

**Increasing Compliance with the Norm Against Child Soldierly: A Case for the Adoption of
Localization Theory**

by

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Abstract

This thesis aims to address the question of why, despite a relatively well-established norm prohibiting the use of Child Soldiers, some government forces and non-state armed groups continue to utilize child soldiers in active conflict, while others do not. While the scholarly literature on child soldiery has developed a relatively robust understanding of the supply and demand factors shaping the use of child soldiers in varying contexts, this thesis will argue that it has yet to fully address and embrace a fundamental part of the norm development process – what Amitav Acharya first referred to as norm localization. In order to strengthen the existing international norm against the use of child soldiers, this thesis will highlight the need for more international and scholarly attention to be directed towards understanding the norm development process as a whole, and to prompting norm localization efforts in the areas where compliance rates remain low. As this thesis will show, the localization of the child soldier norm would help to overcome some of the major barriers facing the implementation of, and compliance with, the norm by allowing local actors to interpret and integrate the norm into their contextualized realities. This thesis will first provide a literature review of the existing knowledge around both the norm development process and the factors driving child soldier use, before going into an analysis of Acharya’s localization theory and its potentiality to help overcome the compliance barriers.

Preface

This thesis is an original intellectual product of the author, Nicole Esligar.

This thesis heavily relies on the work of Amitav Acharya, specifically his article “*How Ideas Spread: Whose Norms Matter? Norm Localization and Institutional Change in Asian Regionalism.*” It has adopted Acharya’s localization theory as its foundation.

Chapter 4 of this thesis relies on the fieldwork findings from Bridget Hynes’ PhD Dissertation, “*Children of the Borderlands: Young Soldiers in the Reproduction of Warfare.*”

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List of Abbreviations

NSAG – Non-State Armed Group

ANSA – Armed Non-State Actor

FGM – Female Genital Mutilation

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Special thanks are owed to my parents for their infinite support, to my grandparents for their challenging and inspiring conversations, and to my MA cohort as a whole for being there to wade through the trenches with. I could not have survived these past two years without your constant supply of caffeine and laughter. Thank you for pulling me through.

Dedication

To my grandfather, Gus MacDonald. Thank you for teaching me the value of learning, and for continually inspiring me to get out into the world.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Overview

The use of children in war and in conflict is by no means a new phenomenon, nor is it one that is exclusive to any specific region or any specific conflict. Rather, child soldiers are a common feature of many armed groups, both state and non-state, in many countries around the world. Given the nature of the conflict environments in which child soldiers are often used, it is almost impossible to know the exact number of children involved in this phenomenon. However, many leading NGO's estimate that there are around 300,000 children in armed groups around the world.¹ While the military recruitment of children is slowly being outlawed, it is still allowed in 50 countries, and many non-state armed groups continue to recruit children at alarming rates.² In 2016, the UN placed seven states – Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Myanmar, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, and Yemen – on their annual 'list of shame' for the recruitment and use of children.³ 51 non-state armed groups appear on the list for the same reason, located mostly in Africa and the Middle East, as well as in Colombia.⁴

While there are several well-defined international treaties prohibiting the use of child soldiers in war, and an international norm campaign has developed with the help of many prominent international actors, we have yet to see a radical decline in their use by both state and non-state actors. This prompts the question - 'Why do compliance rates across and within state and non-

¹ "Child Soldiers", War Child, accessed January 12 2017, <https://www.warchild.org.uk/what-we-do/protection/child-soldiers>.

² "Where are there Child Soldiers?" War Child, accessed February 1, 2017 <https://www.child-soldiers.org/where-are-there-child-soldiers>.

³ "Where are there Child Soldiers?" War Child.

⁴ "Where are there Child Soldiers?" War Child.

state armed groups vary so drastically? How can this norm be strengthened, and who can help lead this task?’

This thesis takes this question as its starting point, and puts forth the argument that while the scholarly literature on child soldiery has developed a relatively robust understanding of the supply and demand factors shaping the use of child soldiers in varying contexts, and while it has repeatedly condemned their recruitment and use in conflicts, it has yet to fully address and embrace a fundamental part of the norm development process – what Amitav Acharya first referred to as norm localization.⁵ In order to strengthen the existing international norm against the use of child soldiers, more international and scholarly attention and resources need to be directed to understanding and promoting norm localization efforts in the areas where compliance rates remain low.

Questions around how compliance works in relation to norms are by no means new, as many leading norms scholars have identified mechanisms of transmission and pathways of influence that urge states to either comply or not to comply with a given norm. This will be expanded on later in this thesis. Even in relation to the child soldier norm specifically, many scholars have already identified some of the main factors that influence a groups’ decision to use child soldiers or not. Most accounts of child soldiers use attribute the drastic variation in compliance rates among different groups to the complex interplay of supply and demand factors fuelling the availability and motivations of children in conflict zones, such as the presence of a large refugee population, high illiteracy rates, high unemployment rates, a weak central government, lack of adult recruits, etc. They also attribute this to several other factors, including the presence of

⁵ Amitav Acharya, “How Ideas Spread: Whose Norms Matter?” *International Organization* 58:2 (2004).

external pressure, the likelihood and perception of viable peace negotiations, and the desire for external legitimacy. And while these factors do play a large role in incentivizing or dissuading groups from using child soldiers, they do not form the complete picture, and they limit the type of solutions available to us.

What is missing from the current child soldier literature is a renewed focus on the norm development process as a whole, and, stemming from that, an analysis of the degree of localization of the norm that has occurred in each group and community. The literature focuses quite heavily on the external factors that influence a group's decision to use or not use child soldiers, and policy interventions seem to focus on those factors. But because of this narrower focus, we aren't paying as much attention as we should to promoting the internalization and localization of the norm. This is especially relevant in the areas where we cannot curb or deter the presence of the above-mentioned factors, or where we lack any significant leverage over a group to incentivize them to follow these norms. By taking into account to what extent (if any) different communities, state forces, and non-state armed groups have localized the international norm, the literature can help fill in some of the blanks in the explanation of why compliance rates differ so drastically, and this can allow the international community to cater their policy approaches and resource investments in more efficient ways.

1.1.2 – The Compliance Barriers

As mentioned above, the potential for norm localization to occur has been largely overlooked and underdeveloped in the context of the child soldier campaign, and the norm has struggled to take hold in some local communities. In the areas where compliance rates are still quite low, this can, in part, be explained in part by the norms' inability to overcome several key barriers, which are fundamentally different from the supply and demand factors that were previously listed. The

first barrier comes from the differing and competing understandings of childhood that are prevalent in culturally grounded community beliefs, which makes developing a universal understanding of a “child soldier” difficult. The second barrier is grounded in the dominant suspicions and fears of western imperialism and neo-colonialism that can, and have, flowed from the dissemination of the norm from ‘outsiders’. The third barrier comes from a failure by parts of the international community to fully understand and respond to the specific contextual factors driving child soldier use on the local level. The fourth barrier stems from the inherent difficulty posed by creating and implementing effective age identification procedures, and from the challenge of navigating the agency of the child in instances of voluntary recruitment. Lastly, the final barrier is grounded in the fact that the relatively robust and well-developed legal approach criminalizing child soldiery has lacked the sufficient enforcement capacity to create and incentivize definitive change among non-compliant actors.

As this thesis will show, promoting norm localization among communities, non-state armed groups, and state forces involved in child soldier use is one of the missing ingredients in the success of the norm campaign, and will help overcome some of the above-mentioned key barriers that this transnational advocacy campaign continues to face. By involving local actors in the norm dissemination process, it is possible for the child soldier norm to be grown more organically within these communities. Instead of continuing to focus almost exclusively on developing external policy interventions to combat the supply and demand factors promoting child soldiery, attention needs to be paid to ways in which the norm diffusion process itself can be internally and domestically supported and strengthened. In other words, what conditions are needed for this norm to develop more organically in the areas where norm violation is still high? To answer this question, this thesis will go back to the norm literature analyzing how compliance

and localization occurs in hopes of shedding some light on why compliance isn't happening more broadly in the child soldier case study.

1.1.3 – Non-State Actors and The Norm Development Process

This thesis will also aim to expand on Acharya's theory of norm localization, adapting it from its original, state-centric base to encompass non-state actors as well. Our current framework for understanding norm diffusion and adoption doesn't often account for the mechanisms by which non-state armed groups can, and do, adopt and localize international norms. While this is slowly changing, norm theory has yet to fully catch up to this new international trend, Acharya included. On top of this, this thesis will also aim to draw attention to one of the key gaps in the child soldier literature – namely, its general oversight in regards to the processes of how norms develop, spread, and become internalized. It will do this by providing a brief overview of the literature on norm development and norm diffusion, highlighting how compliance and non-compliance come to happen, before delving into the question of why compliance has been so difficult to achieve in this context.

Lastly, this thesis will compare and contrast the successes that similar campaigns, most notably the campaign against Female Genital Mutilation, have had with its own localization efforts, and will draw out lessons that can be applied to the child soldier norm. It will finish with suggestions for increasing and supporting localization both within vulnerable communities and among actors who have continued to violate the international norm.

1.2 Important Definitions

Before continuing any further, it is important to define some of the key terms that will be utilized in this essay. In the current literature, there is much debate surrounding the proper terminology for non-state actors in conflict. For the purposes of this essay, I will be using the

terms ‘Non-State Armed Group’, ‘Rebel Group’ and ‘Armed Non-State Actor’ interchangeably. I will follow the lead of Geneva Call in defining Armed Non-State Actors as “organized armed entities that are involved in armed conflict, which are primarily motivated by political goals and which operate outside of state control, thereby lacking the legal capacity to become party to relevant international treaties. These include armed groups, national liberation movements, and de facto governing authorities.”⁶

For the purposes of this thesis, a child will refer to anyone under the age of eighteen, as outlined in The Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 1, and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, Article 2.⁷ Following the lead of the Paris Principles on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict drafted in 2007, this essay will define a child soldier as “any person below 18 years of age who is, or who has been, recruited or used by an armed force or armed group in any capacity, including but not limited to children, boys and girls, used as fighters, cooks, porters, spies, or for sexual purposes.”⁸

This thesis will adopt Amitav Acharya’s definition of localization, defining it as “the active construction, through discourse, framing, grafting, and cultural selection, of foreign ideas by local actors, which results in the former developing significant congruence with local beliefs and practices.”⁹ It will also adopt Finnemore and Sikkink’s definition of a norm as “a standard of appropriate behavior for actors with a given identity.”¹⁰

⁶ “Armed Non-State Actors”, Geneva Call, accessed December 2, 2016.
<http://genevacall.org/how-we-work/armed-non-state-actors/>.

⁷ The CRC Article 1, the African Charter RWC Article 2

⁸ “The Paris Principles”, Children and Armed Conflict, accessed Dec 2nd 2016.

https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/publications/ParisPrinciples_EN.pdf.

⁹ Amitav Acharya, “How Ideas Spread: Whose Norms Matter?” *International Organizations* 58:2 (2004): 246, accessed November 14, 2016.

¹⁰ Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink, “International Norm Dynamics and Political Change,” *International Organizations* 52:4 (1998): 891, accessed January 10, 2017.

As this thesis will address issues of compliance with the child soldier norm, it is important to define exactly what I mean by the term, and to identify what compliance would look like for both State and Non-State actors. For the purposes of this paper, I will follow the lead of Hyeran Jo in defining state compliance as “conformity to existing rules and norms.” Analogously, rebel compliance will be defined as “rebel groups’ behaviors consistent with international rules.”¹¹ In relation to the child soldier norm, compliance would be identified as restraint in using children – more specifically, youth under the age of 18- in rebel or state ranks, especially for combat purposes. Non-compliance would be identified as the active use of child soldiers in state or non-state armed groups.¹²

1.3 Scope and Rationale for this Research

Another important step before entering into an overview of the child soldier literature is to clearly define the rationale and importance of studying this topic. While there is a rapidly growing amount of attention being shed on the use of children in conflict, and an increasingly strong international norm prohibiting it is developing, children continue to be involved in conflict at alarming rates. Both state actors and non-state armed groups are continuing to actively violate or disregard the norm, which shows us that it has yet to achieve the status of a robust and widely acknowledged norm. There is clearly much more work needed to understand why compliance rates have differed so much both across and within groups known to use child soldiers. There is also a clear need to incorporate an analysis of the current norm literature to help us identify, acknowledge, and overcome key barriers to the norm diffusion process. We know a lot about *how* norms develop, spread, and promote compliance, and this information can

¹¹ Hyeran Jo, *Compliant Rebels* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015): 23.

¹² Jo, *Compliant Rebels*, 25.

provide the vital first step in helping us understand *why* compliance rates haven't yet been uniformly achieved.

Due to my inability to conduct fieldwork, this thesis relies exclusively on the work of a few leading scholars in the field, and on the case studies, data, and scope of their findings. For that reason, its aim is simply to highlight some of the missing gaps in the scholarly literature around the child soldier norm campaign, and to provide an understanding of norm localization and norm theory to help identify, explain, and fill those gaps.

Before going any further, it is important to clarify that this thesis does recognize that the child soldier campaign has achieved many successes to date, and that many actors have willingly and continuously complied with the emerging norm. The reasons for their compliance are many, and have been clearly identified by major scholars in this field, as will be demonstrated later on. The focus of this thesis, however, is to target and explore the reasons behind why some groups continue to use child soldiers, despite the creation and increasing spread of this norm. Because of this, this thesis will largely discuss cases of non-compliance, but this should not be taken to mean that it believes compliance rates across the board have been low, or that the campaign has achieved little to no success. On the contrary, the successes the campaign has achieved make the puzzle of those actors still not complying all the more interesting and relevant.

Chapter 2: Literature Review - Norms

2.1 Overview of the Norm Literature

Before moving forward with an examination of the child soldier norm and its potential for localization, we need to first establish a clear understanding of what exactly a norm is, with a particular focus on how norms spread, which actors are involved in this process, and what factors influence the success rate of norm compliance. As stated above, developing a strong understanding of how norms spread can help us identify current barriers facing the child soldier norm and causing continued non-compliance by certain actors. This section will provide a brief overview of relevant literature in this field, and will aim to connect these pieces to the child soldier norm campaign and the limitations it is facing.

Firstly, this thesis will follow the lead of Finnemore and Sikkink in defining a norm as “a standard of appropriate behavior for actors with a given identity.”¹³ Finnemore and Sikkink proposed the argument that norm emergence and dissemination can be understood as a three-stage process. The first stage is the “norm emergence” stage, whereby certain actors create the norm; the second stage is the “norm cascade” stage, whereby widespread norm acceptance comes to be achieved; and the third stage is the “norm internalization” stage, where compliance becomes automatic and often ‘taken-for-granted’.¹⁴ What is most significant about their research in relation to the child soldier norm is their discussion of how the completion of a norm’s “life cycle” is not an inevitable process; many emergent norms fail to reach a critical threshold, or ‘tipping point’, to achieve the final stage of internalization. Internalization of the norm does not

¹³ Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink, “International Norm Dynamics and Political Change,” *International Organizations* 52:4 (1998): 891, accessed January 10, 2017.

¹⁴ Finnemore and Sikkink, “International Norm Dynamics”, 895.

automatically follow from the widespread acceptance of it. Compliance is significantly more nuanced than that, and attention needs to be brought back to the norm emergence process to understand that these are two distinct stages that do not automatically create each other.

Ethan Nadelmann also analyzes the evolution of international norms and the global prohibition regimes that often follow. According to him, there are five stages of global norm prohibition regimes. The first stage is one in which most societies regard the targeted activity as entirely legitimate under certain conditions, and the central constraints on involvement in the activity, if any exist, have more to do with ‘political prudence than with moral notions or evolving international norms.’¹⁵ The second stage is when legal scholars and other moral entrepreneurs redefine the activity as a problem or an evil, and explicit government involvement in the activity is gradually de-legitimized.¹⁶ The third stage is where proponents begin to agitate actively for the suppression and criminalization of the activity by all states, and the formation of international conventions.¹⁷ The fourth stage brings about the creation of criminal laws and police action around the activity, and places international institutions and conventions in a coordinating role to monitor and enforce these laws.¹⁸ The fifth and final stage is when the proscribed activity is greatly reduced, and persists only on a small scale and in obscure locations, if at all.¹⁹

For Nadelmann, transnational moral consensus regarding the evil of a particular activity is not sufficient to create a global prohibition regime.²⁰ Rather, success in reaching the fifth stage

¹⁵ Ethan Nadelmann, “Global Prohibition Regimes: The Evolution of Norms,” *International Organizations* 44:4 (1990): 484, accessed December 15, 2016.

¹⁶ Nadelmann, “Global Prohibition Regimes,” 485.

¹⁷ Nadelmann, “Global Prohibition Regimes,” 485.

¹⁸ Nadelmann, “Global Prohibition Regimes,” 485.

¹⁹ Nadelmann, “Global Prohibition Regimes,” 485.

²⁰ Nadelmann, “Global Prohibition Regimes,” 487.

depends almost exclusively on the nature of the criminal activity and its susceptibility to criminal justice measures.²¹ He argues that international prohibition regimes that are: (1) aimed at suppressing activities which require limited and readily available resources and no particular expertise to commit; (2) that are easily concealed; (3) that are unlikely to be reported to the authorities; and (4) those for which the consumer demand is substantial, resilient, and not readily substituted for by alternative activities or products; are the least effective regimes, and are unlikely to reach the fifth and final stage.²²

The prohibition regime around the use of child soldiers fits exactly this description. Children in conflict zones are vulnerable, and are often in communities/locations that lack the protection and security measures to keep them safe. Coercing or kidnapping children into state and non-state ranks takes little expertise and few resources to carry out. Utilizing children in a group is also relatively easy to hide in many cases, as age identification measures are often inadequate and non-state armed groups tend to be more discretely hidden from enforcement and monitoring mechanisms. The use of child soldiers isn't consistently reported to authorities, as children are sometimes voluntarily enlisted, and as some cultures and communities do not view the activity as illegal or immoral. Authorities also aren't always easily accessible or reliable in many of the areas where child soldiers are used. And lastly, consumer demand, or demand by state and non-state armed groups, for child soldiers is high in many areas and in many different conflicts, as they need to maintain recruits, and children make for easy targets that aren't easily replaceable.

²¹ Nadelmann, "Global Prohibition Regimes," 486.

²² Nadelmann, "Global Prohibition Regimes," 486.

While Nadelmann's explanation looks more at how compliance is influenced by international activity, and doesn't directly address what explains variation in compliance by different actors, his work is beneficial for this thesis for several reasons. Firstly, it helps to highlight some of the critical challenges that the child soldier norm campaign faces based on its nature. This sheds some light on why the international prohibition regime has failed to achieve large-scale compliance in some prominent areas – child soldier use is a difficult activity to suppress through international efforts, and despite the increase in international efforts to target the activity, it is challenging to achieve robust compliance across the board. As will be discussed later on in this essay, this is a great reason why turning our attention to promoting localization efforts in areas where norm compliance is low is a good use of resources and effort moving forward. Secondly, along with Finnemore and Sikkink, it provides us with a framework with which to track and monitor the progress of a norm.

While Nadelmann laid out a clear understanding of the norm emergence problem and the difficulties inherent in the nature of certain norms, he did not address or analyze the *processes* in which compliance can be generated or hindered. To shed some light on this, we will turn to the work of Harold Koh.

Koh developed a framework to analyze and explain why and how actors come to obey international laws. One of the most beneficial parts of his argument for this thesis rests on his belief that the process of transforming occasional or grudging compliance with international norms into habitual obedience involved three phases; first, one or more transnational actors provokes an interaction with another; this interaction then forces an interpretation or enunciation of the global norm applicable to the situation; and by doing so, the moving party seeks not simply to coerce the other party, but to internalize the new interpretation of the international

norm into the other party's internal normative system.²³ According to Koh, the aim of this process is to "bind" that other party to obey the interpretation as part of its internal value set, and the extent to which these norms are successfully internalized determines the extent of future compliance by such actors.²⁴ As Koh states, "as governmental and nongovernmental transnational actors repeatedly interact within the transnational legal process, they generate and interpret international norms, and then seek to internalize those norms domestically."²⁵ Koh believes that the habits that develop from these interactions lead nations into default patterns of compliance. In his piece, Koh provides the causal mechanism through which compliance spreads.

He argues, then, that if transnational actors obey international law as a result of repeated interaction with other actors in the transnational legal process, the first step in promoting more compliance is to empower more actors to participate²⁶. In terms of the child soldier norm campaign, this is an important step in increasing compliance, and we are starting to see organizations like the UN, Geneva Call and many others involving a multitude of actors, including non-state armed groups, in the negotiation and discussion processes.

Koh does point out, however, that there are different types of internalization, and distinguishes between political, legal, and social internalization. Legal internalization occurs when an international norm is incorporated into the domestic legal system.²⁷ Political internalization occurs when political elites accept an international norm, and adopt it as a matter

²³ Harold Koh, "Why Do Nations Obey International Law?" *The Yale Law Journal* 106:2599 (1997): 2646.

²⁴ Koh, "Why Do Nations Obey?" 2646.

²⁵ Koh, "Why Do Nations Obey?" 2654.

²⁶ Koh, "Why Do Nations Obey?" 2656.

²⁷ Koh, "Why Do Nations Obey?" 2657.

of government policy.²⁸ Social internalization occurs when a norm acquires so much public legitimacy that there is widespread general obedience to it.²⁹

For the child soldier norm, it could be argued that all three forms of internalization have not been fully achieved. While many legal treaties have been drafted and signed condemning the use of child soldiers globally, there are several instances of state actors continuing to use child soldiers anyways. For example, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Nigeria, Sudan, Iraq and Mali, just to name a few, were all accused of utilizing children in their military ranks in 2016,³⁰ even though they have all signed and ratified the Optional Protocol expressly denouncing child soldiery.³¹ In terms of political internalization, many countries have developed their own domestic legislation expressly forbidding the use of child soldiers, and yet have continued to employ child soldiers in their ranks. This can be seen in several contemporary examples, including Sudan, South Sudan,³² and Nigeria.³³ Social internalization is much more difficult to quantify and measure, which makes it more problematic as a marker of success. But if we take “widespread general obedience” as a marker, it is clear to see from the sustained use of child soldiers by 7 states and 51 armed groups in 2016³⁴ that the child soldier norm falls short of widespread compliance.

²⁸ Koh, “Why Do Nations Obey?” 2656.

²⁹ Koh, “Why Do Nations Obey?” 2656.

³⁰ “What are Child Soldiers?”, Child Soldiers Organization, accessed January 2017, <https://www.child-soldiers.org/about-the-issue>.

³¹ “Ratification Status of the Optional Protocol,” Children and Armed Conflict, Accessed January 2017, <https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/mandate/country-status-2/>.

³² Samia al-Nagar and Liv Tonnesen, “Sudan Country Case Study,” *Sida* (2011) http://www.sida.se/contentassets/e3a7b0cb84274558afc2720451885d62/20113-sudan-country-case-study-child-rights_3127.pdf.

³³ “Child Rights Act 2003,” Unicef, Accessed January 2017, https://www.unicef.org/nigeria/ng_publications_Childs_Right_Act_2003.pdf.

³⁴ “What are Child Soldiers?”, Child Soldiers Organization, accessed January 2017, <https://www.child-soldiers.org/about-the-issue>.

Again, this is not to say that compliance with the norm has not been achieved at all. In fact, there are several prominent examples of both state and non-state actors consistently and continuously complying with the prohibition on the use of child soldiers. This is just to show that in the areas where compliance rates remain low, a key explanation could be the norms' failure to achieve full internalization in these three key areas because of the four barriers identified earlier in this essay.

Koh's framework is not just relevant for an explanation of the processes underlying compliance and the different forms of internalization leading to compliance. It is also relevant as it provides a clear entry point for the incorporation of non-state armed groups into the norm compliance discussion. The above-mentioned authors have all relied on a state-centric framework to discuss both how norms emerge on the global stage, and how actors are influenced to comply. One of the shortcomings of the norm literature for the purposes of this thesis is that it rarely engages with the possibility of non-state actors playing a vital role in the norm process. But Koh's argument highlights a key area where they can be better incorporated into norm development and dissemination, and a key entranceway for localization theory to take hold. While non-state armed groups cannot achieve legal or political internalization given that they are not a state and cannot sign or ratify treaties or domestic laws, they can play an active role in developing, promoting, and adopting mechanisms of social internalization within their communities and their own groups. Acharya's theory of localization looks extensively at this process of social internalization, and gives us a clear roadmap at how to better foster this. We will be addressing this in the next section.

Something to note in this section is the very apparent lack of any discussion around the role of non-state armed groups. These scholars all represent a prime example of the exclusion of

non-state armed groups in the norm literature more broadly, as these explanations of norm emergence focus exclusively on characteristics of the norm development process that involve state actors. This thesis will tackle this issue in more detail later on.

Now that we've established some of the key normative pieces of literature and what light they can shed on the processes of norm emergence and norm compliance, we can shift our attention to norm localization more specifically, and how it can help fill in the gaps identified in this section. The next section will provide an overview of what Amitav Acharya's localization theory is as well as an overview of Lizbeth Zimmerman's supplementary argument, and will then analyze the ways in which it can be applied to the child soldier norm to increase large-scale compliance in areas where the norm is still consistently violated.

2.1 Acharya, Zimmerman, and Norm Localization

The central argument of this thesis is that in the areas where child soldier use remains high, one potential solution for increasing compliance is to focus our efforts and resources into promoting the localization of the norm within communities. However, before we can dive in to how localization can benefit the child soldier norm campaign, it is important to first establish what localization is and why it has so much potential. To do so, this section will first provide an overview of Acharya's concept of localization before moving on to analyze what conditions and factors influence its viability and chances of success.

Acharya first introduced his concept of localization in his article '*How Ideas Spread: Whose Norms Matter? Norm Localization and Institutional Change in Asian Regionalism.*' He defined localization as "the active construction, through discourse, framing, grafting, and cultural selection, of foreign ideas by local actors, which results in the former developing significant

congruence with local beliefs and practices.”³⁵ Acharya argued that because many local beliefs are themselves a part of a legitimate local normative order, this order directly impacts and conditions the way that foreign norms come to be accepted or rejected among local communities.³⁶ It is often the role of local agents in such communities to reconstruct foreign norms to make them fit with the agents’ cognitive priors and identities.³⁷ Therefore, for Acharya, congruence building between foreign and local norms becomes the key to acceptance,³⁸ and the success of norm diffusion strategies depends directly on the extent to which they provide opportunities for localization.³⁹

Localization may start with a reinterpretation or re-representation of a foreign norm through framing and grafting, but it extends into a complex reconstitution process that works to make the outside norm congruent with the local, pre-existing normative order.⁴⁰ In this process, the role of local actors is significantly more crucial than that of outside actors, and ideas that could be constructed to fit indigenous traditions have much better success rates than those that do not.⁴¹

2.2.1 How Does Localization Happen?

According to Acharya, there are a few different events that bring about the conditions for localization to occur. Some exogenous forces may create a demand for new norms, such as a major security or economic crisis, or an international demonstration like the Arab Spring.⁴²

These events can lead to ‘norm borrowing’ by calling into question the existing rules of the game

³⁵ Amitav Acharya, “How Ideas Spread: Whose Norms Matter?” *International Organization* 58:2 (2004): 246.

³⁶ Acharya, “How Ideas Spread,” 239.

³⁷ Acharya, “How Ideas Spread,” 239.

³⁸ Acharya, “How Ideas Spread,” 239.

³⁹ Acharya, “How Ideas Spread,” 241.

⁴⁰ Acharya, “How Ideas Spread,” 244.

⁴¹ Acharya, “How Ideas Spread,” 244.

⁴² Acharya, “How Ideas Spread,” 247.

and providing space for new alternatives.⁴³ Systemic change is another catalyst for new norms to take hold, as shifts in the distribution of power or shifts in the interaction of great powers and their interests open up opportunities for the spread of new norms.⁴⁴ Domestic political changes in the norm taker are a third catalyst, most commonly in the form of new democratic regime transitions calling for new democratic norms to take hold.⁴⁵ Finally, international or regional demonstration effects could prompt norm borrowing through things like emulation, imitation, and contagion.⁴⁶

Keck and Sikkink argued that norm displacement occurs when “a foreign norm seeks to replace a local norm whose moral claim or functional adequacy has already been challenged from within, but norm displacement fails when it comes up against a strong identity norm”.⁴⁷ This led Acharya to conclude that the prospect for localization depends not only on the presence of social and political forces, but also on several key factors, such as: the foreign norms’ positive impact on the legitimacy and authority of key norm takers, the strength of any prior existing local norms, the credibility of the local agents bring in the norm, the indigenous cultural traits and traditions in place, and the scope/room for grafting and pruning presented by the foreign norm.⁴⁸

Acharya identified four major conditions favorable for localization:

⁴³ Acharya, “How Ideas Spread,” 247.

⁴⁴ Acharya, “How Ideas Spread,” 247.

⁴⁵ Acharya, “How Ideas Spread,” 247.

⁴⁶ Acharya, “How Ideas Spread,” 247.

⁴⁷ Acharya, “How Ideas Spread,” 247.

⁴⁸ Acharya, “How Ideas Spread,” 248.

1. The ‘norm-takers’ must come to believe that the new outside norms – which may have previously been feared or mistrusted – can be utilized to enhance the legitimacy and authority of existing institutions, without fundamentally altering their social identities.⁴⁹
2. The prior local norm that is being targeted must be foundational to the group; otherwise the new foreign norm would likely just be accepted wholesale⁵⁰.
3. Credible local actors – or “insider proponents” – with sufficient authority and influence are needed to help accommodate local sensitivities and aid in the localization of the foreign norm.⁵¹
4. The prior existence of a local norm in a similar issue area as the foreign norm, and which calls for similar behavioral changes, makes it much easier for the local actors to introduce it into the community.⁵²

Other conditions favoring local norm adoption are said to include a large degree of societal openness, an absence of blocking factors like strong elites or veto actors, favorable decision-making structures, and strong state-society relations.⁵³⁵⁴

Table: The Trajectory of Localization and the Conditions for Progress⁵⁵

This chart provides a concise overview of Acharya’s 4 stages of localization, and the conditions that need to be present for progress throughout the stages to occur.

Stage	Description	Condition for Progress
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⁴⁹ Acharya, “How Ideas Spread,” 248.

⁵⁰ Acharya, “How Ideas Spread,” 248.

⁵¹ Acharya, “How Ideas Spread,” 248.

⁵² Acharya, “How Ideas Spread,” 250.

⁵³ Thomas Risse. “Transnational Actors and World Politics.” In *Handbook of International Relations*, edited by Walter Carlsnaes, Thomas Risse, and Beth Simmons. Thousands Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2002. 266-267.

⁵⁴ Frank Schimmelfenning. “Introduction: The Impact of International Organizations on the Central and Eastern European States – Conceptual and Theoretical Issues.” In *Norms and Nannies: The Impact of International Organizations on the Central and Eastern European States*, edited by Ronald Linden. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002.

⁵⁵ Acharya, “How Ideas Spread,” 251.

1. Prelocalization (Resistance and Contestation)	Local actors may offer initial resistance to new external norms because of doubts about the norms' utility and/or fears that the norms might undermine existing beliefs and practices. Some local actors begin to see the new norm as having potential to contribute to the legitimacy/efficiency of existing institutions.	Some aspects of the existing normative order must remain strong and legitimate, while other aspects may be already discredited from within or found inadequate to meet with new and unforeseen challenges.
2. Local Initiative (Entrepreneurship and Framing)	Local actors borrow and frame external norms in ways that establish their value to the local audience.	There must be willing and credible local actors ("insider proponents"), not be seen as "stooges" of outside forces.
3. Adaptation (Grafting and Pruning)	External norms are reconstructed to fit with local beliefs and practice, even as local beliefs and practices may be adjusted in accordance with the external norm. Local actors may redefine the external norm, linking it with specific extant local norms and practices, and pruning the external norm.	There must be some scope for grafting between the external norm and some aspects of an existing norm hierarchy – supplementing, rather than supplanting, an existing norm hierarchy.
4. Amplification + "Universalization"	New instruments and practices are developed from the syncretic normative framework in which local influences remain highly visible.	Borrowing and modification should offer scope for some elements of an existing norm hierarchy to receive wider external recognition through its association with the foreign norm.

Another important author for us to look at, and who builds on Acharya's work on localization, is Lizbeth Zimmerman. In her work, Zimmerman attempted to analyze and explain the patterns of variation found in norm adoption strategies by different actors. She began by highlighting some of the competing theories in the literature that tackle this question, namely theories of domestic filter, transnational socialization, and decoupling approaches. She then went on to

argue that these existing theories are conceptually limited in their ability to describe and explain outcomes of norm diffusion, and that they all include an implicit normative bias.⁵⁶ Ultimately, she argued that they all “presented a linear scale from resistance to norm adoption, which can only describe deviance from full norm adoption,” and they only focus on government behavior, which leads them to ignore how reinterpretation and modification of international norms can inform local discourse and practices.⁵⁷

According to Zimmerman, the stages to norm adoption in mainstream international relations research follows a similar pattern:

Rejection → Rhetorical Adoption → Legal Adoption → Implementation → Internalization

No Adoption

Full Adoption

Zimmerman points out that this model of norm adoption “depoliticizes” norm diffusion because it sets as its endpoint the absence of political conflict, therefore suggesting that the indication of internalization, and therefore norm adoption, is the lack of contestation and conflict surrounding the norm.⁵⁸ As Zimmerman points out, this ignores the reality that norms are part of a “constant process of negotiating and re-negotiating.”⁵⁹ When we view norm diffusion through this lens, the variance in outcomes can only ever be described as deficient, and never as simply different. This lens leads us to believe that everything short of complete compliance

⁵⁶ Lizbeth Zimmerman, “Same Same or Different? Norm Diffusion Between Resistance, Compliance, and Localization in Post-Conflict States,” *International Studies Perspectives* 17 (2016): 104.

⁵⁷ Zimmerman, “Same Same or Different?” 104.

⁵⁸ Zimmerman, “Same Same or Different?” 104.

⁵⁹ Zimmerman, “Same Same or Different?” 104.

automatically indicates a watering down of the norm.⁶⁰ This is an important element for this thesis, as it can help us better understand the nuances of the child soldier norm, and to accept that there is a much more complex process involved in norm internalization than just simply accepting or rejecting it. It also helps us to expand on the previous norm literature that we laid out to incorporate an understanding of the mechanisms underlying the variance we are seeing in compliance rates.

Zimmerman proposes a new conceptual approach to analyze norm translation patterns. Building on Acharya, she argues that different types of localization can be distinguished based on an assessment of three steps: (1) how norms are translated into discourse; (2) how norms are translated into law; and (3) how they are translated into implementation. For each step, there are more options than simply full adoption or full rejection: certain aspects can be adopted or rejected in full, while some parts can be left out or modified, and some new parts can be added.⁶¹ Zimmerman's theory attempts to give a more fine-grained picture of the omissions, add-ons, and modifications that can occur through the implementation process, and it allows for a deeper analysis of local conflicts that can lead to different subtypes of translation.⁶² As Zimmerman states, "this provides the basis for better explanations of how and why certain conditions brought about certain types of translation results."⁶³

Both Acharya and Zimmerman provide an important overview of *how* it is that compliance does or does not occur in relation to a particular norm, and Zimmerman's theory can help us to explain why compliance rates can vary so drastically within one issue area. In the process of

⁶⁰ Zimmerman, "Same Same or Different?" 104.

⁶¹ Zimmerman, "Same Same or Different?" 107.

⁶² Zimmerman, "Same Same or Different?" 112.

⁶³ Zimmerman, "Same Same or Different?" 112.

norm creation and norm diffusion, both authors identify several key features and critical factors that determine the success or failure of internalization and localization. This is incredibly important information for the child soldier norm to acknowledge, as a strong understanding of *how* compliance occurs provides us with a good starting point to understand *why* compliance fails in certain situations. This thesis will delve directly into this explanation in relation to the child soldier norm in great detail later on. First, however, it is important to provide a background of the child soldier norm campaign, and of the successes and failures it has faced to date, for us to build on moving forward.

Chapter 3 – Literature Review: Child Soldiers

3.1 Overview

As previously mentioned, most sources estimate that there are around 300,000 active child soldiers engaged in conflicts worldwide.⁶⁴ Child soldiers remain active in at least 57 groups fighting in 15 conflicts around the world, and many of these groups continue to utilize extreme violence in their recruitment strategies.⁶⁵

At the international level, there are several treaties that explicitly prohibit the use of child soldiers today, including the 1945 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the 1949 Geneva Conventions, the 1977 Additional Protocols to the Geneva Conventions, the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), and the 2000 Optional Protocol to the CRC.⁶⁶ At a regional level, the Organization for African Unity, the Organization of American States, The Economic Community of West African States, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, and the European Parliament have all also openly denounced the use of child soldiers.⁶⁷ A robust global grassroots effort against it has also developed, demonstrated by the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, an umbrella group composed of various NGO's in over 40 countries.⁶⁸ However, the continued use of child soldiers in many areas of the world illustrates how many of these conventions, laws, and organizations are being ignored and overlooked.⁶⁹

It is important to quickly note here that despite continually high levels of child soldier use, there have been some important milestones reached by the transnational advocacy campaign in

⁶⁴ "Child Soldiers," War Child, Accessed January 2017, <https://www.warchild.org.uk/what-we-do/protection/child-soldiers>

⁶⁵ "2015 Annual Report," Watch list on Children and Armed Conflict, accessed January 2017, <http://watchlist.org/wp-content/uploads/2142-Watchlist-AR-LR1.pdf>.

⁶⁶ P.W Singer, "The Enablers of War: Causal Factors behind the Child Soldier Phenomenon," in *Child Soldiers in the Age of Fractured States*, ed. Scott Gates and Simon Reich (Pittsburgh: the University of Pittsburgh Press, 2010), 95.

⁶⁷ Singer, "The Enablers of War," 95.

⁶⁸ Singer, "The Enablers of War," 95.

⁶⁹ Singer, "The Enablers of War," 95.

decreasing norm violations. Since 1999, over sixty armed groups have made unilateral and bilateral commitments to reduce and end the recruitment and use of children, and in many cases this has led to tangible changes in their internal policies and practices.⁷⁰ There has also been an increase in the number of armed groups who have set their minimum age for recruitment at 18 years,⁷¹ a feat that can largely be attributed to groups like Geneva Call who are helping to foster the social internalization of such norms and incentivize compliance through mechanisms like the Deed of Commitment. Although the track record for implementation and monitoring has been patchy, the increase in the amount of commitments being made demonstrates that there is a growing recognition among armed groups of the need to protect children from involvement in military organizations.⁷² Increased awareness and advocacy on the issue, along with the recent increase in criminal investigations and prosecutions of individuals suspected of recruiting and using child soldiers, primarily by the ICC, have helped drive these positive developments.⁷³ So, while there is still a long way to go in eliminating the use of children as soldiers, some of the foundational groundwork has been laid, and important achievements have been made to date.

3.2 Competing Explanations for Child Soldier Use in the Literature

This next section is dedicated to providing an overview of the current literature around the factors driving child soldier use, and the reasons that armed groups utilize child soldiers. By providing a background of what we already know, and the policies that have been adopted because of this knowledge, this section aims to give us a better understanding of where work is

⁷⁰ "A Law Unto Themselves? Confronting the Recruitment of Children by Armed Groups", Child Soldiers International, accessed January 2017, 4.

⁷¹ "A Law Unto Themselves," 4.

⁷² "A Law Unto Themselves," 4.

⁷³ "A Law Unto Themselves," 23.

still needed in relation to the child soldier campaign. Addressing these supply and demand factors is an important and integral part to ending the use of child soldiers. But in the places where the supply and demand for children in conflict cannot be eliminated or reduced, and in the places where armed groups have been resistant to external policy interventions, turning attention to the norm dissemination process itself, and localization more specifically, can help the norm take hold despite the presence of supply or the forces of demand. Before this argument is further developed, however, there is a need to establish some of the leading explanations for child soldier use, and give a brief overview of the current state of the literature.

As mentioned above, much scholarly attention has been devoted to developing a stronger understanding of the supply and demand factors that influence both an armed groups' decision to use child soldiers, and child's decision to be used as a soldier. A relatively robust understanding of the factors that put children more at risk of becoming soldiers in conflict zones has been developed, and both government and non-government organizations have developed many programs to better support communities in demobilizing and reintegrating child soldiers.

To start, many scholars have argued that the availability of, and access to, children in conflict zones is one of the largest predictors of child soldier use. For instance, Achvarina and Reich (2010) argue that a key factor in explaining child recruitment rates is the degree of access that belligerent parties (both state and non-state) have to refugee camps and internally displaced populations (IDP's).⁷⁴ This is because of several conditions: firstly, the prospect of escaping from poverty may lure potential child recruits; secondly, high orphan rates may make these recruits more vulnerable to either incentives or threats; and lastly, there is a drastic increase in

⁷⁴ Vera Achvarina and Simon Reich, "No Place to Hide: Refugees, Displaced Persons, and Child Soldiers Recruits," in *Child Soldiers in the Age of Fractured States*, ed. Scott Gates and Simon Reich (Pittsburgh: the University of Pittsburgh Press, 2010), 57.

the degree of vulnerability of children in refugee/IDP camps that ultimately influences their participation rates.⁷⁵ They argue that child soldiers will make up a larger percentage of belligerent forces in areas where refugee/IDP camps are more vulnerable to infiltration or raiding, which leads them to the conclusion that protection from access by belligerents is a crucial part of limiting the supply side of child soldiers.⁷⁶

In contrast to this view, Andvig and Gates propose that it is actually the demand for, and not the supply of, child soldiers that determine the number of children utilized in conflict by state and non-state armed groups.⁷⁷ Building on Gates' work in 2003, in which he looks at child recruitment from a principal-agent model, they argue that since every organization (state or non-state) must operate under some form of financial constraint, these organizations only substitute children for adults if they are cost effective.⁷⁸ They point to a groups' resource base as a predictor of its ability and willingness to use both pecuniary and non-pecuniary benefits to recruit child soldiers.⁷⁹ They argue that the child-soldier ratio is determined by the policies and characteristics of the organizations themselves, and not by the characteristics of the areas in which they operate.⁸⁰

P.W Singer builds on the above argument by pointing to three critical factors that he believes form a causal chain perpetuating the demand for, and therefore the use of, child soldiers. As he states, "First off, social disruptions and failures of development, sparked by globalization, war and disease, have led not only to greater global conflict and instability, but also to generational

⁷⁵ Achvarina and Reich, "No Place to Hide," 57.

⁷⁶ Achvarina and Reich, "No Place to Hide," 57.

⁷⁷ Jens Christopher Andvig and Scott Gates, "Recruiting Children for Armed Conflict," in *Child Soldiers in the Age of Fractured States*, ed. Scott Gates and Simon Reich (Pittsburgh: the University of Pittsburgh Press, 2010), 77.

⁷⁸ Andvig and Gates, "Recruiting Children," 82.

⁷⁹ Andvig and Gates, "Recruiting Children," 82.

⁸⁰ Andvig and Gates, "Recruiting Children," 82.

disconnections that create a new pool of potential recruits (influencing supply). Second, technological improvements in small arms now permit these child recruits to be effective participants in warfare (influencing supply and demand). Third, there has been a rise in a new type of conflict that is far more brutal and criminalized” (influencing demand).⁸¹ Singer argues that these three conditions have made it so that conflict group leaders now look at the recruitment of children to be an efficient, low-cost way to mobilize and utilize force.⁸² Revolutions in warfare and changes in societal structure are directly impacting the ease and the ability to utilize children in active conflict.

Building on this argument, Beber and Blattman argue that because children are usually less able fighters, they become attractive recruits if and only if they are easier to intimidate, indoctrinate, and misinform than adults. They argue that the ease of manipulation interacts directly with the perceived costliness of war crimes to directly influence rebel leaders’ incentives and motivations for coercing children into conflict.⁸³ In their work, they find that children are in fact easier to mislead, indoctrinate, retain, and coerce. In particular, they point to scholars who have noted that remuneration will be lower if children have relatively poor civilian employment and educational opportunities.⁸⁴ They also highlight others who have argued that children are more willing to fight for nonpecuniary rewards such as honor and duty, revenge, sense of purpose, or protection.⁸⁵ All of these things make children less costly recruits than adults. In their view, costliness matters: foreign governments, international organizations, diasporas, and local

⁸¹ Singer, “The Enablers of War,” 95.

⁸² Singer, “The Enablers of War,” 95.

⁸³ Bernd Beber and Christopher Blattman, “*The Logic of Child Soldiering and Coercion*,” *International Organization* 67 (2013), 65.

⁸⁴ Alcinda Honwana, *Child Soldiers in Africa*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006.

⁸⁵ Rachel Brett and Irma Specht. *Young Soldiers: Why They Choose To Fight*. Boulder, Colo: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2004.

populations can therefore discourage child recruitment by withholding resources or punishing offenders.⁸⁶

Other scholars have focused their efforts on understanding and explaining why children would choose to join armed groups, and on analyzing the motivations behind coerced or voluntary membership. In her dissertation, Bridget Hynes identifies what she believes are the four main paths that lead a child to become a soldier. The first is desperation-based voluntarism, which stems from circumstances where youth or children find no other choice but to join a military group, such as lack of physical security, food, shelter, or an alternative livelihood.⁸⁷ The second is politically based voluntarism, which is driven by pro-soldier cultural narratives, restrictions of opportunities for children, and charismatic military leaders disseminating motivating discourse to youth.⁸⁸ The third is coercion-based soldiering, which relies on regional networks and local norms to ‘push’ families into lending out their children as a means of maintain or improving their income or status.⁸⁹ The fourth and final pathway is abduction-based soldiering, which relies on brute force and fear-based control to dissolve original connections and replace them with ties to the armed group and commanders.⁹⁰

As it is clear to see, the motivations behind the use and persistence of child soldiers are both incredibly diverse and increasingly complex, which ultimately means that any efforts to cease the practice will defy a simple, one-size-fits all kind of solution. In the next section, then, I will turn

⁸⁶ Beber and Blattman, *“The Logic of Child Soldiering,”* 65.

⁸⁷ Bridget Hynes, *“Children of the Borderlands: Young Soldiers in the Reproduction of Warfare,”* (PhD diss., University of Denver, 2008), 49.

⁸⁸ Hynes, *“Children of the Borderlands,”* 49.

⁸⁹ Hynes, *“Children of the Borderlands,”* 49.

⁹⁰ Hynes, *“Children of the Borderlands,”* 50.

to analyzing the resulting critical barriers facing the child soldier campaign, in hopes of shedding some light on potential solutions moving forward that cater to these complex nuances.

3.3 The Compliance Barriers

The previous section touched on the supply and demand factors that influence both a groups' decision to utilize a child soldier, as well as a child's decision to join an active armed group. This next section will shift the focus from an examination of why child soldiers exist and are utilized, to an examination of why some groups comply with the norm against the use of child soldiers, and some groups do not.

One of the biggest challenges that have impeded the successful implementation of the child soldier norm in certain areas is centered on the contested definition of what constitutes 'childhood'. Quite often, childhood is assumed to be a "trans-historical and trans-cultural category,"⁹¹ when in reality, different cultures have different conceptions and understandings of when childhood ends, what childhood entails, etc.⁹² As Iuliia Kokonenko states, "the variance in the perception of childhood is not only a matter of cultural differences, but is also a reflection of the level of economic and social development of a society."⁹³ The perception of childhood that we have in western society places a high value on protecting those under the age of 18 under the special category of "minor", and keeping them out of what we traditionally consider to be 'adult roles'. But this distinction doesn't hold true in many other cultures, as varying conceptions of

⁹¹ John Comaroff and Jean Comaroff. *Civil Society and the Political Imagination in Africa*. Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 2000, 30.

⁹² Lucille Gretry, "Child Soldiers: Our Representation Challenged by their Reality," *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy* 31:9 (2011), 591.

⁹³ Iulia Kononenko, "Prohibiting the Use of Child Soldiers: Contested Norm in Contemporary Human Rights Discourse," *Nordic Journal of Human Rights* 34:2 (2016), 91.

what age adulthood starts at come into play with culturally-grounded understandings of acceptable forms of child labor that differ from ours. Field research conducted by David Francis in Liberia and Sierra Leone demonstrated that there was a general consensus that ‘support roles’ played by children in armed groups, excluding sexual slavery, were accepted as normal and expected domestic-economic-related activities.⁹⁴ It therefore seems appropriate to understand childhood more as a “social convention and not just a natural state,”⁹⁵ and to recognize the impact that this has on armed groups’ decisions to utilize youth under 18. What some may see as an unacceptable use of children in conflict, others may see as a legitimate and/or normalized form of labor for young males.

There is also another similar important factor that the child soldier norm campaign has not been able to overcome in many areas, which is the fact that the practice of using child soldiers is part of a culturally engrained understanding of the world, which varies both across and within countries, often making up part of the normative basis underlying individual communities.⁹⁶ Differing understandings of what “childhood” is, and what acceptable ‘child labor’ practices are vary cross-culturally, and this makes it so that not everyone views a “child soldier” the same way, and not everyone agrees that it has negative connotations. This can be seen in the negotiation records for the Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflicts, which displays considerable variance in the understandings of what an appropriate minimum age would be.⁹⁷ The Rome Statue, one of the major international treaties condemning

⁹⁴ David Francis, “*Paper Protection Mechanisms: Child Soldiers and the International Protection of Children*,” *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 45:2 (2007), 221.

⁹⁵ Martin Hoyles. *Changing Childhood*. London, England: Writers and Readers Cooperative, 1979, 23.

⁹⁶ Francis, “*Paper Protection Mechanisms*,” 210.

⁹⁷ “Guide to the Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict,” Unicef, 14, accessed January 2017, https://www.unicef.org/sowc06/pdfs/option_protocol_conflict.pdf

child soldier use, set the minimum age of soldiery at 15 years old, while the Optional Protocol and the Cape Town Principles lobbied over intense discussions and strong opposition to have the standard raised to 18.⁹⁸ To this day, child soldier advocacy groups are still fighting to implement and uphold a ‘straight-18’ ban, and while the international community has overwhelmingly agreed to an 18-year minimum age, this has yet to translate in all areas where child soldiers are used.

We can see this barrier to compliance prevalent in other, similar norms as well, such as the norm against Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). This factor, and the successes that the FGM campaign has had when implementing localization efforts, provides the basis for the argument that norm localization is the key to increasing compliance in areas where child soldier use is still high. This will be addressed in more detail later in this thesis.

Another barrier to achieving widespread compliance with this norm centers on the agency of the child soldier. The status of the child soldier is inherently ambiguous and fluid, and is growing increasingly hard to categorize. As demonstrated by the global debates over the role of autonomy and choice in the decision to participate, there are very divided views as to whether or not children have the mental capacity to make such a decision.⁹⁹ As child soldiers state that they have voluntarily enlisted, and as they demonstrate increasingly complex strategy and decision making in joining, participating in, and leaving armed groups, the ideology of “child as victim” and the usual representation of childhood as a time of innocence and vulnerability comes into question.¹⁰⁰ This makes compliance with the child soldier norm a more difficult endeavor for many groups, as those we consider the ‘passive victim’, a.k.a the child soldier, may choose to

⁹⁸ “Guide to the Optional Protocol, Unicef, 14.

⁹⁹ Noman Benotman and Nikita Malik, “*Children of the Islamic State*,” Quillam, March 2016, 10.

¹⁰⁰ Gretry, “*Child Soldiers*,” 591.

actively seek out and participate in conflict zones, forgoing their victim status.¹⁰¹ There is a strong need to recognize child soldiers as both social and political agents in their own right,¹⁰² and to account for the agency of the child in our explanations of why child soldiers are continually utilized.

Another major compliance barrier comes from the inherent difficulty in identifying child soldiers in active combat. A major example of this is the challenge of identifying a combatant's age; especially when they are in identical uniforms and often do not have formal identification such as a birth certificate on them.¹⁰³ Even if one is able to identify that this person is a child, assessing whether he/she is considered to be participating in hostilities and in what capacity is also incredibly difficult.¹⁰⁴ Given the nature of the conflicts in which child soldiers are often used, tracking and monitoring armed groups' activities is increasingly difficult and poses inherent dangers to those attempting to do so. Another facet of this is that some armed groups have acknowledged that they do have children associated with them, but argue that because they are not recruited or used for military purposes, their association is legitimate.¹⁰⁵ The major difficulty here for monitoring compliance is that it is often incredibly difficult to delineate the lines between recruitment, participation, and association, and children may perform multiple roles or shift from one role to another.¹⁰⁶

Another major barrier to compliance lies in the current enforcement capacities of both international and national laws surrounding the protection of child soldier. In her study of the

¹⁰¹ Gretry, "Child Soldiers," 591.

¹⁰² Helen Berents, "No Child's Play: Recognizing the Agency of Former Child Soldiers," *Dialogue* 6:2 (2009), 1.

¹⁰³ Berents, "No Child's Play," 184.

¹⁰⁴ Berents, "No Child's Play," 184.

¹⁰⁵ "A Law Unto Themselves," 20.

¹⁰⁶ "A Law Unto Themselves," 20.

international mechanisms in place to protect and prevent the use of children in conflict zones, Grace Mbungu found that it was not only the insufficiency in the Optional Protocols' provisions that perpetuated the use of child soldiers, but also the presence of specific conditions within sovereign states that could negatively affect the enforcement and implementation of international norms.¹⁰⁷ These conditions include wars, political and social instability, poverty, and weak governments, and all of them pose major challenges to the child soldier norm campaign by creating environments that are incompatible with human rights protection.¹⁰⁸ She also found that there has been a lack of willingness and an inability on the part of nation-states to implement and enforce international treaties designed to protect child soldiers.¹⁰⁹ This presents a major compliance barrier, as feelings of impunity come to shroud actors who utilize child soldiers, and there becomes little incentive for actors to comply without effective enforcement.

Andrew Mack helps to sum up the problem nicely when he states that “the real problem with legal instruments, norms, and advocacy campaigns that seek to stop child soldiering is that they make little impact on the incentive structures that make children the soldiers of choice for so many governments and rebel groups. If the rebels win, there is little chance that they will be indicted for using child soldiers, and no chance that they will be extradited. The Security Council has not sanctioned any of the governments known to be using child soldiers. And no charges have ever been brought against members of any serving government.”¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ Grace Mbungu, “Good Intention, Little Effect: International Norms and the Use of Child Soldiers,” (MA diss., Bowling Green State University, 2009), 1.

¹⁰⁸ Mbungu, “Good Intention, Little Effect,” 3.

¹⁰⁹ Mbungu, “Good Intention, Little Effect,” 2.

¹¹⁰ Andrew Mack, “Ending the Scourge of Child Soldiering,” in *Child Soldiers in the Age of Fractured States*, ed. Scott Gates and Simon Reich (Pittsburgh: the University of Pittsburgh Press, 2010), 244.

Therefore, the chances of complete success from a top-down normative approach to ending child soldiering are limited, largely because they fail to acknowledge or address the strategic incentives that make the employment of child soldiers in poor country conflicts so pervasive.¹¹¹ Simply setting the norm at the international level is quite unlikely to encourage and engender widespread compliance on its own, as there is a real and persistent problem with implementation and enforcement.

This leads into another major compliance barrier facing the child soldier norm, and that is the exclusion of non-state armed groups – who constitute the majority of the norm violations - from the negotiation and treaty-creation process. Because of their non-state status, NSAG's are not able to participate in the drafting of international agreements to condemn the use of children, and therefore have no sense of ownership or involvement in the norm creation process. This often gives them little incentive to comply, and can create the feeling of an unfair double standard against them, as the state actors they are quite often fighting against were given a voice and empowered through this process when they were not.

Geneva Call, a Swedish-based NGO, is currently paving the way to address this compliance barrier with the development of what they call 'Deeds of Commitment' – a mechanism whereby NSAG's are able to negotiate, discuss, and sign commitments to end their use of child soldiers with an internationally-recognized actor.¹¹² This has allowed for some major successes in achieving compliance, but it remains a relatively new solution, and still relies almost exclusively on self-enforcement and self-monitoring mechanisms. Because of this, it is only one step in the much larger fight to increase widespread and continuous compliance.

¹¹¹ Mack, "Ending the Scourge," 245.

¹¹² Geneva Call, accessed January 2017, <http://genevacall.org/>.

Hyeran Jo has also conducted a lot of research around the issue of non-state armed groups and their compliance with international norms. It is worthwhile for the overall argument of this thesis to dedicate a small section to highlight this connection between rebel groups and international norms, and the mechanisms of compliance that Jo has identified.

In her work, Jo found that some contemporary rebel groups actually do comply with international law, and that these compliant rebel groups emerge “when they seek legitimacy in the eyes of domestic and international audiences that care about humanitarian consequences and human rights.”¹¹³ Her central thesis is that legitimacy-seeking rebel groups are more likely to comply with international law than legitimacy-indifferent groups are.¹¹⁴ Her work therefore identifies another major compliance barrier in the child soldier campaign, namely that of legitimacy-indifferent groups, which are groups that privilege military gains, have no social ties with their domestic constituencies, or have human rights-disregarding sponsors, and who will therefore have little incentive to respect international standards of warfare.¹¹⁵ These groups represent a major compliance barrier for the child soldier norm, as they lack the incentive to comply with almost any international norms. Localization, as we will see, may be one of the only solutions to increase compliance rates for these groups.

It is also important to note that sometimes, even legitimacy-seeking rebel groups may not comply with an international norm under certain circumstances. As Jo states, one of the key facets of legitimacy-seeking behavior is the regard that it requires for constituency preferences. This means that if the core domestic supports of a rebel group do not strictly prefer abandoning

¹¹³ Hyeran Jo, *Compliant Rebels: Rebel Groups and International Law in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 4.

¹¹⁴ Jo, *Compliant Rebels*, 4.

¹¹⁵ Jo, *Compliant Rebels*, 5.

child soldiers because of economic or cultural reasons, even legitimacy-seeking rebel groups may not go against those social relations, and will be unlikely to see the benefits of complying.¹¹⁶ This is another major barrier to compliance that, as we will discuss below, can be addressed and overcome through the process of localization.

As stated above, we have seen some major successes in the fight to end child soldiery, so it is worth quickly mentioning here that these findings do not intend to imply that we've failed to stop the use of child soldiers completely. This thesis is simply attempting to show that despite the major improvements we've seen, child soldiers continue to be used in many areas by many different actors, and this gap in compliance rates can be attributed to the existence of these complex and multi-faceted barriers. This thesis focuses on the areas where non-compliance rates remain high, and because of this it can appear to discount many of the successes this campaign has achieved, but the intent is to focus on critical barriers still at play, and to hone in almost exclusively on non-compliant actors and areas.

Now that we have provided a clear overview of the supply and demand factors that influence the use and existence of child soldiers, as well as the major barriers that affect the variation in compliance rates by armed groups, we can finally turn to the bulk of this thesis' argument: the case for localization in the child soldier norm campaign. This next section aims to provide a clear overview of exactly how Acharya's localization theory can help to overcome the above-mentioned key barriers in compliance.

¹¹⁶ Jo, *Compliant Rebels*, 151.

Chapter 4 – Norm Localization in the Child Soldier Norm Campaign

4.1 The Case for Localization

The dominant questions in this essay are this – why do compliance rates vary so much in regards to the child soldier norm, and how can localization help bolster and support the translation and diffusion of the norm in areas where violations are still occurring? At this point, we should have established a fairly clear understanding of the reason compliance rates vary so much – it is not only about the supply and demand, push and pull factors that influence the presence or need for child soldiers. It is also about the various barriers that exist in the differing local contexts that make complying with the norm more or less attractive and achievable for different actors, and about the local and international influences that act upon each of these actors and influence their decisions. Therefore, we cannot just limit the presence of children, or work to reduce the need for them, not only because this is often an impossible task to achieve, but also because it only addresses half of the equation. If we want to effect positive, long-term change in compliance rates with the child soldier norm, we need to pay attention to the norm development process as a whole, and target our efforts and resources at bolstering this process. Adopting an approach centered on promoting localization is one of the best ways to do this.

However, if we are to adopt the localization framework as the solution to this question, we need to first establish the potentiality for localization efforts to succeed within the child soldier norm. Through extensive fieldwork in Namibia and Sierra Leone, Bridget Hynes found several key characteristics of the child soldier practice that call for a prioritization of local efforts and local knowledge, and she identified several key local actors – or “inside proponents” – who could, according to Acharya, “help accommodate local sensitivities and aid in the localization of

the foreign norm.”¹¹⁷ This next section will give an overview of Hynes’ findings and the potential that they provide for localization efforts. Although Hynes’ never directly adopted Acharya’s theory of localization, or referenced it in any way, the following section will aim to use her work to prove that Acharya’s theory has solid potential in the child soldier norm, and deserves more attention than it is currently being given. I will first provide a quick overview of her general findings, before delving into her two case studies to highlight their support for localization.

As Hynes states, “In any given region or locality, civil-military relations have particular institutional structures, particular histories, and particular normative bases that serve as a crucial part of a war’s ability to expand, including its limits and decisions regarding whom to include as soldiers.”¹¹⁸ She argues that when addressing factors that promote child exploitation, local social capacity can, and should, be leveraged for more desirable outcomes, and that a contextual, case-by-case approach can be utilized to meet internationally set goals more easily.¹¹⁹ In her research, she identified several subsets of experience that children who become soldiers fall into, which led her to claim that without the specific knowledge of the more locally and regionally derived distinctions that make up these subsets, any remedies that are implemented could be unsuccessful or even harmful.¹²⁰

Understanding what Hynes refers to as ‘local capabilities and local vulnerabilities’ provides a map for international actors to understand and navigate at-risk communities’ strengths and

¹¹⁷ Acharya, “How Ideas Spread,” 250.

¹¹⁸ Hynes, “Children of the Borderlands”, 45.

¹¹⁹ Hynes, “Children of the Borderlands”, 46.

¹²⁰ Hynes, “Children of the Borderlands”, 46.

weaknesses.¹²¹ Because the norms around child soldiering interface with local norms around childhood, identity, gender, and economic factors, understanding community beliefs in context-specific locations is essential to developing effective, long-term solutions.¹²² Her findings strongly support the existence and importance of some of the key compliance barriers listed earlier; namely that of the failure of international actors to respond to context-specific factors driving child soldier use on the local level, and the differing and competing understandings of childhood that make our universal category of “child soldier” quite contested and unclear.¹²³

Hynes also argues that network linkages between regions, states, and localities can have a very dramatic effect on civilian security, and they can both define and impact configurations of power in ways that shape the extent of force and the way in which children are used in conflict.¹²⁴ Hynes stated, “These networks are difficult to generalize about, as similar actors can play very different roles depending on the shape of the specific local-regional-national network connections. This means that there is a strong need to understand the local context and the role of variations in local network processes.”¹²⁵ Based on this finding, it is clear that utilizing local actors and insider proponents is the most effective way to bring in this knowledge, which is a foundational part of effective localization.

Hynes’ research also highlights the strong link between the prevalence of child soldiers and the local, context-specific social norms around childhood, children’s roles, and the relationship between children, youth, and elders in communities.¹²⁶ She argues that “pre-existing labour roles

¹²¹ Hynes, “Children of the Borderlands”, 56.

¹²² Hynes, “Children of the Borderlands”, 186.

¹²³ Hynes, “Children of the Borderlands”, 186.

¹²⁴ Hynes, “Children of the Borderlands”, 186.

¹²⁵ Hynes, “Children of the Borderlands”, 118.

¹²⁶ Hynes, “Children of the Borderlands”, 118.

for boys as porters at rural border crossings, as the eyes and ears of ambitious politicians in towns, and as frequent migrants to fill urban market needs, all make their use as soldiers more likely and more acceptable than if the youth were in school or at home.”¹²⁷

Local norms regarding participation in war, alongside the ability of local leaders to get oppositional or controversial views heard both formally and behind closed doors, are fundamental capabilities necessary to combat child soldiering in an effective way.¹²⁸ Hynes found that when local politicians, especially those with a more traditional status, were unified in their message and goals with other local elites, they had the ability to generate a protective “shaming or shunning” power over their communities.¹²⁹ She also found support for the ability of unified and coherent maternal and student groups to bring about a similar power.¹³⁰ This highlights the existence and effectiveness of local actors that would be incredibly well suited to foster localization of the foreign norm within their communities.

Hynes observed several different ways that local actors in many different roles leveraged their local connections and influence to deter child soldiery, or to lessen its negative impact on youth. One such pathway was found in maternal networks. As Hynes found, in times of war, mothers are repeatedly seen employing aspects of their network capabilities to prevent their child’s military involvement, or to mediate and influence their child’s involvement in a more favorable manner.¹³¹ Using a family member’s influence to get a child placed in a more lenient position, gathering aunts and grandmothers to protest police inaction and draw attention to what is happening, and engaging family ties to transport children across borders, were all mother-driven

¹²⁷ Hynes, “Children of the Borderlands,” 182.

¹²⁸ Hynes, “Children of the Borderlands,” 118.

¹²⁹ Hynes, “Children of the Borderlands,” 118.

¹³⁰ Hynes, “Children of the Borderlands,” 118.

¹³¹ Hynes, “Children of the Borderlands,” 140.

actions that Hynes observed across cases.¹³² Maternal networks therefore provide one point of entry for localization efforts to be carried out.

4.2 Case Studies: Namibia and Sierra Leone

Hynes undertook two case studies in her research – Namibia and Sierra Leone. In the two cases, she identified several key impacts that local norms had in either preventing or promoting child soldiery, and she analyzed the role that local actors played as well. I will provide a brief overview of each of her two case studies, and will then draw out their importance and their support for the viability of Acharya’s localization theory. Overall, Hynes found that in Namibia, the use of child soldiers was heavily limited by the actions taken in the communities and through the framing of prominent local discourse, while in Sierra Leone, the actions and beliefs of the local communities helped to spur the use of child soldiers. These two case studies will be described in greater detail below.

4.2.1 Namibia

At the Namibian border, local norms were used as a barrier to the use of children in war. Early community-wide protests took place following the abduction of two young girls and in response to attacks on local schools. A substantial part of the public discourse generated by these protests centered on the treatment and security of children and youth. Residents of local communities, publicly led by school-aged youth, traveled to the capital to voice their concerns, and community involvement and elder guidance in the decision was incredibly strong. Children and youth were sent to the doors of Parliament to deliver their petition, and they contacted the press when they were turned away.¹³³

¹³² Hynes, “Children of the Borderlands,” 140.

¹³³ Hynes, “Children of the Borderlands, 142.

The language of children's rights, and of children as a special category worth of protection, was clear in the local framing of the issue and in the way the protestors presented their concerns to the central Namibian government.¹³⁴ The long standing efforts in Namibia on behalf of children's rights also played a role in limiting children's use.¹³⁵ Intra-regional unity was highlighted as holding an importance equal to, or beyond, grievances toward respective actors in the region. In many instances, abducted children were returned through the cross-border collaboration of community members.

Normative sanctions against those who forcibly abducted individuals to Angola were high, and the value of non-participation dominated locally. Community norms on non-participation were vocalized through the press, government, and civil society representatives in the church and schools. Locally based protests influenced national opinion, as they were eventually acknowledged at the highest levels of governments.¹³⁶ In this region, war weariness led to much discontent and fear over a potential spread of war, and an expectation of protective action by local leaders.¹³⁷

4.2.2 Sierra Leone

In contrast to Namibia, normative beliefs in Sierra Leone created a space for young joiners at the start of the war. The content of such norms was applied and interpreted by armed groups to make youth participation in war more acceptable. This can be seen in the downward trend in age standards for initiation rites that took place throughout the course of the Sierra Leonean war,

¹³⁴ Hynes, "Children of the Borderlands," 193.

¹³⁵ Hynes, "Children of the Borderlands," 213.

¹³⁶ Hynes, "Children of the Borderlands," 263.

¹³⁷ Hynes, "Children of the Borderlands," 268.

which helped to justify the use of younger children through local normative markers of adulthood.¹³⁸

Local norms also facilitated the border crossing of belligerents, enhanced child vulnerability, and shaped local-national interaction and the government's non-response¹³⁹ In Sierra Leone, local adult views of children as a source of danger, and local youth's sense of injustice and wrong-headed action on the part of elders, combined to create a firestorm in favor of war. The absence of a locally coherent message that could go beyond generational and ethnic divides allowed such forces to prevail.¹⁴⁰

As Hynes stated, "comparing local norms (between Sierra Leone and Namibia) illuminates the different categories of ideas that influence the spread of violence and the use of children that accompanies it. The two border regions share the porousness, cultural interrelatedness and shared histories often credited for the ease with which African instability spreads. Yet, specific regional and local norms along the Angola/Namibian border played a role in diminishing excitement for war, where at the Sierra Leone/Liberian border, specific regional and local norms helped propel war forward."¹⁴¹

Hynes case studies found that pathways of local action either blocked or promoted child soldiering accordingly, and the ability to mobilize youth and children made possible the expansion of war. Security in each region was influenced directly by local capabilities, demonstrated through the functioning and framing of local norms and networks.¹⁴² Most notable among these local norms were the ideas regarding war participation, perspectives on children's

¹³⁸ Hynes, "Children of the Borderlands," 187.

¹³⁹ Hynes, "Children of the Borderlands," 263.

¹⁴⁰ Hynes, "Children of the Borderlands," 268.

¹⁴¹ Hynes, "Children of the Borderlands," 263.

¹⁴² Hynes, "Children of the Borderlands," 266.

roles, and the capacity to counter prevailing war-promoting discourses.¹⁴³ This provides a good insight for areas where localization can occur – these local norms can provide the point of contact for the external child soldier norm to “graft onto”.

As Hynes found, local knowledge is absolutely essential, as historically embedded norms and practices directly influence children’s war participation. Specific historical struggles create potentialities around conflict in both directions, and old norms are grafted onto current events in each region’s debates on war, and impact the outcomes differently.¹⁴⁴ This provides a great justification for why localization can provide an important pathway to increasing compliance with the child soldier norm. The foundational norms in each country and within each community drastically influences the acceptability and availability of child soldier use, and these local norms are what we should be focusing on in areas where non-compliance with the norm remains high. Because we now know how fundamentally impactful local norms and local discourse can be, we can turn to Acharya’s localization theory to help understand and modify local norms. Localization efforts among prominent local actors can provide the opportunity for these local norms to be adapted and modified to fit more closely with the child soldier norm campaign, and can be leveraged to bring about behavioral change.

As mentioned earlier, Hynes’ never directly engaged with the localization literature, and while much of her argument relates strongly to promoting localization, she stopped short of making this connection directly, or using this terminology. This thesis is therefore arguing that Hynes’ work provides us with convincing evidence of localization theory’s utility in understanding norm compliance among NSAGs, and that her initial results warrant further

¹⁴³ Hynes, “Children of the Borderlands,” 266.

¹⁴⁴ Hynes, “Children of the Borderlands,” 268.

research across cases of success and failure to further validate the importance of localization in this norm. Due to my inability to conduct fieldwork, it is impossible for me to determine whether or not any of the armed groups who comply with the child soldier norm do so because of localized, community-driven efforts, or whether localization has occurred in the communities where child soldiers are no longer used. But Hynes findings suggest that this is a viable possibility, and they call for more fieldwork and research to explore this idea.

4.2.3 External Case Study – Female Genital Mutilation

Given that this thesis only utilizes two case studies of localization, I am aiming to provide additional support for my argument that localization may well be a key to success by drawing on comparable cases, such as the FGM campaign. This comparison can give us more additional confidence that these theoretical arguments for the importance of localization have considerable merit and promise for child soldiers.

There are several similarities between the phenomenon of child soldiery and the prevalence of female genital mutilation (FGM). Both of these norm campaigns are centered on the innocence of the child, and draw on child protection discourse in their messaging. They both have international legal support in the forms of treaties, laws, and a robust transnational advocacy campaign condemning the practice. Both campaigns also come up against a very similar problematic hurdle when it comes to ensuring compliance – child soldier and FGM practices are culturally engrained in some communities and are often justified with discourses around their cultural significance. Both campaigns have come up against accusations of western imperialism and of colonial undertones in their efforts to end these practices. Because of these similarities, I would argue that these two campaigns have a lot to learn from each other, and that

some of the tactics and programs that have worked to stop or, at the very least, decrease the prevalence of FGM can be applied to help deter child soldier use.

In Sudan, UNICEF has made significant progress with regards to decreasing FGM practices. One of their latest and most successful projects involved convening a workshop with religious leaders, community leaders, government members, civil society actors, activists, and artists, all with the aim of engaging them in localized conversations about the challenges facing the FGM campaign.¹⁴⁵ This group of local actors quickly recognized that one of the largest barriers to the FGM campaign's success in their communities was the discourse that people still used when referring to "uncut" girls – the current word (Ghalfa) was a derogatory term used to curse someone, and was often used to describe sex workers.¹⁴⁶ They were able to identify that without a new word, and therefore a new understanding of what being 'uncut' meant in this community, there would be little chance of success for the norm to take hold.

The new term that these local actors chose was 'Saleema', an adjective that is about being complete, healthy, and perfect from birth, as a creation of God.¹⁴⁷ The Saleema campaign was a unique and effective approach to targeting female genital cutting in a culturally sensitive and locally aware way, and by placing the emphasis on transforming local discourse to view girls as perfect even when they are uncut, they targeted one of the largest cultural barriers facing the campaign.¹⁴⁸ In the new cultural norm they're creating, Saleema girls are associated with good and beautiful; a marriageable condition; god's intention; and are seen as integral to their

¹⁴⁵ "The Saleema Campaign," UNICEF, accessed March 2017, https://www.unicef.org/sudan/protection_6092.html.

¹⁴⁶ "The Saleema Campaign," UNICEF.

¹⁴⁷ "The Saleema Campaign," UNICEF.

¹⁴⁸ "The Saleema Campaign," UNICEF.

culture.¹⁴⁹ The local actors also recognized the ability and the necessity of taking advantage of the Sudanese tradition of collective action, which can take the form of dances and poetry around Saleema, and has been symbolized by a community pledge written on large banners and displayed in public spaces.¹⁵⁰

This case study provides a prime example of the success that localization efforts can have in combatting pre-existing local norms that fuel child right's violations. In this case, we see prominent local actors taking the lead in grafting external norms onto local belief systems in locally relevant ways. If the child soldier norm campaign can follow suit, there is great potential to increase compliance with the international norm, as it comes to be seen as a locally empowered movement.

¹⁴⁹ "The Saleema Campaign", UNICEF.

¹⁵⁰ "The Saleema Campaign", UNICEF.

Chapter 5: Compliance Barriers and How Localization Can Help

5.1 Overview

The hope of these last three case studies was to highlight both the potentiality that localization has to increase compliance with international norms, and the need for more research and fieldwork investigating this claim. This next section will build on these two arguments by tackling each of the earlier-mentioned compliance barriers facing the child-soldier norm campaign. The aim of this section is to elaborate on the potentiality of localization theory in relation to each individual barrier, and to make the case for ways in which localization can help us to overcome or minimize these barriers and increase compliance rates across the board.

5.2 Compliance Barriers and Localization

One of the most dominant aspects of the campaign to ban the use of child soldiers is its international legal basis. The first attempts to limit the reliance on child soldiery were all brought about in sweeping international documents and treaties that condemned the practice by both state and non-state actors through their exercise of international humanitarian and international human rights law. But, while this top-down, international legal approach may have aided in spreading the discourse of the child soldier ban campaign, it has lacked the enforcement capacity to create definitive, on the ground action. Such legal institutionalization is unlikely to change behavior in and of itself, since it requires active mechanisms of implementation, which it does not have.¹⁵¹ Additionally, non-state armed groups are left out of the negotiation processes of these

¹⁵¹ Hynes, "Children of the Borderlands," 46.

international legal documents, meaning they have little incentive and no sense of ownership driving them to comply.¹⁵²

Localization can help to overcome these barriers by creating self-sustaining incentives for both state and non-state actors to comply. According to localization theory, empowered local actors will come to borrow and frame external norms in ways that establish their value to the local audience,¹⁵³ and if this were to happen with the child soldier norm, the enforcement capacity and pressure to comply would be coming from the bottom-up, instead of the top-down. We can see the potential for this to occur in the Namibia case, whereby local communities utilized their influence and their normative understandings to limit the capacity of groups in the area to employ child soldiers. If armed groups are not incentivized to comply by the international legal framework, there is a chance that they can be incentivized to comply by a strong normative condemnation of the practice within the communities they operate in. It is also likely to be easier for local communities to enforce and monitor this type of activity, and to recognize instances of compliance and non-compliance among armed groups in day-to-day activities.

As discussed earlier, Hyeran Jo is one of the leading scholars tackling the complex issue of non-state armed groups and their compliance with international norms. Through her research, Jo has established that rebel groups are, in fact, aware of laws and legal frameworks,¹⁵⁴ and they make complicated decisions every day to comply or not to comply based on a variety of factors. As she states, “In some situations, rebel groups voluntarily comply because their local norms are consistent with global norms, and at other times they strategically decide to comply, despite the

¹⁵² Geneva Call, “Engaging Non-State Armed Groups in the Protection of Children.” Accessed November 2016. http://genevacall.org/wp-content/uploads/dlm_uploads/2013/12/Engaging-Nonstate-Armed-Groups-on-the-Protection-of-Children-Towards-Strategic-Complementarity-International-Peace-Institute..pdf

¹⁵³ Acharya, “How Ideas Spread.”

¹⁵⁴ Jo, *Compliant Rebels*, 12.

cost of doing so, to enhance the legitimacy of their armed struggle.”¹⁵⁵ Jo argues that the interaction with other political actors is also incredibly important in this decision, as rebel groups’ legitimacy is usually determined via the perceptions and actions of other actors.¹⁵⁶ Key actors therefore include potential supporters at home and abroad, such as domestic populations of co-ethnics, diaspora populations, foreign state sponsors, or other rebel networks. She states “Rebel groups’ pursuit of legitimacy will be undertaken and navigated vis-à-vis these potential supporters.”¹⁵⁷ Her argument demonstrates that rebel groups are, in fact, responsive to local actors when they feel the need or desire for some sense of legitimacy from them, and that local actors often have more influence and impact on rebels groups’ decisions.¹⁵⁸ This provides further support for the necessity and importance of localization.

Another compliance barrier facing the child soldier norm is the limited ability of international actors to understand and respond to context-specific factors driving child soldier use on local levels. Because the motivations and opportunities for using child soldiers vary among conflicts and across cultures, it can be incredibly difficult for international actors to enact one-size-fits-all policy options, and to navigate the complexities of the supply and demand factors inherent in each region. Localization theory provides the opportunity for local actors to take on an empowered role, and to apply their own local knowledge and experience to inform any of their attempts to introduce the child soldier norm.¹⁵⁹ Local actors are significantly better-suited to understand what the unique factors underlying the existence and use of child soldiers are in their community, and with the funding and support from the global community they would

¹⁵⁵ Jo, *Compliant Rebels*, 14.

¹⁵⁶ Jo, *Compliant Rebels*, 18.

¹⁵⁷ Jo, *Compliant Rebels*, 18.

¹⁵⁸ Jo, *Compliant Rebels*, 18.

¹⁵⁹ Acharya, “How Ideas Spread.”

be able to effectively influence the creation and use of discourse and policies to better protect children. We saw this happen in the case of the FGM campaign that was carried out by Sudanese elders with the support of an international NGO. These elders were able to identify and navigate the complex issues driving the use of FGM in their communities, and to enact a shift in the discourse and cultural understandings around FGM to bring about more tangible change.

Localization is also prominently poised to help overcome the barrier created by the fact that ‘childhood’ is a culturally grounded concept that is understood very differently throughout the world. As we discussed earlier, different cultures have different understandings of the age at which a child becomes an adult, and different understandings of both the appropriate roles for children, and the acceptable forms of child labor. This means that the construct of ‘child soldier’ and the weight that the label carries is not a trans-cultural concept. Localization is one of the best ways to overcome this barrier, as it allows local actors to reconstruct these types of external norms to fit with local beliefs and practices. According to localization theory, local actors may redefine the external norm, linking it with specific extant local norms and practices. In the case of Sierra Leone, we saw how important the lowering of the age in local initiation rituals was in driving the use of child soldiers in the region. Localization theory gives us hope that there is room for the opposite effect to occur – with local actors utilizing culturally grounded initiation rituals to further underscore the importance of child protection, and to redefine child soldiery as an unacceptable form of child labour. This would be a prime example of localization’s ability to take an external norm (i.e. not using child soldiers) and to graft and re-construct it to fit with existing local norms (i.e. local initiation rituals demarcating the split between child and adult, and the appropriate roles in each stage of life).

This type of norm grafting between the local and the international would also help to overcome the other compliance barrier listed above; namely that of the fears and suspicions of western imperialism and neo-colonialism that can under-ride the dissemination of ‘western’ norms. The child soldier norm was created, drafted, and disseminated by western nations, and is grounded in a relatively western-centric understanding both of childhood and of conflict more broadly. Because of this, there are some cases in which little incentive exists for non-western armed groups to comply, as it doesn’t fit with their paradigm of the world or with the way their culture views children and conflict. But by paying attention to the ways in which local actors can help ground this external norm in locally-relevant belief systems, the re-enforcement and dissemination of the norm could come from within cultures and within communities, instead of from outside actors. This would increase not only the legitimacy of the external norm, but also its applicability and relevance in context-specific situations. It could be seen less as a ‘western’ norm or a neo-colonial form of intervention, and could come to be understood and promoted from within local communities and through local normative frameworks.

Chapter 6: Conclusion and Moving Forward

6.1 Policy Proposals and Suggestions Moving Forward

When it comes to helping foster localization, an important first step for any international actor would be to identify and connect with prominent local authorities within the region, and to open up discussions of pre-existing local norms that may be fuelling child soldier use. According to Acharya, one of the key factors influencing the success of localization is identifying areas of this local normative order that may already be being discredited from within, or are beginning to be found inadequate or outdated.¹⁶⁰ International actors can help fuel this stage by bringing in information and resources to help educate communities and broaden local beliefs to include the disutility of using children as soldiers, and helping to highlight the legitimacy and reputation boosts that comes with complying with international laws. Organizations like Geneva Call are well suited to this type of work, and have already begun doing so in many prominent areas.

Building off of Zimmerman's work, it is also important to understand that norm adoption does not always follow a linear pattern, and that there are several options besides wholesale norm adoption or rejection. Because of this, the child soldier norm campaign and the scholarly literature that is analyzing it needs to acknowledge that parts of the child soldier norm may be adopted, while other parts may need to be negotiated and adapted to fit local customs. For instance, child labour practices in many cultures, and the necessity for children to work for a living, may present a serious challenge to any attempts to send children, and ex-child soldiers, back to school full-time. This is a potential area for re-interpretation of the norm to fit local

¹⁶⁰ Acharya, "How Ideas Spread."

needs, shifting local beliefs to disaggregate child soldiery as an illegitimate form of child labour, but not condemning child labour as a whole.

6.2 Concluding Remarks

The aim of this thesis is to call more attention to the potential for localization theory to increase compliance with the child soldier norm among actors who continue to violate the norm. While demobilization and reintegration programs are a fundamental part of protecting and rescuing children being used in active conflict, they are only one part of the puzzle, and yet they receive an overwhelming amount of the attention and resources dedicated to the child soldier norm campaign. Without more attention, funding, and investment in supporting local actors in promoting localization efforts, compliance rates will remain low in many key areas, and demobilization and reintegration programs will continually come up against many fundamental barriers to child protection. While demobilization and reintegration programs help us rescue children from conflict zones once they've become child soldiers, turning our attention toward localization efforts could actually help prevent the use of children as soldiers in the first place by tapping into, and altering, the local normative understandings that often allow child soldiery to occur.

Another fundamental piece of the puzzle that is not being fully addressed is the need to incorporate and address non-state armed groups (NSAG's) in localization efforts. Geneva Call is paving the way in negotiating with NSAG's and allowing them to be a part of a sort of 'non-state actor equivalent' to the treaty making process, through the creation, negotiation, and signing of Deeds of Commitment. And while this is an important step in increasing their willingness to comply, more needs to be done to help make them a fundamental part of the normative change

process. NSAG's are key actors in the use of child soldiers globally, and therefore they need to be key actors in the campaign to end child soldiery. NSAG's are connected to local communities, and are influenced by the underlying local norms that promote or condemn the use of children in conflict, and are therefore the best targets for communication and negotiation. If done correctly, prominent NSAG's can become the local actors needed to help delegitimize child soldier use within their communities, and can help shape local normative change in beneficial ways.

The international effort to end child soldiery has also focused largely on an outside-in approach, meaning that it has relied heavily on outside actors to bring in knowledge and resources to combat child soldier use. The Romeo-Dallaire Initiative is a great example of this, as they're one of the leading organizations focused on ending child soldiery around the world. Their framework, while cognizant of the relevance of local actors in bringing about successful change, still relies almost exclusively on UN Peacekeeping Forces and government negotiations to monitor and implement child protection mechanisms. While this type of work is key in providing on-the-ground, immediate protection to children, it struggles to provide a long-term solution to the local norms fuelling child soldier use in the first place. In their most recent 2016 annual report, they did not once make reference to local norms or local customs related to child soldiery.¹⁶¹ This demonstrates that there is a need for more academic literature on the potentiality of localization for norm dissemination to help influence the policies and priorities of NGO's on the ground.

Another example of this is found in the Machel Study 10-Year Strategic Review report, published as a follow-up to the original Graca Machel study in 1996 on the situation of children

¹⁶¹ "Annual Report 2015/2016," The Romeo Dallaire Child Soldiers Initiative, Accessed March 2017, http://www.childsoldiers.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Annual_Report_2015_2016-min.pdf.

in armed conflict. In its entire 236-page report, it mentioned the word “norm” 30 times, and for 29 of those times, it was in relation to the international norms set by the UN and the global community.¹⁶² Only once did the report make reference to “local norms,” in which it stated that children who had access to emergency safe spaces during conflict were “more likely to be considered ‘well’ according to local norms.”¹⁶³ The report did not state what local norms it was referring to, or how these norms actually impacted the safety or protection of children. This helps to further demonstrate the lack of discussion around local norms and their connection to and impact on child soldier use in communities. This report was co-published by UNICEF and the United Nations Children and Armed Conflict office, two other major players in the norm campaign against the use of Child Soldiers. If these actors aren’t talking about the importance of local norms, it is clear that this is a major gap being overlooked at the moment.

Ultimately, this essay has argued that, in areas where child soldier use is still persistent, and where compliance rates with the international laws to protect child soldiers are still low, localization efforts present a needed step to bring about positive change. Child soldier use is fundamentally linked to the underlying normative frameworks that operate in these areas, and therefore these frameworks need to be addressed and challenged if change is going to occur. The most effective way to bring about this change is through local actors and localization efforts, and will ultimately involve negotiating and adapting the external norm to fit with local understandings and conceptions of childhood. For instance, the child soldier campaign needs to work to target and change the expectation in many communities that male children are only

¹⁶² “Machel Study 10-Year Strategic Review: Children and Conflict in a Changing World,” UNICEF and the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, accessed April 2017, https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/publications/MachelStudy-10YearStrategicReview_en.pdf.

¹⁶³ “Machel Study 10-Year Strategic Review,” p. 108.

valuable for security and defense, otherwise there will never be a lasting shift in the roles available to male children. If this underlying normative belief cannot be changed completely, local actors can instead work to frame child soldiery as an illegitimate form of security and defense.

To date, much of the scholarly research surrounding the use of child soldiers has looked at ways in which the international community can target and reduce the availability and vulnerability of children, and the norm campaign has relied on an increasingly robust international legal framework to deter demand for child soldiers. But as we are seeing by the continued use of child soldiers by both state and non-state actors, this has yet to bring about large-scale compliance in many key areas where it hasn't been effectively translated on a local level. The theoretical claims of norm implementation deployed in this thesis, along with the evidence of several case studies based on others' field research, strongly suggest to us that paying much more attention to how the norm may clash with local norms could have a very significant impact on its success rate.

While a really strong understanding of the supply and demand factors that influence child soldier availability and use has been developed, it is clear from the continued and sustained rates of non-compliance that attention to the availability of children and the effectiveness of them is not sufficient to address the issue. And while catering resources and responses to cut off supply and deter demand is important, it is not enough to fundamentally impede the use of child soldiers. Localization holds a lot of promise in those locations and among those actors who lack the incentive to comply with the norm, whether it is because of supply and demand, or because of many of the other barriers previously discussed. It is time to shift attention to addressing context-specific case studies and promoting long-term, normative change in communities where

the external norm has failed to take hold. Localization theory provides a great basis from which to do so.

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