

https://dspace.org/

Child soldiers as reflected in the African Francophone war literature of the 1990s and 2000s.

Minga, Katunga Joseph

2012-05-15
http://hdl.handle.net/10539/11468

Downloaded from a DSpace repository. https://dspace.org/

Abstract

The ‘child soldier’ is one of the most challenging concepts confronting the modern mind. Neither wholly “perpetrator” nor “innocent”, the child soldier character haunts the pages of our recent novels, drawing the reader into the sad page of the recent African history of civil wars. As controversial now as it was in the 1990s when it first appeared, the literature about child soldiers both invites and resists the reader‘s understanding of the reasons behind the grotesque acts of the African child soldier. Francophone African writers such as Ahamadou Kourouma, Emmanuel Dongala and Florent Couao-Zotti among others, have reappropriated the theory of the grotesque as a useful tool for investigating the postcolonial realities through the trope of child soldier. Distortion, degradation, irony, symbolism, and so on, as strategies of representation used in these writers’ novels all contribute not only to increase the reader’s difficulty in comprehending the child soldier but also to deny him sympathy. However, on examining closely the child soldier character whose acts everybody detests, the francophone African writers expose our new sacrificial and cannibalist practices. It is in this respect that the present study proposes to read the child soldier as a postcolonial figure which has become a signifier, not only of war and lawlessness, but also of marginal alienated African people who are victims of the exploitation of systems of modernity. The study further suggests that, in focusing our analyses exclusively upon the child soldier’s ambiguous nature as simultaneously ‘child’ and ‘soldier’, ‘strong’ and ‘weak’, ‘inocent’and‘guilty’, ‘protector’ and ‘destroyer’, and so on, this concept will start to become understandable. In other words, we will solve the problem of child soldier’s violence when such contradictions are given critical attention. It is thus only fitting that multiple voices or perspectives contradict one another in addressing postcolonial issues in Africa of which the child soldier is a clear example in this study.