

FORMER CHILD SOLDIERS AS REFUGEES IN GERMANY

Quaker
United
Nations
Office



Quaker United Nations Office
13, Avenue du Mervelet
1209 Geneva, Switzerland



Project study by Michaela Ludwig

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English Edition

Quaker United Nations Office
13, Avenue du Mervelet
1209 Geneva
Switzerland

Tel.: 0041 22 748 48 00
Fax: 0041 22 748 48 19
Email: quno@quno.ch
Internet: www.quno.org

Revised and with a new introduction by Rachel Brett, Representative (Human Rights and Refugees),
Quaker UN Office, Geneva

Editor

Rebecca Kmentt

Translation

Rebecca Kmentt

German Edition (Original)

terre des hommes
Bundesrepublik
Deutschland e.V.
Hilfe für Kinder in Not
Postfach 4126
49031 Osnabrück

Tel: 0049 541 7101-0
Fax 0049 541 707233
Email info@tdh.de
Internet: www.tdh.de

Spendenkonto 700 800 700
Volksbank Osnabrück eG
BLZ 265 900 25

Editors

Andreas Rister
Albert Riedelsheimer

Editorial assistant

Cornelia Dernbach

Author

Michaela Ludwig

Born 1969, studied German Literature and Sociology in Marburg and Hamburg. She has worked with unaccompanied refugee minors, travelling twice to Uganda to research the political situation and deployment of child soldiers in Northern Uganda. She lives and works in Hamburg as a freelance journalist with a special focus on child soldiers.

Contact details: michaelaludwig@hotmail.com

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1. Introduction to the English Edition

This research was undertaken in the specific context of Germany with its particular asylum procedures and restrictive interpretation of “persecution” in relation to those refusing to serve in or deserting from armed forces or groups. One of the reasons for doing it was that in January 2004, Germany was reporting on its implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child to which it is a party.

The research was successful in its immediate objective of bringing this problem to the attention of the Committee on the Rights of the Child. In its Concluding Observations on Germany, the Committee stated its concern that “refugee children between 16 and 18 years do not benefit from the rights included in the Youth Welfare Act” and that “recruitment of children as soldiers is not accepted as a child specific persecution in the asylum procedure”. In consequence it went on to recommend that Germany “take all necessary measures to (a) fully apply the provisions of the Youth Welfare Act to all refugee children below the age of 18 years; ... (c) consider the recruitment of children as soldiers as a child specific persecution to be accepted in asylum procedures”.¹

However, the Quaker UN Office, Geneva, believes that the findings of this pioneering research on the experience of former child soldiers in seeking asylum deserve broader consideration. Not only do the interviews of these former child soldiers – all in this instance boys – show the nature and impact of their experience as child soldiers, but also its after-effects. In particular, it highlights the problems which such young people face in articulating an asylum claim, in coping with the requirements of the authorities and the uncertain outcomes. This “suspended animation” leaves them unable to settle into a new society and a normality, as well as unable to come to terms with their past – both as perpetrators and victims of violence. These are not specific to one country or one asylum system, and all Governments, care workers

and non-governmental organisations into whose remit they fall are urged to read and consider the implications of this study, and to seek ways to better address the problems and issues identified in it.

At the same time, the research begins to shine a light on the hidden world of former child soldiers in the sense that many are reluctant to identify themselves as such in their asylum claims because of their fears about the response and their difficulty to speaking about their experiences. Those who are known to be former child soldiers are, therefore, very much the tip of the iceberg. This is an area which could benefit from further research, as well as action, in relation to both boy and girl former child soldiers.

Of course, it would be even better if there was no need for consideration of this issue at all because these children were able to live in their own countries without having to become child soldiers with all its direct and indirect consequences.

Since it is intended for a broader audience, this English edition does not include the detailed discussion on the German asylum law and process which was in the original. However, while noting that all the interviewees were child soldiers *strictu sensu*, that is they were under 18 years of age at the time of their recruitment, since nearly half were 18 or over at the time of interview, the English edition retains the use of the term “youth” and similar from the German edition.

¹ Concluding Observations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child: Germany (CRC/C/15/Add. 226), 30 January 2004, paras 54 and 55.

2. Executive summary of the German Edition

The interest of the German public in the topic of child soldiers reached its peak during the discussion in the German Parliament about whether or not the German Government should send the Bundeswehr (German Army) to the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), a conflict which is well-known for its 12,000 child soldiers fighting for the various armed groups operating in this Central African country. However, the German public in general is not aware that 300–500 former child soldiers² are already living in Germany as so-called “separated children”³.

Once recruited, a child soldier has little chance of escaping from the armed forces without being hunted down and most likely killed by his former comrades. The career of a child soldier normally ends with his or her death, captivity, serious injuries or – which is rare – peace talks and discharge. Only a very small number of child soldiers succeed in escaping from their troops and making their way to a place where they are safe, for example, the Federal Republic of Germany.

This study, entitled “Former Child Soldiers as Refugees in Germany”, is the first of its kind to focus on the group of former child soldiers and survey the experiences and circumstances in which they are living in Germany with a view to assessing the needs of this extremely vulnerable group of young persons. The study is based on eleven narrative interviews with male former child soldiers from Sierra Leone, Democratic Republic of Congo, Angola, Sri Lanka, Eritrea, Afghanistan and Senegal, who were recruited at ages between seven and seventeen years and who served for between one month and eight years. According to the “Cape Town Principles” a child soldier is *“any person under 18 years of age who is part of any kind of regular or irregular armed force or armed group in any capacity, including but not limited to cooks, porters, messengers and anyone accompanying such groups, other than family members. The definition includes girls recruited for*

sexual purposes and for forced marriage. It does not, therefore, only refer to a child who is carrying or has carried arms⁴.”

The majority of the former child soldiers suffer seriously from the loss of their families. Many of them witnessed the murder of their parents and the abduction of brothers and sisters, while they were also abducted. A small number of the persons interviewed joined the armed forces voluntarily, either because they were orphans and were seeking food, clothing and shelter or because they were looking for adventure. Being in Germany most of the former child soldiers are still haunted by thoughts about whether their family members are still alive and where they might be living. They also stress the loss of their childhood and the lack of education, and they blame this, above all, for their lack of prospects for the future.

Many of the former child soldiers were seriously wounded and still suffer from these injuries. Their duties in the armed forces ranged from fighting to unskilled work, such as washing clothes, cooking, fetching water, etc. They also worked as slave labourers or overseers in diamond mines. They felt like slaves and through brain-washing, ill-treatment, subjection and punishment they learned to obey orders. They were sent into battle high on drugs, alcohol and magic rituals to make them bold and give them courage. In this way victims became perpetrators. After combat, when they were sober again, they started feeling guilty about murdering, ill-treating people and raping women. In turn, when they were captured by the enemy they were themselves ill-treated.

After escaping from the armed forces and eventually arriving in Germany, the former child soldier goes through a very delicate stage, being highly vulnerable. He badly needs to be given immediate psychosocial support in order to prevent re-traumatisation. He needs to find a person he can relate to and has to build

² According to a rough estimate of the Katholische Jugendsozialwerk München (Catholic Youth Social Work Group in Munich) who believe that approximately 4 percent of all unaccompanied refugee minors in Germany are former child soldiers.

³ According to the “Separated Children in Europe Programme”, separated children are “children under 18 years of age who are outside their country of origin and separated from both parents, or their previous legal / customary caregiver.” Separated Children in Europe Programme: Statement of Good Practice. Geneva 1999.

⁴ Cape Town Principles and Best Practices on the Prevention of Recruitment of Children into the Armed Forces and on Demobilization and Social Reintegration of Child Soldiers in Africa, adopted by the Participants in the Symposium on the Prevention of Recruitment of Children into the Armed Forces and Demobilization and Social Reintegration of Child Soldiers in Africa, organized by UNICEF in cooperation with the NGO-Sub-Group of the NGO Working Group on the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Cape Town, April 1997, (UNICEF, New York, 1999).

up a “normal” social set-up through learning German, attending school, doing sports etc. The majority of the former child soldiers are seriously traumatised and suffer from the symptoms which are summarised as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Many of them enter therapy.

Applying for asylum is the only avenue for child refugees by which they can benefit from the protection of the German State and receive a residence permit. However, the results of this research show that former child soldiers have, in fact, next to no chance of succeeding in the German asylum procedure for two reasons. First, child-specific persecution such as recruitment of minors is not accepted and, secondly, due to psychological and sometimes physical problems they are not able to undergo the procedure successfully. Also, through lack of school education and insufficient knowledge of the language and asylum procedure, the former child soldiers are not able to meet the demands. The Federal Office for the Recognition of Foreign Refugees (Bundesamt für die Anerkennung von ausländischen Flüchtlingen) labels former child soldiers “deserters”. The act of desertion is not considered to be persecution in the German asylum procedure, except when linked to political persecution, the so-called “Politmalus”.

Ironically, the German government was a driving force in establishing international law concerning children’s rights in armed conflict with a view to improving their protection. Now international law clearly proscribes the recruitment of child soldiers and their participation in combat, stating that child soldiers are the victims of the gravest crimes against humanity and war crimes. Since former child soldiers do not get a permanent residence permit, their situation is marked by a high degree of uncertainty. They live with many restrictions, such as a prohibition on leaving their place of residence, denial of further education and permission to work, etc. In conclusion, integration is prevented and the former child soldiers are strongly aware of this. They live in constant fear of being deported. In this state of uncertainty and fear, social and psychological stabilisation, the prerequisite for a successful therapy, is hard to attain.

On the basis of these findings and results **terre des hommes e.V.** and the **Bundesfachverband Unbegleitete Minderjährige Flüchtlinge e.V.** demand, first, that the recruitment of child soldiers as child-specific persecution be accepted in the German asylum procedure and, second, that appropriate accommodation, adequate assistance and psychosocial care be granted to former child soldiers.

Michaela Ludwig, Hamburg

3. Child soldiers worldwide – a brief overview⁵

Definitions

There is no binding international law definition of the term “child soldiers”. However, in 1997, the Cape Town Principles established a formulation that has since become widely accepted: *a child soldier is any person under eighteen years of age who is part of any kind of regular or irregular armed force or armed group in any capacity, including but not limited to cooks, porters, messengers and anyone accompanying such groups, other than family members. It includes girls recruited for sexual purposes and for forced marriage. It does not, therefore, only refer to a child who is carrying or has carried arms.*

For the purposes of this study, the “Cape Town Principles” are well suited because they do not distinguish between:

- the kind of recruitment, (which means whether or not the child was forcibly recruited, conscripted or joined the armed group or armed forces voluntarily for whatever reason);
- the type of armed group, (which means regular armed forces, government-aligned militia or paramilitary or armed opposition forces, rebels or guerrilla units);
- children or young people who have actually been used in combat and those who have only been subjected to military training.

This study also deals with two groups of persons for whom the definition child soldiers cannot, or can no longer, be applied: these are, firstly, those children and young people who were in direct and real danger of being forcibly recruited and have been sent abroad by their parents or families to seek protection from such recruitment. Secondly, those who are now older than eighteen but were active child soldiers. The criteria for inclusion in this study was, therefore, not the

moment at which participation in an armed conflict ended, but the fact that the person was a child soldier during a period of his life that is essential for the development of his personality and his identity.

In 2000, UNICEF estimated that more than 300,000 girls and boys under eighteen were deployed as soldiers in armed forces and armed groups in over 30 countries⁶. Several hundreds of thousands more are serving in armed forces or groups but not currently engaged in active combat. The majority of child soldiers are between 15 and 18 years old. However, a large number of children are recruited at a younger age. Some are no older than seven.

International law prohibits any recruitment (compulsory, forced or voluntary) or use in hostilities of children under 15 years of age.⁷ The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child’s Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict has been in force since February 2002. It raises the minimum age for all forms of conscription, forcible recruitment and use in hostilities to 18 years. For volunteers, it prohibits all recruitment of under-18s by armed groups, but does not categorically prohibit government armed forces from recruiting those between 16 and 18 years,⁸ which makes for a very problematic distinction.

Amongst the groups most in danger are children who live in war zones, children without or having only little education, from the poorest segments of society or disrupted families. The UN Study on the *Impact of Armed Conflict on Children* (1996) established that children and young people are particularly at risk if they have been separated from their parents during flight or expulsion. Even after fleeing, children are not safe from recruitment. Displaced persons and refugee camps are often militarised and even cross-border recruitment is increasing.

⁵ For a detailed discussion of child soldiers, their recruitment, training, deployment, military importance, rehabilitation and reintegration, see Rachel Brett & Margaret McCallin: *Children – the Invisible Soldiers* (Save the Children, Sweden, 2nd ed. 1998). For legal texts, country specific and other information, see the website of the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers: www.child-soldiers.org

⁶ In 2002, the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers 1379 Report to the UN Security Council listed of children in armed conflicts in the following countries: Afghanistan, Angola, Burundi, Colombia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Guinea-Bissau, India, Indonesia, Iraq, Israel and the Palestinian Occupied Territories, Liberia, Macedonia, Myanmar, Nepal,

Pakistan, Russian Federation, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Uganda and Yugoslavia (Federal Republic of).

⁷ Additional Protocols I and II, 1977, to the 1949 Geneva Conventions, UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.

⁸ The Optional Protocol in fact requires States to specify their minimum voluntary recruitment age in a legally binding declaration at the time they become parties to the Protocol. This age must be higher in years than that specified in the Convention, hence it cannot be less than 16. The Protocol also requires States to comply with certain safeguards if they are recruiting under-18 volunteers.

There are fewer children of wealthy parents among child soldiers, as they have the opportunity to move out of harm's way. Some families move to safer parts of the country or send their children abroad. Some families get into serious debt to save their children.

The longer an armed conflict goes on, the more likely it becomes that children take an active role. The number of child soldiers also rises in accordance with an increasing number of internal wars. In such conflicts the distinction between civilian populations and combatants is no longer made. The protection of children under international law is disregarded when they are victimised, indeed their recruitment as soldiers turns them into violators themselves.

The uncontrolled traffic in and the development of small arms and light weapons exacerbate this tendency. Even small children can handle these weapons, meaning that children can fight in the frontline from the age of ten. Younger ones are used as carriers, servants, spies, messengers or guards. Girls are also used as soldiers, although their number is smaller than that of boys. Girls, however, are subjected to a particular danger as they are often used as sex slaves as well.

Children are easy to get hold of and they are cheap. In most cases they receive little or no military training before being sent to the front. They are at the very bottom of the military hierarchy and are, therefore, often given the most dangerous fighting assignments. They fight in the very front line and, due to their aggressiveness, are considered particularly dangerous. This aggressiveness results from the brutalising treatment in the military, ideological influence, strong psychological pressure and from drugs and alcohol. Child soldiers, who capitulate, flee or are captured often face mistreatment, torture or death, both from the enemy and from their own side.

Their experience as child soldiers has devastating consequences for children and young people: not only do they lose their childhood, their education and development possibilities, but they also risk severe physical injury, psychological trauma or, indeed their lives.

Child soldiers in the political context

Africa was estimated as having 120,000 child soldiers in 2001.⁹ In the aftermath of decolonisation, war has taken on new appearances that can be characterised by three developments¹⁰: Firstly, the state has lost its monopoly on the use of force in so far as it ever had it. War in Africa is seldom fought as a conventional war between government armies about territories and domination. Much more common are armed conflicts between the state and para-state and partly private actors. Among those are local warlords, guerrilla leaders, international mercenaries etc. The recent wars in the Democratic Republic of Congo (formerly Zaire), Liberia, Sierra Leone, Uganda, Sudan and recently in Côte d'Ivoire show that neighbouring states often indirectly support the warring parties or even intervene directly.

War becomes a permanent occupation for some non-state armed actors. Many of these are war-entrepreneurs who finance themselves through war. They receive the necessary income through the support of private citizens or States. They sell drilling and mining rights in the territories under their control and engage in drug and human trafficking or in extortion. By controlling refugee camps, they profit from the aid deliveries of international organisations. The economic engine behind these wars is access to resources. The violence in Africa often has as its ambition oil, diamonds, gold, Coltan, or tropical hardwoods. The aims are not so much political, religious or even of ethnic origin, although such reasons are often invoked if it serves someone's interest. Among other factors, this development was made possible by easy access to small arms and light weapons that do not require lengthy training periods.

War as a business can only function if the profit is higher than the cost. In order to keep war in Africa cheap, most war activity is directed against defenceless civilians. This is the second characteristic of war in Africa. Equally matched opponents seldom fight each other and there are no longer clear frontlines along which big battles are fought. "War" is often a series of small-scale skirmishes, which do not use up military strength. In turn, the violence is directed against civilian populations.

This leads to the third tendency: violence combined with extreme cruelty. The civilian population is

⁹ Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers: *Child Soldiers: Global Report 2001*.

¹⁰ See Muenkler, Herfried: *Die neuen Kriege*. Reinbek bei Hamburg 2002. p.7

completely at the mercy of those in control at the time. They are robbed of all their possessions, displaced, forced into slave labour, starved, women and girls raped, children abducted and forcibly recruited. Whoever resists, or is merely suspected of such resistance, is massacred. The conduct of war has fallen into the hands of unpredictable criminal and violent actors.

Child soldiers are a central element in the economy of these new wars. Many of these children receive no pay. The only cost-generating factors are weapons, munitions and drugs. Instead, the children are told to loot without mercy. Modern handguns are cheap and so light that children can easily use them. They can be deployed without requiring long training. In addition, compared to adults, children have relatively few demands, are easily influenced, have a lower risk-awareness and are not so prone to mutiny. All these factors make them into cheap and effective instruments of violence.

Psychosocial situation of former child soldiers

Most, if not all former child soldiers, have suffered severe traumata. They have witnessed murder, often of close relatives, and in many cases were the perpetrators (having themselves killed people). Fischer¹¹ defines a traumatic experience as a “vital discrepancy between threatening situations and the individual capability to overcome these situations, which goes hand in hand with feelings of helplessness and total lack of protection causing a lasting shattering of self-understanding and understanding of the world.” Trauma means a “shock that has a lasting effect on the psyche and which repeatedly overcomes the individual without the ability of exercising control. In other words, psychological trauma causes solid and protection-giving psychological energy to be ripped apart and extremely weakened by burdening experiences”. Becker¹² also points to the socio-political dimension in which the traumatising takes place.¹³

Former child soldiers suffer from long-lasting repeated traumata caused by human rights violations. Traumatic experiences lead to permanent inner over-

stimulation, paralyse the *Self* and transform the youth into a state of total paralysis and helplessness combined with feelings of exposure. The extent of the trauma depends on the traumatizing experience and on the personality structure and maturity of the young person. The consequences of traumatizing experiences are described as “post-traumatic stress disorder”. This consists of three characteristic groups of symptoms. The intrusions are recurring, unwanted and burdening memories of the traumatic experiences in dreams as well as in the conscious state. The youngsters return to their memories in the form of “flash backs” and forget reality. In most cases, the memories go hand in hand with physical reactions such as sweating, shaking, breathing problems, palpitations, and gastro-intestinal problems. The youths try to fight off the memory of this painful experience through avoidance or drugs. The results of this are difficulties with concentration and memory as well as “disassociative” states. This avoidance behaviour often leads to reduced levels of interest and activity and a feeling of having only a limited future. The behaviour of avoidance is often combined with feeling emotionally dazed. The young people experience feelings of estrangement from their surroundings and withdraw themselves.

They can find themselves in a state of chronic overstimulation. The results are anxieties, aggressiveness, rage and sleeping disorders. The extreme traumatization can continue to affect the feeling of identity (shame or guilt feelings) or lead to interpersonal disorders (for example a tendency to “re-victimization” or excessive risk behaviour). According to Keilson¹⁴, the psychological consequences of severe traumata caused by human rights violations are lifelong. In particular, the phase immediately after traumatization is characterized by a high degree of vulnerability, which, according to Keilson, can result in severe and long lasting re-traumatizations. Hence, the youths require particular protection during this phase. It is in this phase that the former child soldiers arrive in Germany.

¹¹ Fischer, G. & Riedesser, P.: *Lehrbuch der Psychotraumatologie*. München 1998. p.79.

¹² Becker, David: *Prüfstempel PTSD – Einwände gegen das herrschende „Trauma“-Konzept*. In: Medico International: *Schnelle Eingreiftruppe „Seele“: auf dem Weg in die therapeutische Weltgesellschaft*. Frankfurt/M 2000. p. 25 – 47.

¹³ The differing definitions of trauma cannot be adequately investigated in this study. For a more detailed discussion see Medico International: *Schnelle Eingreiftruppe „Seele“: auf dem Weg in die therapeutische Weltgesellschaft*, 1997.

¹⁴ Keilson H.: *Sequentielle Traumatisierung bei Kindern. A clinical description and quantifying statistical study of the fates of jewish war orphans in the Netherlands*. Stuttgart 1979.

4. Interviews with child soldiers¹⁵

I. Life before recruitment – who becomes a child-soldier?

In the interviews with former child-soldiers, three different patterns that are partly combined with each other, yet independent from the form of recruitment, emerge. The affected youths come from current conflict zones, from poor or otherwise deprived parts of society or from disrupted or non-existent family backgrounds. Children from wealthier families are, in comparison, less threatened by forcible recruitment because the parents have the means to send them to other parts of the country or abroad.

Age at recruitment

Name	Country	Age at recruitment	Time spent as a child soldier	Age at the time of interview
Mussa	Senegal/Casamance	14	1 month	15
Mike	Sierra Leone	8	6 years	18
Hassan	Sierra Leone	15	6 months	17
Mala	Sri Lanka	12	18 months	22
Antonio	Angola	11	5 years	29
Diko	Sierra Leone	7	8 years	17
Daniel	Sierra Leone	11	2 years	15
Samson	Eritrea	13	3 months	17
Hamed	Afghanistan	15, when he fled from forcible recruitment		18
Dost	Afghanistan	15, when he fled from forcible recruitment		
Aime	Democratic Republic of Congo	17	14 months	20

Children from conflict zones

Of the eleven interviewees grew up in regions in which armed conflicts were taking place: Sierra Leone, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Angola, Sri Lanka and Senegal/Casamance.

Children from poor or disadvantaged groups in society

Some of the interviewees come from poor families. Their parents practiced subsistence farming. Some of the children did not go to school but helped their parents at home or in their work:

I worked too. ... My mother, because she cooks for us ... example potatoes at home. Later I sell this ... in the village where we live. (Samson, Eritrea)

Refugees form a particularly deprived segment of society. Following attacks on the village, people flee in all directions. Children are without protection

during the flight and often lose their parents or other grown-ups that look after them:

... Into the mosque ... they have ... killed many people there and we ran very quickly into the forest. We tried to run away from my town. (Diko, Sierra Leone)

¹⁵ See Annex for the methodology of this study. Where the interviewees responded in German, those excerpts have been translated literally and in such a way as to preserve the quality of language used in the original. Some of the interviewees responded in English. These excerpts are reproduced verbatim.

Minor male refugees are often forced to join the civilian defence in the village in which they seek refuge:

When these rebels ... come, they do poum poum and then all people go away from this village, go to another village and then this village gives ... civil defence. And this ... civil defence says ... if all people who come here this ... boy must, together with us, he can defend all children ... all girls and babies. And all boys and all grown-ups ... gone ... for defend these people. (Daniel, Sierra Leone)

Children who have been left by or are separated from their parents

Through war, many children have lost one or both parents or have been separated from them. These children live as orphans with neighbours or with other family members:

I was at school and when I came back ... from the school ... then ... the house was totally destroyed and I did not see my parents and then came our neighbour. She took me with her. I slept in her house and the next day she told me: "Your parents are dead. ... You don't need to cry. We are here and we will help you." (Antonio, Angola)

II. Recruitment

Recruitment is the deciding factor in this research. Without recruitment there would be no child soldiers. Recruitment happens forcibly or voluntarily. In this research, there was no conscription (compulsory government army service) for any of the youths.

Forced recruitment

Youngsters are recruited during attacks on their home villages or whilst fleeing from rebel groups. Heavily armed rebel groups attack the village, destroy the houses or set them ablaze and force the inhabitants into the street. Many people are murdered; children and youths are taken captive and abducted into the rebel camps. Those who resist are killed:

... One night rebels come, where we live with my parents with other people. They have killed my parents ... The rebels arrested me, beat me up very much. I had a lot of panic ... Everywhere shooting and bombs ... Then I thought I should come in the forest, everything what they say to me I have to do. When I say "No" then they kill me. (Diko, Sierra Leone)

First Case Study:

Mussa (15), Senegal

Mussa lived in a village in the Casamance in Senegal with his father and his older brother. He helped his father to cultivate the fields. Mussa did not go to school; he only went for two years to the Koranic School. When he was 14 years old, rebels, who forced the youth and the young men to go with them, attacked his village. His father resisted the deportation of his sons and was subsequently killed before their eyes. The brothers were brought to two different rebel camps. Since this time Mussa lost contact with his brother. In the camp there were three boys he knew from his village. The rebels forced Mussa to kill one of these boys. When Mussa refused, he was tortured and the boy was killed before his eyes. Mussa stayed in this rebel camp for one month where his duties were laundry, cooking and doing the dishes. During an attack by the police (most likely Government forces) Mussa was arrested and locked in a room where he was severely tortured. The scars are still visible today. During a break of the guards, Mussa succeeded in fleeing by climbing over a wall. Outside he asked a passer-by for help. This man helped him further. He took Mussa with him and succeeded in smuggling him with the help of an acquaintance on to a ship in the harbour. On this ship, Mussa travelled to Germany or Belgium in the Summer 2002; at this time he was 14 years old. Upon arrival, he met a person, who accompanied him on a train to his current residence. Today, Mussa lives in an initial care centre (Erstversorgungseinrichtung). He has sleeping and eating disorders. Mussa tells that he has been admitted to a hospital after a breakdown. According to the doctor, the reasons were lack of food and drink. At night he has nightmares and he spends the day trying to distract himself from his troubled thoughts. He has established close contact to one of the people who looks after him. This woman has tried to arrange therapy for Mussa. There has been one session so far. Mussa's guardian has not yet applied for asylum. Currently, Mussa has been given toleration status. He has been attending special needs classes for one month now (Förderklassen).

During the attacks, many children and young people witness the murder of their parents. In some cases the parents are killed because they resisted the kidnapping of their children:

... and the father did not want this and they have killed father and that hurt him so much. (Mussa, Senegal/Casamance)

During the attacks, families are torn apart. In most cases, this puts an end to any contact with surviving family members. Their fate, therefore, remains unclear:

They took me with them and my two sisters they took to one side. That was the last time that I have seen my sisters. (Mike, Sierra Leone)

One lad was recruited, together with other youths from his village, on his way home from school. Members of the military took another from his parent's house:

We were on the way home from school when troops of the MLC [Mouvement Libération Congolaise] have stopped us, these are rebels ... they stopped us. They have taken in all us boys who were a little bit older and have taken us with them and the girls that were also a little bit older, were raped before our eyes and they have been simply left. ... They have then ... in a car ... drove with us until their camp. And there, they have trained us to be soldiers. (Aimé, DRC)

In some countries, the forcible recruitment of children and youth is presented as some type of army service, which all young men have to follow:

... What someone said: "All young men must join in this war, we must fight." (Samson, Eritrea)

Voluntary recruitment

Two interviewees explained why they decided to voluntarily participate in an armed conflict. For one boy, it was primarily cultural reasons. As a thirteen year old, he joined the armed opposition with his friends in search of adventure:

I did it voluntarily. So we were at school, five people simply run away. ... I wanted to touch the weapons, simply shoot. ... To wear such soldiers' clothes. I wanted this too ... that's why I went there. (Mala, Sri Lanka)

The other boy lost his family during an attack on his village. He describes the feeling that nobody cared for him, so he sought protection with the military:

There (with the neighbours) I could always go and

come whenever I wanted, because they were not my parents. ... That's why I then said I have no parents any more and I have to protect myself and I have to go the military. I go to the military installation and I get military clothing, that's better than nothing. (Antonio, Angola)

Despite the fact that the boys signed up voluntarily, they were not allowed to leave again:

I thought about my mother and my sister or my father. Then I always cried. I said I want to go back. They said: "You cannot go back." Because if I go back then I will have problems with the soldiers. (Mala, Sri Lanka)

Escape from recruitment

Two of the interviewees described the attempt to escape forced recruitment:

There was a Talib, who went to my father when I was not at home. ... My father told me about it, that he came and said: "Why don't you send him to war against the Americans? He is big and old enough." (Dost, Afghanistan)

Out of fear of forcible recruitment, the family sent the boys abroad.

III. Life as a soldier

The interviewees described different daily routines and duties depending on the composition and structure of the armed group.

Daily routine

Three of them spoke of fixed daily routines. One boy was with the regular army, the second with an armed opposition group. Neither fought actively with weapons but were given support duties because of their age. The third one was in a training camp of the government forces

One gets up in the morning at four, then, I have to shower. We did not have a shower there, then we had to go to the lake. ... Then we had to run in groups. Then we had to gather wood to make breakfast. ... Sometimes I peeled potatoes (Antonio, Angola)

I had school, this first aid. I had this, the first time training, and then, after the training, ... some start with school until five o'clock. At five o'clock we had a break and at five thirty we start with sport and in the evening again we had school but politics (Mala, Sri Lanka)

Second Case Study:

Mike (18), Sierra Leone

Mike lived with his two parents and two sisters in a village in Sierra Leone. His father was a teacher. When Mike was 8 years old, rebels of the RUF Faction attacked his village. They came with heavy weaponry and forced the villagers out of their houses. His parents were killed before his eyes; Mike and his two sisters were abducted. Since this time, Mike has had no contact with them. Mike was abducted to a rebel camp where he received military training, the use of hand grenades and learned how to shoot. He was forced to participate in two deployments, one of which was a so-called operation "Pay Yourself". Contrary to the usual practice, the rebels that participated in this operation were allowed to keep all valuables they had looted for themselves. In addition Mike talks about how people were tortured. For example, he was a witness of people being thrown into barrels of hot oil. Mike stayed with the rebels for six years until, at the age of fourteen, he succeeded in escaping during combat. For several weeks he ran through the bush and finally managed to reach Guinea and its capital, Conakry. Several times he received assistance from strangers he met during his flight. In Conakry, he met a man, whom he paid money to in order to get on board a ship. Upon his arrival in Germany, Mike was fourteen years old. At the harbour, he met a man who took him to his current place of residence and to the foreigner's office (Ausländerbehörde). Mike has been living in Germany for four years. He has a guardian from a club with whom he has excellent contact. As Mike started to have frequent nightmares soon after his arrival, his guardian suggested to the youth magistrate (Jugendamt) that a therapy should be prescribed for Mike. For one year, Mike started a therapy, initially twice, later once a week. He says that he has had fewer nightmares since. Before his abduction in Sierra Leone, he had gone to school for four years. In Germany, he went to school (Hauptschule), which he successfully finished. Afterwards, he started to train as an electrician, which he has since given up. Today, he lives in an apartment belonging to the youth magistrate and earns money through various menial jobs. He spoke extensively of his experience as a child soldier during the asylum procedure. Nevertheless, his asylum application was denied. He possesses a residence permit. Mike had a girl friend with whom he has a child. He no longer lives together with the mother of this child but has expressed a desire to remain in Germany to look after the child. He describes his contact with the youth magistrate as excellent. He meets with his desk officer twice a year to assess plans for assistance. The closest relationship however remains to his guardian who helps with all official business and who supported him during his drug abuse trial and during the trial for the custody of his child.

The interviewees that were with rebel groups describe no fixed daily routine. The day was barely organized and depended on the next deployment:

We sleep on the bush, but there is no place where you can sleep. We have to make fire. ... They drink; sing every time ... Most of the time without sleep ... We have to go everywhere they go. (Hassan, Sierra Leone)

Duties

Some of the interviewees were used in supporting duties such as first aid, mechanics, kitchen aid or field work:

When I went there, they have started first to train us ... to help in the garage as car mechanic, sometimes to wash the car; ... wash guns. (Antonio, Angola)

When the children are older or stay longer, they are prepared for an active role:

Then they showed us also how to shoot and ... then we went by foot with the big military and did all the training. (Antonio, Angola)

The child soldiers are sent to fight and are always positioned on the front line:

The children always had to be at the front and the bosses all behind. ... Sometimes he (the commander) says OK, tomorrow I will ... have one, two or three towns, in this week we have to get something. (Daniel, Sierra Leone)

The training for fighting deployments differs in length: from six months in one training camp of the Government Forces to just a few days with rebel groups:

On the third day they have given us the weapons and after the sixth day we were taken to another ... group.

... Obviously we had to be trained very quickly because one needed urgently reinforcement ... in this town. (Aimé, DRC)

The youths that fought in rebel groups described their situation as one of extreme readiness. They were recruited and quickly trained to serve in an ongoing fight. They are the property of their commanders who use them to sabotage other troops or sell them to other warlords:

One man from Guinea wanted to make rebel in Guinea. ... Then he says, he wanted people from Sierra Leone, give from this rebel group and from Liberia to make war there. This boss says: "He gets money from this man, his people have to go there." By force, not when you like. (Daniel, Sierra Leone)

After deployment in active combat, the child soldiers in rebel groups have to supply necessary provisions as well as equipment through the confiscation of cars:

We have to find the people and collect their food and water that we have to eat. ... We have to bring the food this side to the bush ... to the rebel. (Hassan, Sierra Leone)

In areas where diamonds are found, rebel groups use child soldiers as armed guards¹⁶ to patrol workers or as slave labour:

I was there also working for diamonds for years and there are also rebels, they have guns and bombs. They tell us always we have to work with hands ... Day and night I have to do this, every day. When I say sometimes I am ill, he says that this does not work and I have to do this today. Without it, they give you hell. (Diko, Sierra Leone)

Rebel groups conduct operations known as "Pay Yourself" with utmost brutality. Soldiers attack a village and, contrary to the normal practice, are allowed to keep all valuables that they find for themselves. The people are butchered:

Somehow we went there. There was war with weapons boum, boum, boum, non-stop. Where we went in, ... the people all who were there, all were dead. There we looked everywhere. Some people were lucky ... we got a lot of money, diamonds, gold. We also got money, 1.500 Dollars. (Mike, Sierra Leone)

An operation such as this is intended to motivate and strengthen the morale of the troops. It is very popular with the soldiers because it provides an opportunity for

enrichment with no respect for the victims:

When he says, operation "Pay Yourself", even other rebels from other camps come because they heard we go to the operation "Pay Yourself". They are very happy about it. (Mike, Sierra Leone)

IV. Treatment as soldiers

The treatment of child soldiers varies depending on the type of armed conflict and armed force in which the children take part. The spectrum extends from schooling of children and youths with an armed opposition group to a simple functioning as a fighting machine, as explained above.

At first, the mechanism of subjugation and punishment is deemed essential and central for the armed unit that take on child soldiers. As the children do not normally join voluntarily and are not allowed to return to civilian life even if they did join voluntarily, an apparatus of forced measures exists that can reach a horrific level with some armed groups. It is important to be aware of the subjugation and punishment measures that constitute an integral part of the child soldier phenomenon. The way in which the wounded are treated, and the medical care in general, sheds further light on the treatment of human life in these groups. Treatment in captivity is another aspect of "being a soldier" in an armed conflict. The way in which captured enemy combatants are treated is a mirror image of the conflict.

Subjugation

In many rebel groups there exists a very rigid subjugation system. Immediately after recruitment it is made clear to the children that human life only has a value when it follows orders. Whoever refuses to obey, let alone tries to desert, will be punished by death:

(After they captured me), then he says: "You have to be together with us or we will kill you." ... Sometimes, when he captures a lot ... some children go away and then he captures him and he brings him back, he kills him. He goes and says: "Okay, when you go too, we kill you like that." Then you do not think about going, you know that if you go, he comes and then you are dead. (Daniel, Sierra Leone)

This system combines subjugation and punishment in one. It is heightened when the duty to kill the deserters is given to the newly recruited children:

He¹⁶ knew also three other boys from the village, ... they have played together. In the camp the rebels have told him he should kill one of the youth. His said: "No, he is a friend of mine, I cannot do this." Then, they have taken them and hit him on the head and they have killed the boys in front of him. (Mussa, Senegal/Casamance)

The free will of the youngsters is broken with the help of these measures. They have to function like machines. They feel completely controlled and describe themselves as "slaves":

We were completely subordinated by them. ... At every moment they could use us to whatever they wanted. We felt there like slaves. When someone ... was rebellious, stubborn, he was killed. They did not wait for long. (Aimé, DRC)

Even friendships could not withstand this system of subjugation:

It was ... all the people with whom we have lived together in the village, whom we already knew,However this did not help me at all, then we were all in the same situation. (Aimé, DRC)

Even friendships cannot withstand this system of subjugation:

It was ... all the people with whom we have lived together in the village, whom we already knew, ... However this did not help me at all, then we were all in the same situation. (Aimé, DRC)

Each youngster tries to endure the system on his own, hiding his real thoughts from the others:

We don't had to trust somebody because you don't know his mind. (Hassan, Sierra Leone)

Access to food is also exploited: because the child soldiers are at the bottom of the hierarchy, they are the last ones to receive food. The commander decides who is allowed to eat and when:

Many times there is no food. (When there was not much), the boss must eat it. The boss have to eat with a commander. ... Sometimes they give us food, we have to eat, sometimes they don't give us. (Hassan, Sierra Leone)

The system of subjugation described above is reinforced by the attempt to establish a collective identity, in this case through the singing of hymns of praise about the rebel leader:

... Always singing, singing ...: "Foday Sankoh is our president and Kabbah is a bad president, must go away, ... Kabbah is dead". (Diko, Sierra Leone)

Third Case Study:

Hassan (17), Sierra Leone

Since the death of his parents, Hassan lived together with his sister in his uncle's house. He went to school for three years. When he was fourteen years old, rebels attacked his hometown. There were about one hundred who came into town with two vehicles that were slightly smaller than trucks. Hassan was separated from his sister during the attack. Since this time, Hassan has not seen his sister again. The rebels took him with them into the bush. Because he resisted their orders, he was stabbed and cut on his legs. The scars are still visible. He said that a lot of alcohol was consumed and that he often did not eat for days. After approximately six months he succeeded in escaping. He ran along the streets and at night slept in the bush. At some stages he got a ride in a vehicle. He found shelter with a man who hid him from rebels who were looking for him. This man helped him to reach a ship and to leave Sierra Leone. Upon his arrival in Germany, Hassan was fifteen years old. In Germany, he met a man who gave him food and money and who took him to the next larger town to the foreigners' office. Hassan was admitted to a children's home. Afterwards, he lived in a youth home in the province where his psychological situation deteriorated as he kept thinking about his sister's destiny. After eight months, he was transferred to a residence for adults where he established close contact to a social worker whom he also told about his past. The social worker helped him to find a school place. Since then, Hassan has taken language classes on a regular basis and has established a circle of friends from different countries. A German youth visits him on a regular basis and invites him home. When Hassan is sad, he retreats to his room and drinks alcohol. Each Saturday, he receives a visit from the Jehovah's Witnesses, who read the Bible with him and other youths. Religion gives Hassan some stability.

¹⁶ The interviewee chose to describe his experiences in the 3rd person throughout.

Many of the youngsters speak of having been given drugs to control their hunger as well as to get them to fight without thinking. Conscience kicks in later and they experience severe guilt feelings, once the effect of the drugs disappears. The drugs are smoked or taken with meals:

At the moment when I am high, ... when you take for instance this gunpowder, you do not think about food, or about rice Because at that moment I do what comes into my head about some people (and) I break something. But later, when I am normal and then I think, shit, but I did it. (Daniel, Sierra Leone)

You are not afraid about anything; you are ready to do anything. (Aimé, DRC)

I only hear what our bosses are saying to us: "shoot, shoot, shoot." ... (Diko, Sierra Leone)

In addition, there are mystical ceremonies. One youth tells of a ten centimetre long needle that was put into his arm:

They also used fetishes, ... such fetish procedures at night and they have put a needle into our arm. This needle ... was somehow talked about or treated in a

magical way that one stays strong and keeps going. (Aimé, DRC)

Those lads who have served with government forces, as well as one who joined an armed opposition group, do not mention systematic subjugation such as that outlined above.

Punishment

It is important - albeit not always clear – to distinguish between routine military treatment and special punishments. One youth who was trained in a government forces camp, talks about punishment after having publicly requested to be discharged from the camp. His resistance was broken after having spent four days in prison:

Young men are there, we spoke to each other at night, that we don't like him, ... why they do this with us like that. And so on we have thought about, that we don't participate. ... The next day, we said that we don't continue, ... because we are still children, and then they punished us. Once (I) cried, I also said that they should release me, I participate, ... because it was boring and I could not take it anymore. (Samson, Eritrea)

Fourth Case Study:

Mala (22), Sri Lanka

Mala is a Tamil and lived with his parents, a brother and two sisters in a town in Sri Lanka. At the age of twelve, he ran away from school together with five school friends to the military camp of the LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam) to become a volunteer. Mala did not invoke political reasons for volunteering, but a desire for adventure: he wanted to touch weapons, to shoot and to wear a military uniform. At the beginning, Mala and the other children received school teaching and were trained in first aid. He did not receive weapons training. During his one and a half year service with the LTTE, his duties consisted of looking after the wounded in the camp and first aid for the wounded in the field. During one of his deployments, a bomb fragment hit him. He was admitted to the hospital where he recovered within a few weeks. Afterwards, he was again sent to the frontline. During a military operation, he had a car accident, which resulted in severe lung injuries. He was again admitted to hospital where he remained for two months. His parents came to visit him. As he could not be used in action due to his injuries, he was allowed back to his parent's house for a short time, where his mother was supposed to look after him. In order to prevent him from being recruited again and as the police was already looking for him, his parents took him to the capital, Colombo. For fifteen thousand dollars, a colleague of his uncle organized a passport as well as his passage to Germany. Mala was fourteen years old when he arrived in Germany. He was admitted to a youth home. For the first year, Mala attended the preparatory class of the school of this home and later, successfully concluded training as a painter. Today, he works as a painter for a social institution. He established very good contact with the person looking after him who provided him with orientation and support. Upon recommendation of his compatriots, Mala did not mention the fact that he was a child soldier for the LTTE during his asylum procedure. He says that he had problems in giving exact dates during the hearing. His asylum application was rejected and Mala possesses toleration status. Mala lives alone in a private apartment.

As already mentioned, children are often severely abused or even killed if rebel forces recruit them:

After they took us to the bush, ... I told them, that I'm going back. So they said to me I have to stay there. ... So I was stubborn, mug me with knife, they plug a tree, to wipe us in the bush. (Hassan, Sierra Leone)

They hit him (Mussa) the head, they have taken a knife and cut here. They have treated him (Mussa) very badly. Really hit and very injured. (Mussa, Senegal/Casamance)

Injury and medical care

Two youngsters talked about severe injuries that they sustained in an accident during combat:

After the accident, ... I could not breath, I can ... not talk. They have simply thought I am dead. ... Later, they have seen that I am still alive. Then they took me into hospital. (Mala, Sri Lanka)

The quality of medical care in hospitals differs greatly and depends on the available resources and the state of the armed conflict:

The hospital was not well organized. There were not enough drugs. This is why the treatment did not last long. (Aimé, DRC)

Nevertheless, this lad was not allowed to recuperate at home with his family:

I felt very bad. The fight was in June and in July my uncle knew what was happening with me. He came. He asked the commander if he could not take me with him to his home village, that I could be looked after there and treated and afterwards I would return to the troop. But the commander did not want to. (Aimé, DRC)

Another boy, however, did receive permission from the commander of the armed opposition group to recuperate with his parents after a severe injury:

Because I cannot do this any more, fighting or so, or carry so heavy things or so, when I carry heavy things or I run, I get blood on my mouth. They say: "When you are healthy again, you return." (Mala, Sri Lanka)

Treatment during captivity

Government forces captured two boys who fought in rebel groups. Despite the fact that they were children, they were treated like grown-up soldiers, which means as criminals or terrorists. They talk about having been mistreated, tortured and threatened with death during the interrogation:

The policeman ... took him (Mussa) in a room in which it was dark, no light. They tied his both hands and really hit him and there, he has injuries on his leg and here (points to his stomach). (Mussa, Senegal/Casamance)

Now he has arrested me. Today I have to die ... I begged, because they have held me so long, beat me, question me ... and it was so hot. I am thirsty ... I asked them for water, to give me to drink. I asked many, many times and I did not get any water. One soldier comes with a cup and put water on the top of my head. Water comes I open my mouth to open the water. It does not work, because the water comes from my head and then goes into the earth. ... Some of the soldiers say they cut off my head, cut off my arms and my feet. (Diko, Sierra Leone)

The injuries that they received during captivity are still clearly visible and affect them even now.

V. Experiences as soldiers

In addition to their experiences as child soldiers, their accounts are dominated by their own conduct as soldiers. Trapped in an environment in which the "law of the jungle" dominates, the youths are expected to act accordingly with no apparent alternatives for their actions. They describe their experiences during the fighting, but also their own activities and express their emotional reaction, and their ways of dealing with these experiences.

Experience in conflict

Besides their own experience of fighting, they also experience the death of other soldiers, friends and acquaintances:

They were hit and here he was cut and all his inner organs were outside. Yes, and then I went there till he was dead. ... He was a friend of mine. I knew him well. We went to the same church. (Antonio, Angola)

One youth describes in detail how torture and ill-treatment of the civilian population was a part of the daily war routines of the rebel groups:

Something like a (barrel) is filled up with very hot oil and then they threw the people inside. (Mike, Sierra Leone)

Personal activities

Some of the interviewees who fought for longer

periods in a rebel group, talk about their own activities, both the role of perpetrator, which they fulfilled, and the role of victim. These activities continue to haunt them, they experience them repeatedly in their thoughts and dreams:

I remember in particular a family that I have killed. It was said that the father of the family is a traitor. Then I have killed the father. There we have killed the father, the mother and the children. (Aimé, DRC)

And when come the attack soldiers, we have to shoot ... because we want to have this town and we had to go into every house, we broke every door. When we tried, the door does not break, we had to shoot bombs and

grenades to break the door. When we go in we don't have to look how this is, older people or children. We have to shoot ... we kill all the people. ... Sometimes we take knife and cut the hands or the head off of children or women. (Diko, Sierra Leone)

VI. Self-image of the child soldiers

The self-image of child-soldiers is very differentiated. The feeling of loss is predominant. In concrete terms, most have lost their family or their last family members by the time of recruitment (see above). One boy, who as an orphan had joined voluntarily was looking to the military as a substitute family:

Fifth Case Study:

Antonio (29), Angola

Antonio was eleven years old when the village in which he and his family lived was destroyed. When he returned home from school, he saw that his parent's house was no longer standing and he learned that his parents and his three brothers and sisters had been killed during the attack. For three weeks he lived with the neighbour. However he felt neglected and decided to move into the nearby military camp of the Government Forces. He met many boys there whom he knew who also had lost their parents. He explains his decision to move to the camp in that he was allowed to play football and that he was given new clothes. His duties in the military camp were of a menial nature in the garage as well as cleaning guns, collecting wood, helping in the kitchen and selling weapons to civilians. He also received military training and learned how to shoot. Later, he had to accompany car convoys that brought supplies from the capital to the troops in the north. He saw active fighting for the first time during a rebel attack on this convoy. During this fight, a good friend of his was killed and Antonio to this day has visions of this friend lying heavily wounded before him. After this experience he became scared of further fighting and started to question his decision. After having been with the armed forces for five years, Antonio met a priest who took him to Luanda. There, Antonio met a former party friend of his father's, who organized an escape out of the country for him. With this man, his wife and their three children he flew to France and continued on his own to Poland from where he took a train to Berlin. In 1991 Antonio entered Germany. He was sixteen years old at the time. He lived in different places, among them in a home that was sixteen kilometres away from the next town and where social contact outside the institution was reduced to a minimum. Most of the time he was the only youth in a group of adult compatriots. Antonio tells about many bad experiences in these years. At the end of 1991, someone threatened him with a weapon. The police officers that were called to help disarmed this man but did not charge him. The desk officer of the competent social magistrate sent him to a veterinary doctor. Antonio became engaged politically in refugee initiatives and at a parliamentary talk "Youth in Parliament". Antonio is jobless. He says that as an uneducated person, he has no chance in the labour market. In addition he has financial problems because he has rent debts. He has received neither unemployment benefits nor social benefits. In 1991, Antonio applied for asylum. He mistrusted the German authorities, which is why he did not mention his past as a child soldier upon the recommendation of some compatriots. The application was denied and he filed a complaint. Until the final rejection in 1995, he only possessed a certification of border crossing (Grenzübertrittsbescheinigung). From 1996 until 2001 he received toleration status that was later converted into a residence permit. Antonio describes himself as depressed and talks about his inability to come to terms with his past. He would like to start a therapy. He does not see a future for himself either in Germany or in Angola.

You go to the house of one of the bosses, then you sleep in his house. His wife is there, his children are there. Sometimes there was such an opportunity. One has found a place somehow. ... (Antonio, Angola)

This is used by some leaders, who present themselves as fathers to “their” child-soldiers:

Foday Sankoh says sometimes: “The soldiers are all my children.” (Mike, Sierra Leone)

The youngsters interviewed have the sense of having lost their childhood in war, of having been robbed of their childhood. They could not develop their own identity:

I am somebody that lost in the war, really, because I don’t know anything. (Hassan, Sierra Leone)

Because they were deprived of education, they were also robbed of their chances to develop their own capabilities, to decide their own future:

Why our children or sons go to the military or to war despite only being children? ... They are young, fifteen, sixteen. ... They have to go to school first. They have to do now something for themselves, work or something else. The Taliban are not interested in this. They need people to fight. (Hamed, Afghanistan)

Most of the interviewees had no knowledge of the background of the conflict when they joined the armed troops, whether voluntarily or forcibly recruited. They described themselves as childishly unknowing:

Shit, I know nothing at all (in this age) you cannot know everything. Why they fight and so on. Now I know, why they fight ... previously I didn’t know. (Mala, Sri Lanka, 12 at the time of recruitment)

The weapons with which the child soldiers fight are so small and light, that the interviewees could carry and use them without problems. For children that have been forcibly recruited at a young age, this is the only world they know:

I was so little, I don’t know, this is bad or not. ... I believe in Sierra Leone one is allowed to shoot, kill, take a knife, cut arms, legs or head. (Diko, Sierra Leone, 7 at the time of recruitment)

Only much later do they succeed in separating themselves from this identification and understand how they have been abused (see below). For the older children, it appears that the feelings of abuse and exploitation surface earlier:

One interviewee describes the treatment of child soldiers as that of slaves (see above) and their function as fighting machines and cannon fodder:

They had a special technique. They have put children and youth always into the first row, then behind, were the heavy weapons, the artillery and so on. When they shot at the enemy, ... this went therefore over the first rows, then this created confusion with the enemy and in this confusion the child-soldiers from the first row attacked. ... The only duty was to fight them. (Aimé, DRC)

On the other hand, most of the interviewees see themselves not only as victims, but also as perpetrators with strong feelings of guilt. One interviewee differentiates between refugees and rebels, by describing the first as victims that were helped by international organizations and were taken to safety, and the others as perpetrators, who did not receive this support. In one or another form, all the youngsters asked themselves questions about their individual guilt, as explored further in Chapter XI, Rehabilitation. Those who were perpetrators explain that if they had not killed others, they would have been killed themselves:

It was very bad. ... I don’t want this, but I have to do it. When I don’t do this, then they kill me. (Diko, Sierra Leone)

One youngster describes his feelings shortly after being recruited, when he became aware of what he would have to face:

Already on the second day they have given us a weapon, ... there it has started, that I felt really bad, physically and mentally, because I knew when I have such a weapon, this means death and dying. (Aimé, DRC)

Others, who were not involved in fighting intensively, describe typically childish reactions:

And I have cried there, why I am here (with the armed opposition), if I would be with my mother, when I am hungry, then she gives me food immediately. When I am here (with the armed opposition) and hungry, I don’t receive food. (Mala, Sri Lanka)

The majority of interviewees have suffered severe physical damage during their time as child soldiers - a visible sign - to which must be added the invisible psychological damage. Some of the interviewees are in a similar physical condition to old men:

I have many injuries from war and terrible work with diamonds ... many years. Everywhere my body is ruined. (Diko, Sierra Leone)

VII. Desertion of the group

In the final analysis, all interviewees managed to flee from their units, which in a military context would be termed desertion. None of them were officially released from military service, even though some of them mentioned the peace negotiations that were being conducted at the time of their desertion. In ongoing conflicts, there is little hope of release. Military service ends for members of rebel groups either with capture by government forces or by desertion or injury which renders further deployment for fighting impossible. Two of the interviewees succeeded in fleeing whilst being injured. One of them escaped

from the hospital with the help of his uncle, the other one was recuperating at home with his family.

Four of the interviewees escaped during heavy fighting, in which their unit was dispersed and there were many dead and injured. They were able to utilise a situation of dissolution of military order. One of the interviewees mentions that a priest encouraged him to escape and helped him to safety. Another escaped from police captivity and a further interviewee succeeded in escaping from a government forces' training camp. Desertion, however, is only the first step. Afterwards it is necessary for the youngster, who is still recognisable as a soldier, to find a safe place to which he can escape. The interviewees describe their escape as long "wanderings" through the bush:

I run a road, sometimes I sleep in the bush ... I had to go very long. With the streets we have in Sierra Leone,

Sixth Case Study:

Aimé (20), Democratic Republic of the Congo

Aimé was born in the DRC in the Province of Equateur. He lived there until his twelfth year with his parents and his younger brother. After his father left the family and went to Germany, Aimé moved together with his mother and brother to Congo Brazzaville. However, he returned to Equateur two weeks later where he lived with his uncle and went back to school. At the age of seventeen, rebels of the MLC (Mouvement Libération Congolaise) stopped him on his way back from school. They took the older youths with them and raped the girls. Aimé and the other youths were taken to a rebel camp in trucks. Training with weapons started on the second day. After six days, the youths had received very basic training and were allocated to the units. They were sent into combat immediately. In a nearby town, rebel groups were under heavy attack by the regular army and required urgent reinforcement. Aimé was a child soldier for one year and two months. They gave him drugs and placed a fetish-needle in his arm to strengthen his fighting force. During a retreat from a fight, the truck Aimé and his comrades were in was involved in an accident. The accident resulted in many deaths and Aimé was severely injured. He was taken to a hospital that was occupied by the rebels. There was insufficient medication and the treatment did not work. Months later, he was visited by his uncle who asked the commander to be allowed to take him back home to look after him. The commander did not allow this. A few months later, his uncle managed his escape to Congo Brazzaville and his mother. There he was admitted to a hospital. His uncle had organized further travel to his father. He accompanied him as far as Frankfurt. He was eighteen years old when he entered Germany. Initially, he was not allowed to stay with his father despite the fact that his father had German citizenship. Aimé, however, did not have documents with him to prove that he was his son. He was sent to a refugee reception camp where he was treated by a doctor for the injuries from the accident and his escape. Aimé has a permanent sleeping disorder. He has nightmares and often awakes at night. Since the doctor removed the needle from his arm, he feels better. Nevertheless he still has health problems, among others hepatitis. His asylum hearing took place one and a half years ago and he is still awaiting a decision. He gave a detailed account about his experiences as a child soldier during this hearing, and his psychological condition was recorded in a psychological statement. Aimé has attended several German courses and is now in an apprenticeship. Once the decision of the asylum office is known and if his residence status permits it, he would like to begin training as a car mechanic.

we fight to the roads, so I was in the bush for this.
(Hassan, Sierra Leone)

They have to run away from the group that they left and often they are looked for. In addition, they cannot fall into the hands of government forces. They need support, people who give them shelter, water and food. But often, they spread fear and terror. Like a banished person, they have to ask for help:

Many people saw me. I have my gun and my clothes. ... I stink and I was just like an animal. All people who see me with my gun. They are afraid. They think this is a rebel or something like that. When I called to many people, I said: "Okay, now (we are all) the same. I don't kill a man. I run away, I am afraid of death. I don't do anything". (Diko, Sierra Leone)

Even in their home villages they are not accepted, because the family has been driven away and many of the people who are now living in the village no longer know them:

And when I go back there ... this people in the square say: "You are a rebel." I say: "No, yes, I am, but you know that I used to live here." And he says: "We do not know you." (Daniel, Sierra Leone)

The people in the villages are afraid of rebel attacks should it become known that they have hidden a former rebel. The uncle of one severely injured lad prepared his escape:

And when we were there where my uncle lived, my uncle had already done the preparations and then we took a motorboat and we drove on the River Congo until Congo-Brazzaville and there was my mother. (Aimé, DRC)

VIII. Flight to Germany

Desertion or fleeing from forcible recruitment leads to a situation in which the interviewees feel persecuted in their home country. The only possibility of escape from this persecution appears to be for them to go abroad. The country of exile is Germany.

Route to Germany

The interviewees managed to reach the coast or airport in different ways. Also the ways in which they acquired the papers and visas needed for entry into Germany via aeroplane differed. In most cases, according to them, an acquaintance or an uncle undertook this job for them.

Five of the interviewees describe having travelled to Germany by ship as stowaways. Five came by aeroplane via Frankfurt Airport and one flew to Poland and entered Germany by taking the train to Berlin. The costs of their escape are only mentioned by three of the youths:

Has paid about 7 or 6 thousand dollars. (Hamed, Afghanistan)

Hopes and fears

Most of the interviewees say that they did not know where their flight would take them. Someone had taken them on board or had organized the necessary papers for their flight without informing them of the destination: *Then he put me into a ship and then I moved from there, but I am not thinking about Germany, first I think about African country, maybe in Algeria. But when I take there long time, ... I think, well, I am not to an African country, ... but I am not thinking about Germany.* (Daniel, Sierra Leone)

Some of the interviewees believed that they had left their country only temporarily and would return soon: *But he says only: "We go to another town and there we stay a few weeks, then we go back home."* (Antonio, Angola)

In contrast to a voluntary return, one interviewee talks about the anxiety of being forced to return, because the country of exile would not accept him:

I only wanted to stay there (in Germany). Then I said to myself, maybe it doesn't work and then I have (imagined) that I am back in six months. (Samson, Eritrea)

Three interviewees were aware that they would meet family members in the country of exile. That is why they felt courage and optimism despite their fear and insecurity:

I was looking forward to seeing my brother. I did not know how this travel would end or how it would look like. (Dost, Afghanistan)

Most of these former child soldiers found themselves fixated on their experiences and their past:

In the first time, what I think, ... maybe they are going to send me to another place again to go on fight. (Daniel, Sierra Leone)

Their only wish was to leave war and fighting behind and to find a minimum of security:

My wishes were, that I would get out of this war.
(Mike, Sierra Leone)

I was thinking maybe we make it to a placement; my life is going to be secure there. (Hassan, Sierra Leone)

One youth was hoping for a chance to find his lost sister or to be able to get into contact with her again:
I think my next place, that's maybe I can be good. ... Maybe I can be good to bring for my sister and we'll having contact. (Hassan, Sierra Leone)

The interviewees who fled from forced recruitment expressed more concrete hopes and desires with regard to their future in the country of exile:
Firstly school, to study, when I can do it, education, having a reasonable job, ... build something for yourself, build your future. (Hamed, Afghanistan)

IX. Former child-soldiers in the asylum procedure

Apart from one, all interviewees applied for asylum upon their arrival in Germany. At the time of the interview, one youth had been in Germany for six months. Owing to the bad psychological condition of this youth, his guardian had not yet applied for asylum. At the time of the interview another guardian had submitted the application of one of the youngsters; however, he was still waiting for the hearing at the asylum office. One interviewee had completed the hearing and was waiting for the decision. The applications of all the interviewees were rejected by the Federal Asylum Office as “unfounded”. Most of the youngsters have difficulties in understanding the background of the asylum procedure. They acquire their knowledge of the procedure from their carer, guardian, or from compatriots:

... When you come from another country, but I don't know, in my country that does not exist. But you come to another country, the people (need to know where from) you come. (Daniel, Sierra Leone)

They receive advice from these groups of people as to how they should behave, what questions they will face and what is important during the hearing:
We have these papers from this Federal Office, what the question comes. And then, my guardian took this and then she says with me, what ... you do like that, you say. And then, I say what (has happened). (Daniel, Sierra Leone)

Nevertheless, they were often not aware of the conduct of the procedure. They do not know who takes a decision and on what criteria it is based:

When I do an interview and then he says: “Yes”, my interview that is right. Then I have toleration. (Daniel, Sierra Leone)

I believe they did not believe me If he would have believed me, then I receive a visa. Maybe the man, who questioned me, believes, but the boss, he ... does not believe me. (Hamed, Afghanistan)

After the hearing, it is often not clear to the youths what the next steps will be. One was afraid of being sent home in the aftermath of the hearing:
Yes, I was afraid that he says maybe: “Now you have to go back.” Then I said to myself: “Take a few things with you, also my walkman.” (Samson, Eritrea)

One lad waited three years for a decision regarding his asylum application. During the course of the time, his hopes grew:
“Maybe they have forgotten me”. (Samson, Eritrea)

It emerged that some of the interviewees did not present, or did not present in an adequate way, their experiences as child soldiers. This is problematic. The interviewees said that they were given bad advice from compatriots:
“(During my) asylum application, I also did not say ..., but I did not know. This is why I am not recognized. At the beginning here ... the boys said: “If you were (with the LTTE) when you say, yes, they send you to Sri Lanka immediately.” (Mala, Sri Lanka)

In addition, one of the interviewees explains that he had no trust in the sole decision-maker and the procedure. That is why he kept quiet about having been a child soldier:
(One colleague from the home has) said: “Do not say, when they ask you, if you were child soldier, because it could be, they sell this information to the (Angolan) Government”. (Antonio, Angola)

Another describes how he was over-challenged by the requirements that were placed on his presentation about his reasons for escaping and the escape route:
I have always (told) and they have asked again, when was that really, the date. I could not do this, the date. I don't know, when I escaped, when I came to Colombo in J. I have simply said a date. Then they always asked again, I have forgotten ... this date. If it is true,

Seventh Case Study:

Diko (17), Sierra Leone

Diko lived with his parents and his younger brother in a town in Sierra Leone close to the Liberian border. When he was seven years old, rebels of the RUF attacked his hometown. Initially, he sought protection with his parents and brother in a mosque; later they fled to a neighbouring quarter where they hid in a hospital. Diko was shot in the head and severely injured during the flight. As the rebels approached this place of refuge, they ran away to another town. However the rebels also attacked this town. During this attack many people were killed, among them Diko's parents and brother. The rebels took Diko with them into their camp in the forest. Diko stayed with the rebels for eight years. Diko talks about torture methods and other forced measures against the abducted, who refused to obey. Diko received military training; he learned to shoot and to use hand-grenades. Sometimes he was sent to fight; sometimes he was sent to work in the diamond mines. He describes how he and his comrades cut off the heads or the hands of women and children. During many such deployments, they acted under the influence of drugs that had been mixed into their food. Diko was arrested during an attack by Government troops. He was interrogated and under severe mistreatment and torture gave away military details. His life was saved because the rebels recaptured the town, however his commander ordered him killed, because of treason. Diko ran away into the forest with his gun and planned to kill himself rather than to be subjected to mistreatment again. He lived in the bush for a few months and hunted animals for food. He managed to reach the coast where he finally found a ship and where he told his story to the crew. Diko travelled to Germany with this ship. He was fifteen years old at the time. When he reached his current place of residence, people took him to a youth home. Diko was given a private guardian who looked after him intensively. Due to his serious sleeping disorder and nightmares, he has been in therapy for three years. His psychological condition is slowly improving. Since Diko had only attended the Koranic School in Sierra Leone, he started basic reading and writing classes. He attended comprehensive school for two years, however he was forced to stop. He was admitted to a professional qualification project where he did two internships as a cook in a restaurant. The owner of the restaurant is offering him a training place. Currently he is waiting for his work permit. After having had his asylum application rejected, Diko was granted toleration status. He was unable to influence this decision despite the photographs of his injuries that he subsequently submitted.

then I have it in my head. So it is not true. They have thought I lie. (Mala, Sri Lanka)

X. Coping with insecure status

In addition to a subjective feeling of integration, gaining residence status is an important factor in the well-being of the youths. Social integration, therefore, depends to a large extent on gaining residence status. Of those youths who are still in the asylum procedure, one has a border crossing certification and two have residence permits. Two of the other interviewees possess a residence permit - one received this through the "old cases regulation" (Altfallregelung). Five youths possess "toleration" status (that is, temporary leave to remain). Amongst them is also the one who has not yet applied for asylum. At this juncture it is important to point out that the residence permit

depends on the outcome of the asylum procedure. The Department for Foreigners (Ausländerbehörde) can, in its own capacity, decide on the presence of expulsion obstacles even when the asylum decision is negative. Most of the interviewees are not satisfied with their current status, which for most of them is "toleration". They are quite aware of what their status allows: *What I have at the moment, is called toleration (...) a halting of expulsion in brackets toleration, this means, I am not allowed to leave Hamburg, I cannot do education, I am not allowed (full-time) work. For instance, when the government says sometimes in Afghanistan there is a good situation, they simply expel us to Afghanistan. This is toleration.* (Hamed, Afghanistan)

Therefore toleration status means the limitation of freedom of action and freedom of movement, but also insecurity regarding the future:

I was in prison also in Afghanistan. Here, I also feel like I am in prison. (Hamed, Afghanistan)

It is the same war, there in Angola we have weapons war and here we have a moral war. They ruin our soul when they say you are not allowed to leave Berlin. (Antonio, Angola)

These youngsters describe their situation as segregated. They are not allowed to travel with friends, they are not allowed to get a driving licence, and they are excluded from parts of the education system and from the labour market. The permanently short deadlines within which they have to register with the Department for Foreigners are felt to be a deliberate burden that is placed on them: *I do not understand why they do us every three months, could also do one year or six months. Every three months, then I have to go back.* (Samson, Eritrea)

For some of the youths, in the insecurity about the future the terrible memories of the past re-emerge: *Then my colleagues say: "Hey, you go to Sierra Leone." Then I think a lot about what I do there, what has happened.* (Daniel, Sierra Leone)

Only one lad expresses satisfaction with his papers and describes how thanks to them, he experiences a certain degree of freedom:

With this paper I can live here. I can come and go. When I have this with me, police says nothing to me. When they ask me for it, I show it. And then they leave me in peace. (Dost, Afghanistan)

Two of them talk about deliberate obstructive practices on the part of the Foreigners Office. At their first registration, the desk officers did not believe that they were the age they said they were. An older age was put down and the youths were supposed to be sent to a different province, or be put into accommodation for adults. After a lengthy dispute, the age of the youths was confirmed by an age study and a birth certificate. The youngsters are already insecure about what they have to expect here, after such experiences their anxiety increases:

I do not go on my own. When I go, I take my carer with me, or some other German. What they have done with me, this is why I really am scared. (Hamed, Afghanistan)

All the interviewees express a wish for a secure entitlement to residency. This would make them

independent from other people and from their past: *I want to get my good papers and I want to again stay here, one more time education, get my profession. I want to receive these answers.* (Diko, Sierra Leone)

XI. Rehabilitation

Next to the residency status, rehabilitation is the central problem for former child-soldiers.

Physical and emotional well-being

The physical and emotional well-being of child soldiers after their arrival in exile is not only characterized by the experiences of active participation in a conflict, but also through the way in which they were treated by the party to the armed conflict at the time of recruitment and afterwards. The children and youths were abused physically and psychologically in order to ensure subordination and that orders would be carried out. The often violent loss of family and the memory of their own violent acts are also contributory factors. One must not underestimate the degree to which the insecurity surrounding their residency status in the country of exile, Germany, contributes to the worsening of their emotional well-being. Some of the interviewees talk about injuries and illnesses that they received during the fighting or through torture and mistreatment, and which affect them to this day:

With the prostate it is not yet gone, and also at the side where I got hit, this is not yet completely gone, but I already feel better. Sometimes my nerves hurt, but I am sure that this comes from this (fetish) needle. When this was removed, it was totally black and was also rusty. ... The doctor told me: "It is likely that your hepatitis can be traced back to this needle." (Aimé, DRC)

One lad describes how he feels ashamed of his destroyed body. He considers the traces that the war has left on his body as stigmata, which will always make him into an outsider and will not let him forget his past:

I also want to go with some boys swimming and so on, but I went twice with lots of boys swimming. But when they saw my body, everything injured, bad ... my body was not like the others and all were laughing, asks me. I have told them why ... I don't want to be like that. It comes from the war. (Diko, Sierra Leone)

The physical ill-treatment experienced during war has disturbed the natural balance of the youths' bodies.

One of them says that he feels ill despite his doctor having confirmed that he is healthy:

I can't believe, I asked him one or three times: "Are you sure that I am healthy?" Said: "Yes, you are healthy. There are no problems with you." (Hassan, Sierra Leone)

Trauma and recovery

The traumatic experiences of the child soldiers have been related above. However, the insecure perspective of residence or threatened expulsion also represents an additional traumatic experience. The youngsters talk about different symptoms such as sleeping disorders, waves of aggression, concentration difficulties, constantly recurring nightmares, lack of a sense of self-worth and depressions:

I often dream of my father, how they have killed him. ... And when I get up in the morning, I feel so heavy, and then I am totally confused. Sometimes I go, get my breakfast and look at the food. But I cannot eat because I am not hungry any more. (Mussa, Senegal/Casamance)

I cannot get clear with myself, because I do not know compassion, I do not feel any more. I do not feel pain. I am now used to it. I accept everything, (what) is being done with me. I cannot react any more. (Antonio, Angola)

The loss of family, or being separated from the family, represents for all them an important factor. As already mentioned, most of the youngsters lost contact with their families during recruitment or experienced the murder of one or more of their family members. They describe over and over again their loneliness and their longing for their family:

I (did not know any) people, there is no family, and I am alone at home. Always thinking about my sister. (Hassan, Sierra Leone)

One lad described his attempt to bring his family back by starting a new family:

I would have wished that I could come with my parents. Back then, I even wished that I could have someone, my father or mother, but I did not have this. ... When I was young, then I had a girlfriend, start a little family. There we had a child, because I simply wanted to have a family. I think sometimes when we have a family, maybe I feel a little bit better, like my parents. (Mike, Sierra Leone)

Even those whose family is still alive, describe how painful the separation is:

At the beginning, I wanted to go back to Sri Lanka. I cried every day; I wanted to see my mother. (Mala, Sri Lanka)

They experience guilt towards their parents who had to pay a lot of money to allow their children to flee to Germany. They are under pressure because they believe that their parents expect them to achieve something:

My father used to have three trucks and then he sold two trucks. For me, for a better life. ... My parents have done a lot for me ... This is why I had the goal to go to school again here and to get education or something. (Mala, Sri Lanka)

They have developed different strategies to deal with their memories and feelings of guilt. Some of them look for justification for what they have done. They explain that they were forced and that they tried to save their lives:

Mostly I think about the bad time, what one did there, which was not so cool. Although, it is not one's fault. (Mike, Sierra Leone)

This is where I tried to defend myself. ... Someone forced me to do it. (Daniel, Sierra Leone)

I did not do so badly, I saved the people. This is why I do not have such great guilt. I do not have. (Mala, Sri Lanka)

One lad repeats what has happened over and over again like a mantra:

I wanted to continue, because I can continue to tell for many thousand years, not finished, because I have seen a lot. (Diko, Sierra Leone)

Others are ashamed to talk about their time as child soldiers:

I do not tell everybody, because I am embarrassed to say this. (Samson, Eritrea)

One interviewee mentions the indescribable and incomprehensible elements of his experience, which he cannot put into words:

I do not talk about this. I cannot talk about this, then one has to have experienced it, ... how the children suffer, when they are soldiers. ... They are kept like slaves and I do not want to talk about this. (Aimé, DRC)

Another describes himself as being without identity; he thinks that he is going mad:

I am living like somebody that's lost in the war. I go alone sometimes, I talk like a mad man, like somebody, that's crazy sometimes. (Hassan, Sierra Leone)

In this lack of orientation, belief provides a certain framework for some of the youths:

It's a God's work. Many people don't think that I am alive today. (Hassan, Sierra Leone)

They try in different ways to distract themselves:

I like to work, because when I work, ... I forget a lot, the problem. I concentrate then on everything, what they tell me there. I do everything okay. I do not think so much, but when I stay alone, I always dream bad and think, what has happened in my country or about my parents or about my situation. (Diko, Sierra Leone)

Sometimes I have been in my room, I will go to buy beer, we drink or sleep. So I forget about it. (Hassan, Sierra Leone)

Owing to their insecure residence status, the interviewees do not find peace. As long as they fear expulsion, they cannot deal with and overcome their traumatic experiences:

Now I am always afraid, because one ... foot now is in Sierra Leone, one (foot) is here. But I want my (feet) all to be here. Because when I know that I am allowed to do my education, I can stay here, then I know that I am here. Then I can forget everything. (Diko, Sierra Leone)

Four of the interviewees are, or have been, in therapy. The therapy was recommended to these youths by their carers or collaborators at the Youth Office (Jugendamt):

Eighth Case Study:

Daniel (15), Sierra Leone

Daniel was eleven years old when RUF rebels attacked his home village. He succeeded in fleeing to a neighbouring village, where he was forced to participate in the civilian defence. He lost his parents during the flight and until today, does not know what has become of them. For more than six months as part of the civilian defence, he guarded the entrance to the village, until the RUF also attacked this village. This time he was captured and, like all the other youths, was forced to join the RUF. He describes the repression and forced measures meted out as an example to those youth who tried to flee or to resist orders. Subsequently, he fought with the rebel troops in Sierra Leone and also in Guinea. His unit was sent into the neighbouring country to support the rebel groups there against the Government. Half of his unit was killed in these fights. The unit then retreated to Sierra Leone. Afterwards, it was his duty to supervise the diamond mining in the east of the country, which civilians were forced to do. Daniel describes how the child soldiers smoked a drug called "Gun Powder" before combat in order to feel neither fear nor hunger. He says that he followed all orders after he had smoked the drug. Afterwards, however, he experienced feelings of guilt. As peace negotiations became imminent, the commander of Daniel's unit absconded together with the unit and the mined diamonds. During an attack against this unit, Daniel and a number of his comrades succeeded in escaping. At this time he had been with the rebel groups for three years. The rebels followed the boys thinking that they had the diamonds in their possession. Daniel did not find protection in the village that he had protected with the civilian defence, as the villagers were afraid of the rebels. A stranger helped Daniel to reach Freetown and to get on board a ship. Daniel left Sierra Leone not knowing the destination of the ship. In February 2002, when he was fifteen years old, Daniel reached Germany. He registered at the Foreigners Office. The competent civil servant did not believe his age however, he was presumed to be older and sent to a home for adults. Daniel was sent to a medical centre to have his age determined. There, his real age was confirmed. Subsequently, he was admitted into a primary care home (Erstversorgung). He describes the treatment by the Foreigners Office as very degrading. Daniel has a very close relationship to his carer and to his private guardian with whom he is preparing for the hearing at the asylum office. He is currently in possession of a residence permit whilst the asylum procedure is carried out. In his home country, Daniel completed the fourth school level (4. Klasse), in Germany he is attending a preparatory class.

She (the carer) has spoken with the woman (the therapist) about it and they have seen he (Mussa) urgently needs help ... and that's why he started to therapy. (Mussa, Senegal/Casamance)

The youths are insecure; they do not know what they have to expect and what is expected from them:

In the therapy, I do not know, because I never did this. I do not know what I have to say or what is expected of me. ... I do not know if she can help me. (Hamed, Afghanistan)

They hope:

... I can forget my problems quickly ... can. (Mussa, Senegal/Casamance)

One youth, who has finished therapy, sees success:
Has helped me a lot, because then I always had nightmares. I dreamed about my parents. At that time, I started with it (the therapy) and slowly, slowly got better. And until now, I dream hardly any more. (Mike, Sierra Leone)

XII. Social integration

Accommodation, education, job training and participation in social life form the main pillars of the social integration of former child soldiers and, more generally unaccompanied minor refugees. Whether or not integration is legally permitted or enabled depends on the residence status. A certain degree of initiative and action is also necessary from the child soldiers.

Accommodation, Community

The carers in the accommodation facility represent the first contact which the youngsters establish with German society. Most of the interviewees name their carer or guardian as providing the most important relationship. In most cases, it is the carer that establishes contact to a private or team guardian. The carer or guardian offers orientation in a foreign world, financial, material and emotional support, as well as counsel and assistance. Often, the youths see in them substitutes for their parents:

For example at school, when I have a problem, I ask my carer or when I'm cooking or getting dressed, when I buy something, they help me. (Dost, Afghanistan)

He (the team-guardian) helps me a lot. ... He also ... helped very much that I received some kind of (permission). (Mike, Sierra Leone)

Then, when the man said, that I have sold him something, there (my guardian) took care of it, because of the lawyer. And ... because I am not allowed to have any money, he has to borrow money somehow from the bank, from his boss. (Mike, Sierra Leone)

When I need him (the carer) he comes and says: "What did you want, what did you do?" ... When my mother was in hospital. This is why I could not go to school. Then he said: "Okay, come on boy, I give you a telephone, you can call your mother." (Mala, Sri Lanka)

So he talked a lot, like my father. ... Mr. S. (the carer) is so important person for us. (Mala, Sri Lanka)

This is what Mr. S. said to me: "You have to get a paper. If you want to live here in Germany, you have to get an education. That's good for you." That's why I did it. He always said: "You are allowed this, you are not allowed that. Something like drugs you do not sell, that's bad for you. And when you do school here, that's good." (Mala, Sri Lanka)

The youngsters distinguish between the mentors who counsel them and support them and people who patronize them and treat them like children:

(The carer has told the boss) that I had a very difficult past. And in the end, I said to my carer, no, she is not allowed any more to say anything about me. (Mike, Sierra Leone)

Some of the interviewees say that they rarely saw their official guardian and that they did not establish a relationship:

I didn't even know what she did for me. I believe, that the only help was that I received a card for a savings account. She only signed once. Nothing more. (Hamed, Afghanistan)

The youngsters often meet others the same age in the accommodation, with whom they develop friendships. One interviewee says that he was very isolated in his accommodation. It was difficult to establish contact to the world outside the home:

Sleep, watch TV, and walk on the road, play a little bit football and that was it. We had to go sixteen kilometres by bike to see people because there are only three houses: our own home, the master's house and a boat rental. (Antonio, Angola)

Ninth Case Study:

Samson (17), Eritrea

Samson was born to Eritrean parents in Saudi Arabia. At the age of eleven he returned to Eritrea with his parents and three younger siblings. In Saudi Arabia he went to school for six years. In Eritrea he no longer went to school, but helped his mother to sell food on the street. During the war between Eritrea and Ethiopia, Samson witnessed a neighbour being recruited by the military. When Samson was thirteen years old, members of the Eritrean Military also picked him up from his parents' house. He was taken by car to a large military training camp where many young men and also children up to the age of twelve were being trained. Initially, Samson's duties consisted of fieldwork, cutting wood and sewing clothes. Later he received weapons training. He stayed in this camp for a period of three months. When he and a number of other youths openly refused to continue to participate in the training, he was punished with four days arrest. After the arrest, he gave in. Samson found a friend among the youths who convinced him to flee together. A friendly watchman showed them a place where they could flee over the wall. The boys ran for two days to the next town where Samson decided to flee into Sudan because his uncle lived there. He took a bus to the border, crossed it and drove into the capital where he finally found his uncle. His uncle had contacts to a man who forged documents and he arranged a Sudanese passport for Samson. The uncle decided that Samson should flee to Germany where there was a cousin. After a waiting period of five months, Samson flew to Frankfurt. At this time he was fourteen years old. From Frankfurt he took a train to his current place of residence. With permission from the Youth Office, he spent the first weeks with his cousin, because at that time there was no space in the youth programme. He has now been living in a youth apartment for one year. Samson continued to go to school and managed to finish comprehensive school (qualifizierter Hochschulabschluss). For the last three months he has been training as an electrician. However he only receives a work permit for three months at a time, which he is then obliged to have extended. His closest personal contacts are his cousin and an Eritrean friend. He also has very good contact with his current carer and his team guardian (Vereinsvormund). He says that they support him well. Last year, the guardian organized a holiday trip. Samson had his asylum hearing five months after his arrival in Germany. He told of his military training in the camp. He is still awaiting a decision. He has a residence permit.

At the time of the interviews, three of them lived in clearing houses or initial accommodation, three lived in youth apartments, three in private accommodation and one in adult accommodation despite only being seventeen years old.

Education, job training

The interviewees are in the following school or classes:

- Literacy course
- Support class
- Job preparation class (three youths)
- Internship at an educational project
- Comprehensive school, tenth class
- Training as electrician, after qualified junior high school certificate.

One of the interviewees is employed within the home as a painter (junior high school certificate and internal qualification), one has a junior high school certificate

and is unemployed and another is also unemployed. All the interviewees said that they consider attending school and receiving training to be of essential importance. Especially for child soldiers, who in most cases have no or at best interrupted school education, attending school is an important instrument for integration:

... When they go to school. Because most of the child soldiers have not school. Then they get help here, to go to school, to do training, this is somehow correct. (Mike, Sierra Leone)

One lad describes how difficult and humiliating he found it to have to learn to read and write at the age of fifteen in Germany:

At that time I could not hold a pen. And our teacher held my hand like that, said, I should hold the pen like that, to write like that, everyone laughed (about me) why I cannot write, I cannot read, alphabet also not. (Diko, Sierra Leone)

The personal support of the teacher is important for the interviewees:

My teacher is very nice. Because my German is not so good and I have problems with articles. And he will come and explain me the way I will understand. (Daniel, Sierra Leone)

A high degree of commitment and a certain level of prior education are required of the youth in order to manage the regular German school system. Many youths only manage to find a place in special needs or apprenticeship classes.

The youths require a work permit for support measures such as internships or apprenticeships. Whether this will be granted and under what criteria, depends on the relevant Foreigners Office and Labour Office:

And they have already requested (for an internship). We have already gone to the Labour Office, but I did not yet receive work permit. (Diko, Sierra Leone)

One lad speaks of his anxiety that his work permit could be withdrawn again and that he would have to terminate his education:

In order not to get problem with this work permit. I have a friend ... who also had this problem a year ago, when they did not want to give the work permit. Then he had to terminate his training, but his boss allowed him to continue to work nevertheless. (Samson, Eritrea)

It is extremely difficult to find a job after school or training. The interviewees are discouraged. This situation severely affects their emotional well-being:

I cannot go on any more. I do not know any more what I should do. It is difficult to find work today as unskilled. (Antonio, Angola)

Social interaction

The participation of former child soldiers in society depends primarily on the above-mentioned integration possibilities, but also on the ambition of the youngsters themselves to organize their lives within this framework. While some of them describe themselves as orientation-less and passive (see above), others look for possibilities for action for themselves. Carers and guardians can make an important contribution by identifying and reinforcing the abilities of the youngsters. Nevertheless, one questions whether they still have the capability to act or whether it has been destroyed by the traumatisation:

My mother always says: "When you go to a strange apartment as visitor, you are not allowed to touch anything." That's how I thought as well in Germany. We have thought, our freedom is gone, then (when we arrived). And Mr. S. says: "It is not like that in Germany." (Mala, Sri Lanka)

The interviewees describe structured daily routines and rules which help them to organize their lives:

A completely normal day, I go to school. After school, I come home, I go sometimes to play football or, when there is no football, I go swimming or I stay at home, do homework. Once or twice a month I go disco. (Daniel, Sierra Leone)

I try to stick to the rules, when they say: "You are not allowed to do this", I try not to overstep this, but I stick also to the rules. And I am very thankful for this also. (Mussa, Senegal/Casamance)

The youths frequently express a wish for normality. They want to be as normal as the other youths around them. One of the youngsters tells how he was abused in the street as a "foreigner" and that he felt very depressed after this experience:

... They said: "You are foreigner, shit foreigner. Why are you here?" When I (later) was in my room, I thought: Why am I here, why have they said this? I have big worries. Then I could not sleep. I am a dark person here. I look so different than you. (Mala, Sri Lanka)

Another lad tells of experiencing that he can be integrated while "being different":

All people know me. I am the only black ... In my class Germany, Russia, Poland, all were my friend. Now sometimes they come to visit me. Sometimes Saturday, Friday, we meet together and go disco. (Hassan, Sierra Leone)

Through school, training and jobs – and also sports – contact with German society is established:

With the German family during my training I met many people. I was there in a private apartment. This was good. They have asked: "How long are you here in Germany? Have you seen your parents?" (Mala, Sri Lanka)

Additional contact is established through relationships with girls. However, the cultural differences often become very apparent in these relationships:

I had a German girlfriend for a long time. I wanted to get married. Now we are no longer together. We

have separated, because she only wanted to have fun with me. I don't like that. I wanted a sensible good relationship. (Mala, Sri Lanka)

Exile and life plans

The interviewees describe their lives in Germany as free and at the same time not free. Because both family structures and military hierarchies are dissolved, they are not subjected to any social control: *In my country ... we are Moslem. The parents are not accepting for go disco. When I go with girls ... but here in Germany, this is no problem. ... I feel a bit freer than in my country. In my country we are tied.* (Daniel, Sierra Leone)

It's important that one cannot force me here to do something. (Samson, Eritrea)

At the same time, life in Germany is described as a "prison" due to the limitations which result from the residence status (see above). One interviewee does not

see any possibility for initiative in Germany:

To offer a perspective, to become someone in the future, and not to come here, simply as a place to sleep and give something to eat. That is not everything. Everybody has to live up to his abilities, to know what I can do and what I can reach. (Antonio, Angola)

The only way to circumvent these limitations personally, lies in marriage to a German citizen:

The only possibility is, for example with some German or an Afghan that has a German passport to get married. ... This is the only possibility that I can stay here. (Hamed, Afghanistan)

Some of the interviewees follow a more or less clearly defined goal:

I think always my goal. I have to reach this, then I have to do this so. (Mala, Sri Lanka)

One interviewee suggests there should be a differentiation made between non-Germans, who

Tenth Case Study:

Hamed (18), Afghanistan

Hamed lived with his father in a town in Afghanistan, his mother was already dead. He was fifteen years old and attended the 8th school class. Together with a group of pupils, he criticized the one-sided curriculum, which consisted almost entirely of religious subjects. Subsequently he was mistreated by the school director and then by some members of the Taliban. They hit him for hours with ropes and weapons. As Hamed was the youngest of three brothers and the oldest brother was in the army, he feared being forcibly recruited, a common practice of the Taliban. For this reason, his brother and his uncle took him to a neighbouring village a few days after the mistreatment by the Taliban. The uncle and the brother collected money, altogether six to seven thousand dollars, to pay the human traffickers who were supposed to organize and carry out Hamed's escape. First he was taken to Iran where he waited for his papers. Then, he flew to Frankfurt together with a human trafficker (Schlepper). When he entered Germany, Hamed was 15 years old. He took a taxi to his current place of residence. During his escape, his father was shot in the street in Afghanistan. On his first visit to the Foreigners Office, the competent desk officer did not believe his alleged age. He was presumed to be older and referred to the Central Reception Office (Zentrale Annahmestelle). He lived there for two months and wrote letters to several officers telling them his life story. Finally, the Foreigners Office accepted his age only to inform him shortly afterwards that his age had been changed to sixteen. Hamed then organized an Afghan passport for himself that was not recognized by the Foreigners Office. He was accused of document forgery. Only after his lawyer had presented a birth certificate for him was his age corrected down to 15 again. Hamed describes the treatment of the Foreigners Office as degrading and lacking in respect. His closest contact is an acquaintance, whom he met through the organization where he lives. He describes her as his grandmother. When the US entered Afghanistan in 2001, Hamed's psychological condition altered. He became aggressive, lacked concentration and frequently had nightmares. Upon advice of the woman that he calls his grandmother, he started a therapy although he is not yet clear about its aim. Hamed is attending a school (Realschule) and is close to finishing it. His plans are to subsequently try the baccalaureate (Fachabitur). Hamed is very ambitious. In his free time, he acts and also contributes to an Afghan school paper. His asylum application was rejected; he possesses toleration status.

Eleventh Case Study:

Dost (15), Afghanistan

Dost lived with his family in a small village in Eastern Afghanistan. He did not go to school and undertook small jobs at home. At the age of fifteen, a Talib visited his father and requested that his son should be sent to fight the American Forces. At about the same time, a group consisting of four Afghans and an American tried to recruit him for the Afghan troops that supported the American troops. Out of fear of forced recruitment, his father sent Dost to Pakistan. A man took him across the border with a car. His father paid between ten and fifteen thousand dollars for his escape. Dost stayed fifteen days in Pakistan where the man provided him with a passport. He flew to Germany with one stopover. When Dost entered Germany, he was fifteen years old. Today he lives in a clearing place (Clearing-Stelle) in a town where his older brother also has been living these last three years. Dost has a team guardian (Vereinsvormund). During the asylum hearing, Dost presented his flight reasons, namely the threat of forced recruitment. Currently he possesses a border crossing certification.

follow a goal, who comply with the German principles of effort (Leistungsprinzip) and those who do not want to blend in:

They have to sometimes make a difference between youths. Those, who don't go to school, or those who go not regularly or they have to look at their results and decide accordingly. ... Many are interested only in money or cars. (Hamed, Afghanistan)

When the interviewees talk about their future, they are caught between hope and anxiety. As most of them have an insecure residence status, they fear expulsion:

I think sometimes, maybe the police comes any moment, they say: "...You have to go back in your country." Then I know I am dead. Better that I die here, better for me than to go back to my country. (Diko, Sierra Leone)

One interviewee describes his lack of orientation. He asks himself how he can live as an adult in these surroundings in Germany:

I do not understand how one is a grown-up person here. (Mala, Sri Lanka)

Another says that he no longer finds a meaning to life in Germany:

What am I doing here? I don't do anything. I have to have a wife somehow. I have none; I have no money, rental debts. I was jobless for a time and unemployment benefit and social help was refused. (Antonio, Angola)

Two of the interviewees cannot say anything about their ideas for their future. They know that they can only react to what is happening to them. In order to be able to deal with this feeling of dependency, they rely on their faith:

I don't know what is happening about tomorrow. Everything can change. Maybe ... tomorrow (they) just take me back. God knows everything, what is going to happen. God knows tomorrow. (Hassan, Sierra Leone)

At the moment, one of the two wishes for:

Security, where I can live in peace. ... One can wish, but in the end God decides. (Mussa, Senegal/Casamance)

Despite these fears and worries, the others describe their wishes and hopes in very concrete terms. The basis for a better future is a secure residence status:
When I have a decent visa, I can start immediately for example my education, or for example go ... to Kassel ... to Frankfurt or travel abroad. (Hamed, Afghanistan)

Then they would be "completely normal people":

... become completely normal person, live and travel. (Hamed, Afghanistan)

... that one day I have a fixed work contract, then some day I have my own apartment, some day I have a wife at home and my child. Or some day I have German passport or unlimited. (Mike, Sierra Leone)

I also want to go one time on holiday with friends. (Samson, Eritrea)

Only one of the interviewees considers the situation in his home country. He however reaches a discouraging conclusion:

I will, some day, go back. My father has a bakery; this is the only thing ... that is left from my family. I do not know if it still intact or I would need to rebuild and I also have no money. How should I do this without money? (Antonio, Angola)

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The situation of child soldiers and the consequences

For the majority of former child soldiers, the most significant consequence is the separation from their families. This separation normally takes place in violent circumstances and is often combined with the murder of family members. This happens mostly at an age and phase of life in which the children and young people urgently need the help and care that family life offers. The former child soldiers mourn the loss of their childhood and the fact that they have been deprived of the possibility of school education. This means the loss of every perspective outside of the armed groups.

The consequences of armed deployments are traumata, injuries and often the death of the children and youths. Their duties range from menial jobs to fighting, which was the case with the overwhelming majority of the interviewees. The children and youths were enslaved and their will was broken through subordination measures, punishments and the distribution of alcohol and drugs. If they are captured, they are often also subjected to severe mistreatment. In addition to the violent loss of their family, the children and youths experience a number of additional traumatizing experiences during the fighting, through their own activities and through severe physical injuries. As victims they become perpetrators.

Psychosocial Care

If child soldiers succeed in escaping from their units and from their home country to exile in Germany, the period after entry constitutes a phase of particular vulnerability. According to Keilson¹⁷, there is a danger of re-traumatization in this phase. This is why, for the benefit of the youths, it is of primary importance to provide them, without delay, with a space in which they can find calm. The requirements for this are a well-functioning cooperation between the Youth Office, initial and follow-up accommodation and guardian. While only a few youths have described the role of the Youth Office as “positively leading”, the expert explains how she, as constant contact person, pushes for and implements the necessary measures of taking into care, follow-up accommodation,

establishment of guardianship and determination of therapy needs.

Society and private guardians, as well as the competent carers, have usually established close relationships with the former child soldiers. The carers support them in their everyday life and provide orientation in a new environment. They facilitate integration through integrative measures and are often “older mentors” for the youths. Through good knowledge of the Youth Welfare Act (KJHG) and the foreigners and asylum law, they often succeed in making use of legal leeway for the benefit of the children and youth.

Most of the former child soldiers suffer from symptoms which are summarized as post-traumatic stress disorder. Some of them have entered therapeutic counselling or treatment with a resident therapist or at therapy centres. However the requirement for therapy is that the youth is emotionally and socially stabilized. The children and youths often do not appreciate the meaning and success of the therapy. In most cases, the carers, the Youth Office or the guardian initiates these measures and the youths agree to them, in the hope of an improvement in their emotional well-being. During the therapy, a close contact between therapist, carers and the guardian is important. Some therapists are critical that contact is limited to the assistance plan meetings and that the counselling possibilities are not sufficiently used.

Social participation of former child soldiers depends on the social integration offered by school or job training and a free choice of place of residence. On the other hand, it depends on the possibilities of the individual child or youth to act within this framework. A precondition for this is an assumption that the ability to act has not been destroyed by traumatization.

The perspective of former child soldiers is characterized by hopes for a life in Germany with “normal” social participation at the same time as fearing expulsion and the resulting loss of orientation.

¹⁷ Keilson H.: Sequentielle Traumatisierung bei Kindern. A clinical description and quantifying statistical study of the fates of jewish war orphans in the

Netherlands. Stuttgart 1979.

This study highlights the severe problem with which former child soldiers, who have fled to Germany, are confronted. It identifies the urgent need for action in a number of areas. These are given in general terms so as to be applicable more broadly than the German context.

Recognition of child-specific flight reasons in the asylum procedure

- Child-specific flight- and asylum reasons need to be recognized.
- Refugees who are persecuted by non-state actors also need to be granted asylum.

Clearing procedure, accommodation and care, abolition of the sixteen year barrier

- A child-adequate hearing and asylum procedure needs to be developed, which aims to benefit the child. Minor refugees should be given a residence permit for the duration of this clearing procedure.
- Former child soldiers should be cared for according to the standards applicable to children, even if they are older than sixteen.

Legal ability of minors

- The age at which minors can act for themselves in the foreigners and asylum procedure law should be raised to eighteen years in accordance with the UN Convention on the rights of the child.
- Former child soldiers over the age of sixteen should not be housed in joint accommodation with adults.

- A guardianship in the form of a private or society guardian should be established for all unaccompanied minor refugees.

Prohibition to work and receive training

- In order to facilitate social integration, the prohibition of working for unaccompanied minor refugees who are old enough to work should be lifted and access to school and training should be made possible.

Medical, psychosocial and therapeutic care

- Traumatized former child soldiers should be granted unlimited access to medical and therapeutic care. This should not be hindered by asylum legal regulations.
- The training of teachers, carers, guardians and employees of any Government offices dealing with refugee children is urgently required to deal with traumatized former child soldiers.

In general, these demands are valid for all unaccompanied minor refugees, regardless of whether they are former child soldiers or not. However, former child soldiers require particular attention, as they are often not capable of talking about their past owing to the injuries that they have suffered. This fact requires a particularly sensitive approach with a view to the “best interests of the child” from the authorities, the guardians and the carers of child soldiers.

Annex: Methodology

Methods of investigation

The problem-centred interview, Andreas Witzel¹⁸ (2000), is used as a special form of the qualitative interview to investigate the “lifve situation of former child soldiers who fled to Germany”. This method views the interviewee as an expert of his or her orientation and actions. Following the “individualization thesis” (among others, Beck¹⁹ 1986), individuals relinquish old bonds (casts, classes etc.) and have to face up to new institutional dependencies. With this, the possibility disappears of explaining the results of actions as directly caused by social barriers, selection mechanisms and the socially uneven distribution of resources.

Upon their arrival in Germany, the interviewed persons, who are socialised in societies with very close social ties, enter into a situation of extreme individualised social structures. The longer they stay in Germany, the more they are confronted with, on the one hand, the challenge of finding their way through a variety of choices and possible actions and on the other hand, a close net of restrictions and barriers determined by the foreigners and asylum laws. Once taken out of their old collective relationships, they are forced to take responsibility for their actions as child soldiers both to themselves and to their surroundings. For this, a certain degree of self-reflection is necessary.

A treatment, that seeks to balance the presumed opposition of guided theory and openness by combining induction and deduction with the possibility of modification of my theoretic concept is a theory generating procedure.

The interviewed person structures the importance of the social reality. In order to get the largest amount of data, gathering of data is carried out using four techniques: the information that serves as a kind of social background for the interpretation of the subsequent information is gathered in a short questionnaire. The guidelines were developed from pre-considerations about the problem area. This questionnaire also serves as a memory aid and orientation framework during the interview. The entire problem-centred interview is recorded on two mini-disks and tran-

scribed. Finally, if possible, a postscript is prepared after the interview in which information is recorded about conversations before and after the end of the interview, the framework conditions and non-verbal reactions of the interviewed person.

Interview partners

The interviewees were, as far as possible, selected from different provinces. It was possible to establish contacts to affected youth through members of the *Bundesfachverband unbegleiteter minderjähriger Flüchtlinge e.V.*, as well as through recommendations. These were possible through carers, guardianship societies and a council office. The interviewed persons are exclusively male. It was not possible to interview girls, because they are, in most cases, particularly seriously traumatised due to their double burden as child soldiers and as victims of sexual abuse. They do not want to tell their story.

It should be noted, that the interviewed youth were in a psychologically stable state such that they could manage to endure an interview on this topic. Many former child soldiers currently in a therapy did not feel capable of this. A selection criterion for interviewees was the fact, that the former child-soldiers had entered Germany as under-age minor refugees. Aimé was a child soldier, but he was already eighteen years old at the time of his entry to Germany. For this reason, his testimony about his living conditions as a child soldier was included into the analysis, but not that of his experiences in Germany. The oldest interviewed person was twenty-nine years old. He also entered Germany as an unaccompanied minor. The interviews lasted between 45 minutes and two and a half hours and were conducted in the places of residence, in most cases the apartments of the youths. Interpreters translated three interviews; the other interviews were conducted, upon request of the youth, with the interviewer alone and in German or English. Here, the language barrier becomes apparent. In a translated interview, the interpreter has the opportunity to interpret or summarize what was said, while in some cases, the insufficient language knowledge hampers the

¹⁸ Witzel, A.: Das problemzentrierte Interview. In Jüttemann, G. (ed): *Qualitative Forschung in der Psychologie. Grundfragen, Verfahrensweisen, Anwendungsfelder*. Heidelberg 1989.

¹⁹ Beck, U.: *Risikogesellschaft. Auf dem Weg in eine andere Moderne*. Frankfurt/M 1986.

communication between the interviewer and the interviewed person.

The cultural barrier is an additional problem. Facts were presented in a more neutral way out of politeness, and often there was a desire not to say anything “bad” about the host country. All interviewed persons were assured anonymity. Sometimes the interviews went to the limits of what the interviewed person could take. One youth had a breakdown shortly after the interview and had to be treated in a psychiatric clinic. The therapist was unable to determine whether this breakdown was linked to the interview and the resulting relived memories. One interview had to be interrupted and resumed at a later day because it went beyond the limits of what the interviewed person could take.

Goal of the investigation

The present qualitative investigation consisting of the guide-lined interviews with former child soldiers and experts, which in turn represent the juridical, political and psycho-social framework aims – on the basis of the analysis of literature as pointed out in part I - to give more clarity about the living conditions of former child soldiers regarding the areas of recruitment, flight and exile. For the area “exile”, a framework is presumed which consists of juridical, political and psychosocial conditions and which determines the living conditions of the former child soldiers. Representatives of these areas describe these frameworks in expert interviews. The aim of this investigation is, therefore, to gain profound knowledge about:

- the experiences of child soldiers,
- the living conditions of the former child soldiers in Germany,
- the psychological condition, namely the traumatization of former child soldiers,
- the asylum law treatment of former child soldiers, and
- the juridical, political and psychosocial framework conditions.

Duration of the investigation

The interviews were conducted between November 2002 and May 2003. The investigation was concluded with a report on 15 July 2003.

Investigation materials

Two different guidelines were developed as material to gather data: Guideline I for the interviews with former child soldiers and Guideline II for the experts according to the institution which was represented by the experts. The guidelines were developed after an extensive analysis of the literature and they contain research themes. In an ideal case, the guideline accompanies the communication process as a kind of background paper with which the scientist can control how much the different elements are taken into account during the course of the interview.

Guideline I:

Areas of experience as former child soldier: recruitment, traumatizing experiences, destiny of the family, flight history, aspirations regarding the exile country, areas of experience as former child soldiers in the German society: treatment, self-image – alien image, integration, persons of close contact, asylum procedure, resident status, possibilities to act, traumatization, healing, perspective.

Guideline II (example guardianship society)

Function in the institution; Guardianship: Task / Implementation, Framework conditions established by foreigners and asylum law and political conditions, scope for action, quality of work, problems, experiences with former child soldiers, first contact, psychological situation, establishment of relation, conduct of relation, pedagogical / therapeutic needs, therapy: possibilities and problems, co-operation with other institutions of youth care, demands for adequate care.

The interviewed persons could respond freely to all questions and could determine the conduct of the interview themselves. The interviewed persons could ask questions and the researchers could ask follow-up questions. Before the guide-lined interview with former child soldiers was conducted, a short questionnaire was used with the aim of - on the one hand - facilitating the start of the conversation and – on the other hand – to establish some social data (age, school, education etc.).

As the interviews were only conducted with male youths, this study cannot draw any conclusions about “Gender issues”.

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