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BOOK REVIEW

Title: Representations of Child Soldiers in Contemporary African Narratives,

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Introduction

Most of what appears in this work concerns the inevitabilities and realities of war and African situations. It lightened up the phenomenon of the 1990s in the Liberian and Sierra Leonean civil wars, where child soldiers featured. These soldiers were influenced by their experiences before they were drafted/recruited into civil wars. Drugs and footage of Western horror or war films also influenced them. Part of the problems the book raised and sought to address include an understanding of children and childhood, soldering, African and Western writers (novelists) on these subjects, their target audiences, and the question of stereotyping. The kernel of the thoughts in the work grew out of the author's interrogation of the renditions of African war novels by African female novelists, i.e., Chimamanda Adichie (*Half of a Yellow Sun*, 2006) and Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo (*Roses & Bullets*, 2011). Indeed, he analysed the works of these two novelists on Nigeria's civil war with the writings of their African male counterparts on the war, with a view to deciphering the gaps in their accounts/narratives on child soldiers. The book picked four novels for anchoring/interpretative purposes. The novels are Emmanuel Dongala's *Johnny Mad Dog* (2005), Ahmadou Kourouma's *Allah is not Obliged* (2006), Uzodinma Iweala's *Beasts of No Nation* (2006), and Chris Abani's *Song for Night* (2007). It focused critically on the agency of children in warfare through the lens of human rights, which is often hyped and/or privileged by the West. It critiques the notions of innocence, immaturity, victimhood, vulnerability and the imperative to protect, as they pertain to

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child soldiers or those that are so labelled. It made a strong case against a homogenised or singular version of childhood. It tries to revise the universalist idea of a child, buttressing his standpoint with the works of David Rosen, David Mastey, Peter Singer, among others. It also discusses the nature, objectives, interpretation, and/or misrepresentation of African wars (which together form the narratives). Indeed, it contributes to knowledge about children and war.

Appraisal

The author's argument that human rights are often privileged, when talking of child soldiers, by the Western humanitarian groups, is assailable, as he wrote, "... that humanitarian and human rights discourses on child soldiers are both heavily one-sided, indifferent to contexts, and contain misleading distortions that suggest a disconnection from the experiences of children at war". It is assailable, insofar as this stance creates an impression that the child soldiers have something to gain in war, as of essence; that they desire war and their conditions, agonies and hazards faced during war do not matter. The work maintains that child soldiering is neither new nor an aberration in African wars, as (Western) humanitarian agencies like Child Soldier International, Save the Children, Action Aid, Oxfam, Human Rights Watch, the Red Crescent Movement, the International Red Cross would make us feel or believe. I am persuaded, however, that child soldiering is not desirable and should not be a glorious advertisement of (our) African culture. Indeed, I am convinced that children are not suitable for warfare, even though they have been used in various roles throughout history and across societies. The author wrote, "... child soldiers are not easily analytically graspable", yet he has done so much on the subject – dissecting and analysing.

Conclusion

Overall, the study is a nuanced and fascinating interrogation of and an essential addition to African Child Soldier Literature.

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