan psychiatrist Athula Sumathipala, *'the best therapy will be a sound social policy'*. Watters is at his best when writing about American anthropologist Juli McGruder, who lives in Zanzibar and conducted in-depth research around three Zanzibari families who were dealing with a family-member with chronic psychosis. McGruder had been intrigued by studies that had found that people with schizophrenia fared better in low income countries. Several suggestions have been put forward to explain this, for example that people in traditional societies may face lower demands because their lives are less complicated. After living for a while with an extended family of dozens of people in a house in Zanzibar, McGruder quickly realised that life in such setting is not less stressful at all. She noted that the psychotic patients she followed were often more-readily accepted *'as they were'*. This acceptance of abnormal behaviour, reducing their expectation for the patient to be *'productive'* and their belief that spirits (*jinnns*) had something to do with it (as they are thought to have with many other difficulties in life), allowed the family to give the psychotic person more of their own space in the social setting. However, in one family, the narrative of *'treatment'* had been introduced, and in this case the carers used western notions of *'brain disease'*, concluding that it had to be treated with medication, and thereby causing considerable stress in the family. Watters is able to make abstractions such as *'social context'* and *'culture'* tangible, and shows how these shape the experiences of people, their

understanding of the condition, and their approach to dealing with problems.

Two other chapters, on Hong Kong and Japan describe how the psychologisation of lack of wellbeing is now occurring on an unprecedented scale. Until the 1980s Japanese psychiatrists did not have a proper word for 'depression'. The most commonly adopted Japanese word had an association with severe, incurable and inborn forms of depression. Very few Japanese people would identify with such a disorder. The introduction of DSM psychiatry, with its inflated, context-free definition of depression required a new Japanese word. The new word being used for 'depression' can be translated as 'cold of the soul', and therefore has the connotation of being both common and treatable. This reframing of depressive experience in Japan proved a boost for the billion dollar industry in antidepressants.

'Crazy Like Us' is an effective antidote for undue optimism about global psychiatry. Sometimes Watters tends to idealise non-American ways of dealing with mental distress, by portraying cultures as 'vulnerable' to new beliefs about the mind and madness, and talks about 'them' when referring to

non-Americans. However, his main message is valid and deserves to be heard: attempts to diagnose and treat psychological distress do not always offer solutions, and may even add to the problems.

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Reviewed by Peter Ventevogel