

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/

Child Soldiers as Reflected in the African Francophone War Literature of the 1990s and 2000s

By

Katunga Joseph Minga

A Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand in fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Johannesburg

2012

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.

Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination at any other university.

_____
Katunga Joseph Minga

_____ day of _____ , 2012.

Dedication

I dedicate this work to all African children who continue to suffer and those who died in war and never lived to tell the story of their pain.

Acknowledgements

The work in front of your eyes has been made possible by a huge number of people, a number far too large to acknowledge appropriately within such a narrow space. Consequently, I start by offering gratitude to all, before acknowledging a few groups and individuals.

If I may be asked to say what my sacrifice was like in all these nine past years at this university; I would simply say that I climbed up the face of the rock on my hands and knees, a feat many thought could not be accomplished. I then hope nobody will take offence if I congratulate myself first for this achievement. But, what will the race be without the encouragement of others?

Most of all I am indebted to my wife, **Virginia Bambi Minga** without whose care and support this work would not have been completed. **Virginia** has endured it all for the success of this project more than anybody: I, often without noticing it, took all my frustrations out on you, but you willingly accepted it all. I owe a great debt to you my sons **Ephraim Kabuya Minga**, **Blessed Mukanya Minga**, **Céphas Katunga Minga,** and to you my daughter, **Beulah Ntumba Minga**, who needed to spend quality time with your Dad. I cheated it to work on this thesis. I would like to thank you and ask forgiveness for all these years of sacrifice you have endured for me.

I would like to express my sincere appreciation to my supervisors, namely, **Professor Judith Inggs** and **Professor Véronique Tadjo**. The project would have been difficult without their assistance and even more so without their intelligent insight which allowed me to improve this work. Please do accept my thanks for your valuable criticism.

I would also like to express my gratitude to my advisor, **Professor Robert Muponde** with whom the idea of letting others know about child soldiers in my country began. My gratitude goes back again to my editor, **Tammy Baikie**, for her patience in reformulating my ill-constructed sentences due to the interference of the French syntax. However, she will not be held responsible for the ideas advanced nor the mistakes that might occur in this work.

To make things which are stuck work is not something I could have done myself. A big thank you to **Dr. Libby Meintjes**, the Acting Head of School, in this regard.

I am also grateful in a less personal but equally real sense to the University of the Witwatersrand for granting me the Merit Scholarship for three consecutive years that enabled to start working on this project. In this regard, I also extend my thanks to **Professor James Ogude** who never hesitated to support me each time I needed a reference letter to support my application for financial aid.

Perhaps more importantly are my **Christian brothers** and **sisters** who were praying for me in secret. I thank in this regard the **Katunga Christian family**. Thank you for your prayers.

Given my financial difficulties especially over the past two years, a few friends have helped out; I would be remiss if I do not thank them. A special acknowledgement goes to

my friends **José Matundu Diamena** and **Margaret Northey** who have been friends in need and indeed during the last moments when writing this thesis.

And lastly, my eternal thanks are due to the **Almighty God** by whose strength and mercy I have come thus far.

List of Abbreviations

AK47: Automatic Kalashnikov 1947[1]

AFL: *Armed forces of Liberia* (Forces armées du Libéria)

CEDEAO: Communauté économique des États de l'Afrique de l'Ouest (Economic Community of West African States, ECOWAS)[2]

ECOMOG/ECOWAS: Economic Community of West African States Monitoring (Group) (Communauté économique des États de l'Afrique de l'Ouest) [3]

UNHCR United Nations High Commission for Refugees (Haut commissariat des Nations unies pour les réfugiés)

MFDLP: Mouvement pour la libération démocratique du people (fictional)

MFTLP Mouvement pour la libération totale du people (fictional)

NPFL : National Patriotic Front of Liberia (Front national patriotique du Liberia)

RUF Revolutionary United Front (Front Révolutionnaire Uni)

ULIMO: United Liberation Movement of Liberia for Democracy (Mouvement uni de libération pour la démocratie au Liberia)

SLA Sierra Leone Army (Armée sierra-léonaise)

[1] Kalashnikov invented the gun in 1947 and it is an automatic hence AK47.
[2] The francophone ECOWAS is CEDEAO
[3] ECOMOG was a West African multilateral armed force established by ECOWAS

Table of Contents

Abstract ii
Declaration iii
Dedication iv
Acknowledgements v
List of the Abbreviations vii
Table of Contents viii
Pictures x

SECTION A: Generalities about child soldier & literature
Chapter 1: General introduction 1
1.1. Aim and context 1
1.2. Conflicting perspectives in the texts 10
1.3. Chapter Breakdown 13
Chapter 2: Literature review and Theoretical framework 16
2.0 Introduction 16
2.1 Francophone African literature depicting child figures 16
2.2.Tropes and characteristics of the novels 39
2.2.1 African folklore, historiography and the novels about child soldiers 39
2.2.2. Child warriors and empire (nation) builders 41
2.2.2.1. Shaka Zulu 43
2.2.2.2. Soundjata Keita 48
2.2.3. Postcolonial characteristics of the novels about child soldiers 52
2.3 The connection between child soldier & grotesque 61
2.4. Application of the theory of the grotesque to this study 65
2.5. Conclusion 67
Chapter 3: Reading the grotesque novel: Distractions of violence, Misreading 68
3.1 Introduction 68
3.2 [Mis] reading of African novels 73
3.3 Writing in the Marginal or Postcolonial Space 76
3.4 The Magical, Fantastic & Grotesque Realism 77
3.5 Myths, language & culture in the novels 82
3.5.1.Dongala's mythand symbolism 82
3.5.2. Couao-Zotti's own created myth 84
3.5.3. Kourouma's use of Language, myths & history in context 85
3.6. Conclusion 91

SECTION B: Textual study of three novels about child soldiers 92
Chapter 4: *Charly en guerre* by Couao-zotti 93
4.1. Plot summary 93
4.2. Text Analysis 96
4.2.1. Child Abandonment 97
4.2.2. Rebels 100
4.2.3. Children at war seen through the lens of patriotism **&** revolutionary heroism 113
4.2.3.1 Djamba Ray 113
4.2.3.2 A former child soldier as a future revolutionary 118
4.2.4. Reunion, gossiping waters 123
4.2.5. Conclusion*:* Perpetrators or heroes? 125
Chapter 5: *Johnny chien méchant* by Dongala 128
5.1. Plot summary 128

5.2. Text Analysis 130
5.2.1 Historical background of the novel 130
5.2.2 Child soldiers & the waging war 131
5.2.3 Blurred categories of victim and perpetrator 135
5.2.4 Breaking the last remaining taboo in francophone African literature-sex 140
5.2.4.1 First sex scene: Desire for revenge and enemy conquest 143
5.2.4.2 Second sex scene: Why has the country become like this? 147
5.2.4.3 Third sex scene: The classical body in disgrace 149
5.2.4.4 Trauma and Healing 153
5.2.5 The banquet imagery and the myth of cattle raiding 155
5.2.6. The ambivalence and irony of violence 160
5 2.7 Laokolé: The final girl 163
5.2.8 Conclusion 170
Chapter 6: *Allah n'est pas obligé* by Kourouma 172
6.1 Plot summary 172
6.2 Text Analysis 175
6.2.1 The novel and its contextual features 175
6.2.2 The novel's political and historical Background: fact & fiction 178
6.3 Analysis of characters 183
6.3.1 War lordism in Liberian civil war 184
6.3.1.1 NPFL and the roadblock: Colonel le bon, nudism, funerals 184
6.3.1.2 The Congos, Doe & Prince Johnson 192
6.3.1.3 Women: Womb of violence 199
6.3.1.3.1 General Onika Baclay and the sisters-in-law 200
6.3.1.3.2 Colonel Hadja Gabriel Aminata and the girl soldiers 204
6.3.2 Warlordsism in Sierra Leone 209
6.3.2.1 Tieffi & the Lycaons: myth of cannibalism 211
6.4. Kourouma and the writing of child soldiers' *Oraisons funèbres* 217
6.4.1 Sarah 221
6.4.2 Kik 222
6.4.3 Sekou and Soso 224
6.4.4 Kourouma's conception of child soldiers' deaths 225
6.4.5 Remembrance or forgetting? 228
6.5 The *road* from soldier *back to child: d*emobilization & reintegration 231
6.6. Conclusion 234
Chapter 7: Summary of the analyses 236
7.1 Introduction 236
7.2 Writers' perceptions 236
7.3 Conclusion 247
Chapter 8: General Conclusion 249
8.1 Overview and major findings of this study 249
8.2 Phase one of the study 250
8.3 Phase two of the study 252
8.4. Achievements 255
8.5 Suggestions for further research 259
8.6 Limitations of this study 260
8.7 Final comments 261
Bibliography 267







Photos taken from http://conflictyouth.wordpress.com/& http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/3401991.stm

SECTION A: Generalities about the realities of the child soldier issue and francophone African literature in a time context

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1. Aim and context

One of the worst acts of violence described in African francophone fiction throughout the history of this literature is children being forced to become soldiers. More disturbing than the wars these children are engaged in or the atrocities they commit is their youth. Five to seven-year-olds are used in combat today.

While it is true that tragedy has had its place in literature for as long as the genre has existed, the appearance of the child soldier has brought new horror and drastically changed francophone fiction over the last few decades. The senseless killing by child soldiers (at times of their own parents) is one of the newest tragic elements which are not a part of the past.

Although presented in a new form, this violence is not unprecedented in sub-Saharan francophone writing. Nor is the child a new subject in this writing. First published in 1926 and reprinted in 1985, Bakary Diallo's *Force-bonté* describes a young Senegalese who fights in the First World War. The injustices the Senegalese child, Diallo, suffers as a result of his experiences in the First World War remind us of the child soldier in civil wars today.[4]

In Christopher L. Miller's *Nationalists and nomads* (1998), we read a quote by Aimé Césaire:

> L'Histoire du Nègre d'avant guerre… n'est que le nègre d'avant raison. Il s'est mis à l'école des Blancs, il a voulu devenir "autre", il a voulu être "associé."(1998:17)

"Conscription and participation in the French military" writes Miller, "became an important element in the creation of new class of intermediaries, Africans who could be used to colonise each other in the name of France" (1998:17). Warlords' practice of exploiting child soldiers today is no different. We are told that 134,000 Africans fought

[4] Michel argues that Bakary Diallo is "the only one to have left a literary record [about the First World War] – *Force-bonté*"(Michel in Hargreaves1983:288)

and 30,000 – most of them very young – died in the First World War. According to Miller, this resulted in what Philippe Dewitte in his book *Le mouvement nègre en France* refers to as "la dette de sang" (lit. blood debt) – a moral obligation that France owed Africans who had sacrificed their lives in its war. In many ways, however, France failed to recognise what it owed to those whose blood had been spilled. Miller further argues, "that sense of blood debt is one of the most prominent features in the emergence of new francophone African voices in the early 1920s" (1998:18). This is illustrated by Diallo's *Force-bonté*, although "it appears at first sight as an unreserved encomium of the French administration" (Gérard, 1986:120). While many think its title suggests the strength of France in establishing peace among the African tribes i.e. an eulogy on colonialism, the book also reads as a revolt. Riesz, János's 1996 article "The *Tirailleur Sénégalais* who did not Want to be a *Grand Enfant*: Bakary Diallo's *Force-Bonté* Re-considered" brings more insight with regard to Diallo's book. We understand Janos Riesz (1996) as arguing that, it is precisely the unfair treatment of the child *tirailleur* in the French armies that Diallo protests against[5].

The Césaire quotation mentioned above shows that "war is nothing less than the beginning of 'reason' by which Césaire means *resistance*" (Miller, 1998:18, our emphasis). Like Miller, we think that it is significant to read the recent francophone African literature about child soldiers as a literature of resistance (reason) which emerged a while ago.

The most recent francophone African works of art depict children whose voices and actions resist domination and exploitation brought about by historical processes of colonisation and decolonisation, civil war, and the mechanisms of global capitalism. As Florence Paravy observes most recent novels have that privilege to have children being simultaneously heroes and narrators of their own stories: "plusieurs romans récents ont

[5] In a prefatory note written by Mohamadou Kane of the 1995 edition of *Force-bonté,*
Kane in Janos Riesz's words argues that "This work has the merit of existing, and in order to appreciate it, the first thing one must do is place it in its true context rather than condemn it in the name of today's ideals" (Riesz, 1996:160). The book, it seems, puts an end to the series and serves as an opening to a new one. By the first series, Kane seems to refer to the works produced by a group of Senegalese intellectuals that sprung up around the First World War in Saint-Louis, such as Amadou N'Daye Dugay-Clédor, Ahmadou Mapate Diagne, etc. Their literature was very much against slavery and colonialism. While Bakary Diallo's autobiography does seem to be the last in a line of works he calls "fin de série." Even if it marks the end of that series, it still connects with that early philosophy of political writing. And if, as Kane argues, *Force-bonté* marks the opening a new series, it must be because it deals with the injustices of French armies.

pour particularité commune de confier à un enfant la tâche d'être à la fois le héros et le narrateur de l'histoire" (Paravy in Chitour, 2002 para 18).

Returning to the statement that this violence affecting children is not unprecedented in francophone African literature, it must be admitted that after Diallo's autobiographic account of his unhappy childhood in the First World War in *Force-bonté*, there is nothing else featuring a child fighter until the re-emergence of the child soldier figure in the novels of the 1990s and 2000s. Diallo's *tirailleur sénégalais* (Senegalese rifleman) and, to some extent, Bernard Dadié's *L'Enfant terrible* in *Pagne noir* published in 1955 as a collection of African Folktales translated as *The Black Cloth***)** is parodied[6]. Speaking of this *enfant terrible,* Thérèse Zhang Kai-Ying in her *Enfants-soldats d'Afrique imaginaires de guerre, images du continent et écriture de la dénonciation* also acknowledges that "Cette caractéristique rejoint le portrait que l'on peut établir de Birahima" (2009:206). In addition, it brings to mind not only the child protagonist Birahima in Kourouma's *Allah n'est pas obligé* but children as soldiers in armed conflict in general. The general theme of childhood and violence is most prevalent in the works of the 1970s and 1980s but is also found in the works of the 1960s, and especially in works published during the 1950s, due largely to the suffering of the African child during colonial rule. It is even possible to go back still further to the 1920s – years that mark the beginnings of this fiction – and not forgetting the works by European travellers.

Reflecting on the last point, it should be noted that childhood during colonial times was not easy. Writing about Congo, for example, E. D. Morel dispatched the following report which throws much light upon the situation of the local children:

> […] the carnival of massacre, of which the Congo territories have been the scene for the last twelve years, must appall all those who have studied the facts. From 1890 onwards the records of the Congo State have been literally blood soaked ... [there were] *atrocities committed upon young children by the State's soldiers* and the "prime movers" ...in this diabolical and unholy so-called civilising power are actuated, we are told, … by a sincere love for their fellow-men and black brothers. (Morel in Zins, 1998: 60 emphasis ours)

Morel first heard of the nightmare of the Congo from Casement:

[6] Bernard Dadié's *L'enfant terrible* is about a woman giving birth to a boy who as soon as he was born brought war in the village of the animals. This comes as no surprise because he was expected to avenge his father with whom, each time he passed, the animals tried to pick a quarrel for no reason.

> […] the agony of the entire people ...in all the repulsive terrifying details. I verily believe – wrote Morel – *I saw those hunted women clutching their children and flying panic stricken to the bush; the blood flowing from those quivering bodies as the hippopotamus hide whip struck and struck again*; the savage soldiery rushing hither and thither amid burning villages; the ghastly tally of several hands ... later on... we turned again to that tortured African world, to the "heart of darkness", as Joseph Conrad described it in his memorable story. (Morel in Zins, 1998: 61 emphasis ours)

It is these childhood experiences which are given expression in early works by both the African francophone writers of the 1950s and some travellers such as the journalist E. D. Morel, Roger Casement and Joseph Conrad whose novella, *Heart of darkness*, describes "imperialism as robbery with violence, and as aggravated murder on a grand scale."[7] In short, childhood memories in anticolonial writing became a leading symbol of the suffering of Africans in general.

Although the tragedy of the colonial child is recorded in the early works of African francophone literature, it is the recent literature about child soldiers which gives it its full expression. Concerned with this challenge, francophone African writers created child soldier protagonists. While the early francophone works retain the features of a child victimised by the social or political oppression of colonialism**,** a new genre of postcolonial writing has developed that retains the tears and sufferings of the child soldier while simultaneously offering a space to recount the child's own acts of violence.

The use of child soldiers has inspired the emergence of important and interesting questions such as: What is a child? When does a child become an adult? Why do some children become child soldiers? Who is a child soldier? And more esoterically: Why do rebel movements and organisations abduct and recruit child soldiers?

Time has not resolved the doubts and questions that surround the child soldier issue even today. Critics of all ideological persuasions give it their own interpretations. These range from the view that child soldiers are mere innocent victims of absurd wars to the view that their violence cannot be taken lightly, for they kill like any criminals. These views play against each other in different books including novels. These novels about child soldiers,

[7] The Congo Free State was the creation of King Leopold II (1835-1910) of Belgium. King Leopold II regarded the inhabitants of this colony merely as means of production rather than as human beings, though he expressed a hope that "civilization" might follow in the footsteps of forced labour. Conrad's ideas were shared by his best friend Roger Casement.

as we shall see, are loaded with historical facts with regard to this issue, but they are not void of their aesthetic significance.

In general, as argued above, African child soldiers have been portrayed by many, mostly in a negative light, which only invites discrimination against them. They are portrayed as "killers", "murderers", "mad", "rebels" or even as "monsters". Such representations not only create a stereotypical view of them, but also destroy our sympathy for them. How can we try and understand African child soldiers when we already see them in a negative light? Do they really deserve such exaggerated descriptions? How do child soldiers view themselves?

When one reads novels about child soldiers in sub-Saharan francophone fiction, the images of their capacity for violence are disturbing. The books are full of murderous acts, bombings and gory attacks or atrocities committed by child soldiers. They describe the phenomenon of youth involvement in violence, presenting child soldiers both as perpetrators and as victims, but in most incidents; they are clearly depicted as "culprits", and as "grotesque beings". Grotesque images of this sort can only be expected to produce strong negative emotions or challenge our sensibilities. The grotesque device lends itself to mocking, criticising and creating disgust in the mind of the reader. In this manner, the francophone African war novels, with their excessive use of grotesque features, could also be expected to further stigmatise these already ostracised members of the community. Arguably, such a portrayal could lead to the misrepresentation of the child soldier figure thus making it difficult for the reader to understand the reasons these children wage wars.

It is often said that "humankind possesses a morbid curiosity about death and violence, especially when it is perpetrated on a grand scale" (McNeil, 1990:24). So, the desire to explain who an African child soldier really is, is also manifested in some francophone African works dealing systematically with the characterisation of the child soldier. This study uses Ahamadou Kourouma's *Allah n'est pas obligé* (2000), Emmanuel Dongala's *Johnny chien méchant* (2002), and Florent Couao-Zotti's *Charly en guerre* (2001, first published in 1996) to explore the theme of the child soldier. Johnny in *Johnny chien méchant* (2002), Birahima in *Allah n'est pas obligé* (2000), and Charly and John in *Charly en guerre* (2001) are all children between 9 and 16 years old. They are forced into committing violence, although they react in different ways.

The overarching hypothesis that drives this study is that there is an explanation for child soldiers' grotesque actions. The underlying philosophy that guided this line of thought is captured in the following quote from Kourouma's novel:

> Et quand on n'a plus personne sur terre, ni père ni mère ni frère ni sœur, et qu'on est petit, un petit mignon dans un pays foutu et barbare où tout le monde s'égorge, que fait-on?
>
> Bien sûr on devient un enfant-soldat, un small-soldier, un child-soldier pour manger et pour égorger aussi à son tour; il n'y a que ça qui reste. (Kourouma, 2000:100)

Of course, the bizarre murderous acts of child soldiers who kill even their own parents make them appear grotesque and alien. By rejecting easy explanations of the child soldier phenomenon as a mysterious evil force that was bizarrely unleashed, this study attempts to put the phenomenon in its proper context, including the social context that made it possible for children to become so brutal. Answers may be found in the language of child soldiers which brings to the surface the monster lurking behind their brutal acts. The child soldier issue is one of a discourse of power that reaches well beyond their own control.

Clearly, as the UK newspaper *The Guardian* put it:

> … the African boy-killer, or the "kid-at-arms", in the American vernacular, "is becoming a pop-cultural trope. He's in novels, movies, magazines and on TV, flaunting his Uzi like a giant foam hand at a baseball game". His ubiquity is a manifestation of how far Africa, with its wars, postcolonial dilemmas and ethnic rivalries but also its hope, vibrancy, cultural and linguistic diversity, has moved from the margins to the centre of western consciousness; of how Africa has become the cause celeb, as it were, of our new globalisation. (Guardian News & Media 2008)

It is true the world knows a great deal about these children as portrayed in books, movies, and suchlike. But the questions that this research raises are: Why did these writers choose to write these stories? How do they perceive these conflicts in their works? Do they write about child soldiers to dehumanise rather than to humanise them as the press and common stereotypes often do? How do non-Africans tell stories about African child soldiers? Do African writers just want to please their (western) audience by making caricatures of child soldiers? What does an African novel about child soldiers offer to the world in particular? In other words, to what extent does the child soldier figure in African francophone fiction make a contribution to war literature in general and to the ongoing debate on child soldiers in particular? As readers, whether African or not, can we ever say that we know African

child soldiers – truly know what they feel, think, need or go through in the complexities of their experience? What is the relationship between a childhood state of innocence and children's subsequent experiences of violence? There are no easy answers to these questions.

Our interest in this literature therefore rests on an attempt to understand how any human child would behave if placed under the same conditions as the African child soldier.

What requires explanation in these novels about child soldiers is the impression they seem to create for the reader that child soldiers are 'murderers', 'criminals' or 'monsters'**.** Although child soldiers are grotesquely represented or described in the sketchiest of details by the francophone African writers, we contend that perhaps this literature infers more than it represents, for these books would be inconceivable if the writers' intention was to make caricatures of these children. We will later consider the question of whether this portrait of child soldiers as 'murderers' or 'criminals' is indeed faithful or unjust. For now, however, we will merely point out that child soldiers' actions are, like the concept of 'child soldier' itself, ambivalent, simultaneously laughing at conventions and recognizing the need for rethinking our attitude toward children and childhood. This issue is related to the complex question of the role of community in the life of its members (children in this context), a question which is central in the conception of these novels and which must be seen as a socio-political background for the understanding of the child soldiers.

All the different conceptualisations of the social framework and its demands on characters (child soldiers) seem to be related to an underlying question: Is the francophone writer's representation of child soldier favouring the needs of society or does he merges the voice of the individual characters and the voice of the community in his story? Part of the difficulty in resolving this question or understanding this novel may be due to the fact that in conceiving this war novel, the francophone writer has conceived it in such a way that everything in it is unintelligible to us readers, so, unless we place ourselves within the context of postcolonial culture of violence we will not be able to understand the rationale of their age and what they go through. Thus, the analysis of this writer's method(s) and techniques of representation should start from an awareness of his restructuring his fiction in what, "in Bakhtinian terms, can be called a 'zone of direct contact with inconclusive...reality,' a reality seen as contemporary and fluid" to borrow the words by Gabriel Castellanos (1994:136).

The question of whether or not African children are "dangerous", "cruel", "a problem" or "a lost generation" remains a critical one, and discussion of it seems to have been bedevilled by an unwillingness to get involved in critical questions surrounding issues such as indigenous African traditions, colonialism, globalisation, and so on. This study therefore suggests the following specific aims:

- **Aim 1:** To provide new insights into the analysis of francophone postcolonial texts concerned with child soldiers. Aided by the writers' techniques or strategies used in their novels, we will firstly work out the poetics of violence in this literature as a whole, and secondly look more specifically at the child soldiers' actions either as perpetrators or victims of violence. An attempt will be made to distinguish between the social practice of violence and the rhetoric of violence, which Derrida refers to as "the violence of the letter" (Armstrong, et al., 1989:240), even though the two have a tendency to dissolve into each other.
- **Aim 2:** To demonstrate that "childhood" and "child soldiers" are fluid and shifting categories, which transcend the idea of a particular race, gender, or class, and which therefore appeal to (post)modern identities. As "subjects", child soldiers are simultaneously "producers" and "products" of violence. They are, on the one hand, "authors" or "responsible" for acts of violence while, on the other hand, they are "subjected beings" (i.e. those who, in Althusser's words, "submit to the authority of social formation represented in ideology as the Absolute subject" (God, the king, conscience, boss, man) (Althusser, 1971:164). Child soldiers respond positively to the needs of others (i.e. their captors). As such, child soldiers take on dual roles of domination and subordination: As soldiers they are put in a position of domination, while as children, they are seen as unambiguous victims of abduction.
- **Aim 3:** To argue that one cannot isolate juvenile violence from the network of violence in African history (colonialism) or other background factors such as poverty or child delinquency. This aim is achieved by looking at various factors determining the origins of juvenile violence in order to make it intelligible, by looking at African youths from the position of marginality, and finally by showing how the politics of exclusivity brought by colonialism, ethnicity and tribalism, has culminated over years in child soldiery.

- **Aim 4:** To show how these three novels succeed or fail as art in representing violence. Although these novels clearly advocate children's rights and putting an end to the use of children as soldiers, they fail in certain respects to represent children positively, falling short of offering sufficient possibilities for seeing African children with dignity or as capable of renouncing this violence. The positive image of childhood, which, we believe, postcolonial theory needs today must represent African children mostly as they will be, not as they are.

African children's problems hardly need clarification and highlighting. However, for the purpose of this study, the interest is focused on the "rhetoric of the grotesque body" as a literary theory which, we believe, may shed light on the issue of the child soldier. In other words, the study explores the language used by child soldiers themselves and the concerns raised in these texts in order to assess their transformation into killers. Special attention is given to the strategies or techniques used by the writers in their representation of these children in order to discover the new features of postcolonial childhood. As such, the study's main objective is neither to try to solve the child soldier problem nor to side step it, but to focus on the texts to the extent relevant to the questions the child soldier issue raises and to attempt to make it comprehensible.

The focus in this study is not so much on the debate around the definitions of war, child soldiers, childhood and the historical specificities these novels raise. The focus here is on the "ugly**"**, "dirty", or "grotesque**".** In other words, how we can turn the "grotesque" view of the child soldier into a comprehensible view of who they really are. Since the writers use "grotesque" and "obscene" language to represent the complexities of the child soldier's socio-cultural reality, it seems fitting to make use of grotesque realism (the grotesque body) in order to read these novels. In his *Le recit de guerre: une écriture du tragique et du grotesque*, Adama Couloubaly (2003) acknowledges that the "grotesque realism" of which so much is made in these books is important in the analysis of tragic novels:

> Une autre dynamique liée à la description des conflits est le réalisme grotesque. Le grotesque convoque l'exagération, la bouffonnerie et l'exubérance langagière. Pour Bakhtine 'l'exagération, l'hyperbolisme, la profusion, l'excès sont, de l'avis général, les signes caractéristiques les plus marquants du style grotesque'. Le grotesque littéraire est ce qui choque, surprend, dérange. (Couloubaly, 2003:3)

Like Coulobaly, this study will try to show that war novels are realistic works in which tragedy and laughter (paradoxically) meet and go well together. The study will focus on the conflicting perspectives in these texts about child soldiers.

1.2. Conflicting perspectives in texts about child soldiers

It is often said that conflict of some kind is at the heart of every narrative**.** In Janne Schill's *Deconstructing perspectives* (2003), a perspective is described as an impression that is given by viewing something from a certain position. When writers embed conflicting perspectives in their works they are simply reflecting the way we process events, personalities and situations in real life – and this also applies to these texts about child soldiers.

At the centre of this conflict is the concept of the "child soldier". This study largely opposes viewing child soldiers only from negative perspectives – as rebels, terrorists, mad, killers, perpetrators, monsters, and so on. Such views imply that a child soldier is an unlawful child. It should be remembered that very often this concept is used in a context of power relations or in master-slave, rich-poor, superior-inferior relationships. This study strives to look at the child soldier as any other normal child in a difficult situation. We contend that perceptions of this kind foster a stance against the prosecution of child soldiers for war crimes and in favour of their treatment primarily as victims entitled to rehabilitation and restorative justice. In other words, children are not seen as "perpetrators" or "murderers". There are different types of perpetrators, murderers or monsters. The child soldier issue cannot be made understandable if approached solely from a moralistic point of view. Leeds (in Fornari, 1974), for instance, avoids any value judgements, which he considers useless in any analysis of war. "Values", he argues, "are seen as culturally important, but their expression is merely *an individually subjective affair* without significance for the study of war" (126). In his view, "to bring the world of values into the investigation of war would be to risk straying into a world of psychic visions without relevance to the real events of war" (126 empahasis in original). We are therefore of the opinion that, if we are to understand the child soldier issue, it is important to move beyond the binary opposites of good-bad. Instead of arguing that this child is one thing (a perpetrator) or the other (a victim), it's necessary to clarify what and who a child soldier really is.

As the stories about child soldiers reveal, the concept of child soldier is characterised by ambiguity. There are meanings associated with his violence, madness, grotesqueness, culpability and those associated with his peacefulness, innocence or victimisation. If we regard children as perpetrators, we are probably assigning them responsibility for war – for which they should forfeit their status as children. In this respect, they are as bad as any criminals, murderers, rebels or warlords. However, if we take the opposite stance and say they are not perpetrators, we may be surprised to find that they admit to these actions in these texts.

In Congo (DRC) child soldiers are called kadogos (the Swahili word meaning little ones). This concept differs from the English (child soldiers) or French (enfants-soldats) ones which are directly linked to violence. The western concept of "child soldier" combines two irreconcilable terms: "child", on the one hand, and "soldier", on the other. The fact that Africans refer to child soldiers simply as "children" (kadogos) rather than "children and combatants" or "children and soldiers" has to do with the fact that Africans see child soldiers like any other children. To most people, however, associated with the child at war , is the image of soldier. The soldier is in the mind of most people a terrifying image, a gun he carries symbolising death although also bringing to mind the idea of protection to others too. The child soldier is conflated with the stereotypical image; he is aligned to analogically with killers, as such, he has become a figure of absolute 'Otherness.' This leads us as well to the argument that these processes of naming, associating, and classifying categories mediate a specific ideology and thus shed light on how different people, not only construct their world views, but how they think of "others". In short, the concept of "child soldier" applied to children at war is a foreign category, it is western in nature and has a stigma attached to it.

However, it would be inaccurate to pretend that child soldiers are as 'normal' as any other children (kadogos). As we have just shown above, there is always more than one way of conceptualising an issue for any given situation: Coining a word such as "child soldier" to describe a new condition has the potential to undermine the gravity of the situation, shield against anguish or invite exaggerations, scandal-mongering and sensationalism.

David Lee's *Competing discourses: perspective and ideology in language* makes this point clear when the author argues that "a linguistic expression can never encode all the features of a situation, no matter how explicit the speaker may wish to be" (1992:45). Lee further

argues that there are "strong pressures on the language user in particular contexts to construct a situation in a particular way, pressures that derive not only from the nature of the linguistic units that the language makes available but from general conventions of usage" (1992:45). Such a statement reveals that the child soldier issue is closely bound up with questions of perspectives and ideologies. To resolve the problems of understanding around it, we must analyse the language which encodes these ideology and hides its true meaning.

In his *Orientalism,* Edward Said speaks of "strategic location" (cited in Mongia, 1996:31), which is the first step in identifying the Orient (the "other") by the position the writer takes vis-à-vis the other. In our context, the child soldier is perceived as an outcast due to the intense danger they pose to the public**.** They belong to or form a "minority" group often disregarded in the community and are in this way assimilated to the "other". Children, we know, have always been marginalised and regarded as the "other". The fact that child soldiers are treated as being different from other children makes their "otherness" even more dominant than their "otherness" simply as children. This view is explained by Randall McGowen who observes that: "The violent act sets the perpetrator outside of society, not just morally but beyond our rational comprehension as well" (McGowen in Armstrong, et. al., 1989:140). He further argues that: "The violent act comes to define a character as different from us, as criminal. This person appears to be outside of human community, perhaps less than human" (140). In this manner, violence has, according to McGowen, become the domain of the "other". With this in mind, we will look at the literary texts representing these child soldiers within the wider network of social relations.

In his article entitled, "The rhetorical situation" in *Philosophy and rhetoric*, Lloyd Bitzer explains that it is a given situation which calls discourse into existence. According to Bitzer, "a rhetorical situation must exist as a necessary condition of rhetorical discourse" (1968:6). "A situation is rhetorical," he argues, "in so far as it needs and invites discourse capable [not only] of participating with situation, [but also] and thereby altering its reality" (6). Simply put, discourse only comes into being as a response to a particular situation. Furthermore, Bitzer states that there are constituents to any rhetorical situation, namely, "exigence", "audience" and "constraints" (our focus is only on the first one) which also participate in the decision or action. Bitzer describes "exigence" as "an imperfection marked by urgency; it is a defect, an obstacle, something waiting to be done, a thing which

is other than it should be" (6) and "the rhetor's decision to speak is based mainly upon the urgency of the exigence" (7). But, according to Bitzer, "not all exigencies are rhetorical" (6). Following the critic, "an exigence is rhetorical when it is capable of positive modification and when positive modification requires discourse or can be assisted by discourse" (7). In short, "a rhetorical discourse is called into existence by a situation; the situation which the rhetor perceives amounts to an invitation to create and present discourse" (9). Drawing from this discussion of the rhetorical situation, we may ask: How does one explain the phenomenon of child soldiery? The situation generated by the emergence of child soldiers in Africa was so highly complex and compelling that it required a discourse and rightly so. For as a phenomenon, child soldiery is not perceived clearly by the people – it is confusing and shocking, depending upon the individual's clarity of perception and the degree of their interest in it. It is understandable to some and incomprehensible to others depending on how it presents itself to them. Moreover, child soldiery as a phenomenon is familiar to some people while it remains totally new and unheard of to others.

Given the exigence there is to perceive clearly the child soldier issue, francophone African writers have created a discourse of the "child soldier". Yet as already argued, what makes something rhetorical is the language's power to trigger change. The novels about child soldiers occupy a significant position in the history of francophone African literature. Although under-researched, they have aroused readers' interest of readers. African francophone writers have proven to be researchers on the issue of violence who use their narratives as an interesting tool in this regard. We therefore strongly believe that in analysing these novels we will be able to identify appropriate answers to the current child soldier situation.

1.3. Chapter breakdown

The chapters which comprise this study explore the theory of realism in the analysis of the grotesque features of child soldiers as appearing in the works of the three sub-Saharan francophone writers mentioned above. The aims and hypothesis of the study are presented in Chapter 1.

Chapter 2 deals with the literature review and theoretical framework. This review comprises four main subsections. It begins with a brief chronological survey of African

francophone literary works dealing with violence and childhood through history i.e. from the 1920s to the beginning of the twenty-first century and more recent works about child soldiers**.** We also show here how critics of novels by African francophone writers analyse the ways in which these writers conceive or give an account of children's suffering in their fiction. In most of these writings, this is done with the intention to show childhood in Africa as essentially linked to the process of exploitation either by the colonial or postcolonial rule.

After this survey, this section moves to the characteristics of novels about child soldiers. The writer of the novel about child soldiers grapples with the horrors of rapid modernisation and change in childhood but we believe that the myths of child hero and sufferings as reflected in the life of Shaka Zulu (South Africa) or Soundjata Keita (Mali) still haunt the new texts where they linger as real possibilities. The third sub-section entitled "The connection between the child soldier and the grotesque" reviews the two concepts and their different definitions. The application of grotesque theory (method) to the narratives is the focus of the last and fourth subsection. The study adopts the use of a technique developed by Fritz Gysin (1975) which seems to be the most promising although we argue, at the same time that, as a model, it is limited in scope and needs to be complemented by another level of analysis given the complexity of the issue of child soldiers.

The third chapter addresses the difficulties one may face in reading grotesque novels about child soldiers. This section is devoted to the limits of critics or readers' reading habits. This prepares us for the analysis of the three grotesque novels. Although this section does not purport to develop the study's key points in detail, it offers the reader two ways of approaching the novels about child soldiers. The use of the grotesque in these novels appears at first sight to distort the African child figure whose actions are disgusting to society. Read from this angle, the term grotesque preserves a negative connotation as has been perceived by many readers and this reflects disadvantageously on child soldiers. There is, however, another way of looking at this issue. The writers, we believe, use grotesque portrayals of child soldiers as a parody of postcolonial society which they subject to criticism. In other words, this chapter invites us to look at the "grotesque" and "child soldier", not simply as connected to the fearsome but above all as directing our attention toward aspects of the grotesque which have been neglected in the analysis of these novels.

The chapter concludes with the application of grotesque theory (method) to the narratives. This study adopts the use of a technique developed by Fritz Gysin (1975).

Chapters 4, 5, and 6 offer an analysis of the three novels. We try to unravel the basic grotesque features of these novels explicating and analysing the techniques that underpin them. Among other things, we maintain that through the descriptions of the child soldier and realities of war Dongala's *Johnny chien méchant* shows rather than explains grotesque features and that his approach lends itself more to a human rights perspective. Kourouma's analysis of truth in *Allah n'est pas obligé* characterises the whole novel. His use of myths is a powerful technique, which allows him to present his readers with an African man's perception of his world. The use of such a technique brings us closer to the truth and origin of the child soldier phenomenon. Criticism of the horrific effects of war on children is the focal point of Couao-Zotti's *Charly en guerre*. We have some reservations about some of his views especially those embodied by his chauvinist character, the Rastafarian Djamba and his sensationalism which threatens to destroy the niceties of his plot. We nevertheless believe that he has proposed a line of thought worthy of being explored. As a novel aimed at young adults, Couao-Zotti's work seeks to inculcate the notion of African solidarity and resistance against exploitation (or child soldiery in this context) in its readers. Whether this ideology is imposed or conveyed artistically by encouraging self-criticism in the subjects to whom the novel is addressed is open to discussion. The grotesque features characterising these child soldiers cannot be fully grasped unless these novels are critically analysed. The points raised in our interpretations are summarised in Chapter 7 which provides a partial conclusion. This chapter examines the main points or stylistic features of the grotesque elaborated on in these novels. The study concludes by summarising the central themes and theses in Chapter 8.

Chapter 2: Literature review and theoretical framework

2.0. Introduction

Although there are a number of useful studies that have contributed to this research the main focus here is on works by critics of African francophone literature and works that depict childhood through broad conceptual frameworks. This section examines the context of this study, starting with some of the relevant findings regarding childhood and violence and moving on to the definition of the key concepts before concluding with the treatement of the theory of the grotesque appied in this work.

This study differs from many studies on African children which focus on the history of childhood under colonial rule and offers a new perspective on how postcolonial children are both victims and agents of violence. To do this, the study creates a framework within which to view Bakhtin's theory of the grotesque. This, in turn, exposes the decay in postcolonial society and resulting concerns about human rights abuse regarding both the violence committed by children and to which they are exposed. The francophone African literature about child soldiers both condemns and mocks childhood and the modern culture of violence in a grotesque manner, raising questions about the relationship between war, modernity and the child's place within this inhuman world.

2.1 Francophone African literature depicting child figures

There are a number of critics and scholars who have studied African children and their condition in postcolonial Africa. Most of them believe that this theme has had a major influence on many African francophone literary works. Sewanou Dabla is right when he says that: "Bon nombre d'œuvres littéraires du monde noir, outre leur thématique souvent contestataire, ont accordé une importance particulière à la présentation du royaume d'enfance" (Sewanou Dabla in Ogike, 1992:107).

In Gadjigo and Miller's words (2003:34), "[w]hat we call francophone African literature dates only from the years following World War II." For Fredric Michelman: "African literature in English and French is primarily a Post-World War II phenomenon" (1976:29). "La littérature négro-africaine," as Bernard Mouralis emphasises, "prend naissance à partir du moment où, parallèlement au souci de défendre la culture africaine, elle se propose comme objectif la représentation de la violence subie par ces peuples" (in Zhang Kai-Ying, 2009: 201). To be precise, the theme of violence and childhood made its early appearance

with Diallo's *Force-bonté* published in 1926 and regarded not only as the first novel in francophone African literature, but also as an early written record of the collective memory of the *tirailleurs sénégalais'* wartime sacrifices. The issue at hand, then, is not violence in general but rather child soldiers and war. That war should become an explicit theme in postcolonial francophone African fiction in the 1990s and 2000s is hardly surprising given the recent history of Africa's civil wars.

The theme may be placed in a general movement that stretches from Diallo's *Force-bonté* (1926) through Malonga's *Coeur d'Aryenne* (1954) and *La légende de M'Pfoumou Ma Mazono* (1954) to Bhêly-Quénum's *Un piège sans fin* (1960), Diallo's *L' Aventure ambiguë* (1961), and Mongo Beti's works such as *Remember Ruben* (1971). Calixthe Beyala, author of *C'est le soleil qui m'a brûlée* (1987) and *Tu t'appelleras Tanga* (1988) is "perhaps the most visible francophone African woman writer today" (Irele, 2009:137) and also inaugurated the emergence of what some now call *littérature migrante* in the 1980s. Pius Ngandu Nkashama published *Les étoiles écrasées* (1988) during the same period. The theme has been intensified in the more recent works about child soldiers. The early writers of the 1950s found in the child figure a free and potentially powerful way to share their radical views about colonialism or challenges to the dominant ideologies. Much of this literature fell under the *Négritude* movement which demanded recognition for African dignity. Eileen Julien argues in her *African novels and the question of orality* that precolonial Africa is depicted as "a happy world, a better world, a world of a priori goodness and harmony. Similarly we read of Senghor's 'kingdom of childhood' where the black man lived presumably with no alienation, happy in his village, out of contact with whites" (Julien, 1992:19). Although this view has been contested by many critics, readers of the novels of the 1950s are made to sympathise with the colonial child whose sufferings expose the evils of colonialism. The reader of the works of the 1960s can also sympathise with the child of the independence era whose condition does not differ much from the former. In the 1980s, however, francophone African literature re-inscribes, in a neocolonial fashion, the "new" language of representation. The writers link power relations in political discourse to violence by the black rulers who are seen to be enemies of their own people. Harsh criticism in the works of writers such as Pius Ngandu Nkashama, Sonny Labou Tansi, and Mongo Beti characterise this stage. In a deliberate departure from the common trend, we have concentrated on this period and the works of these writers because they are central to understanding the postcolonial representation of

violence. The child depicted here to some extent represents the writers themselves who underwent physical and moral torture at the hands of black rulers, a technique Nkashama Ngandu refers to as "vies parallèles" (1997:119).

The readers of these more recent works of fiction will not find the innocence of the child as in earlier works. This clearly means that ruler's monstrosities become less visible; rather, it is the child himself who has become the focus of the imaginary. Readers may deplore the writers' misrepresentation or disfiguration of the African child but they should not ignore the fact that such writings are indispensable. The grotesque acts perpetrated by the African child (soldier) define or signal the birth of the new African childhood. Clearly, civil war has brought about a new form of narrative that seems to defy all traditional forms of storytelling. In *De l'enfance tragique dans Allah n'est pas obligé de Kourouma: entre guerre et représentation littéraire de l'horreur* (2011), Aimé Gomis would argue that, "cette présence des enfants-soldats renverse tous les codes de représentation" (110). That is the reason why one can talk of the recent African novel of the 1990s and 2000s as the *nouveau roman* in which the writers reconstruct the major changes and ideologies that have shaped their continent and affected postcolonial childhood.

Attacks on colonial rule and calls for justice are found in literary works by African anticolonial writers, but they are veiled. This literature depicts scenes of horror and the exploitation of the African colonial child – although in a satirical way. This type of colonial childhood is found in works such as Abdoulaye Sadji's *Maimouna* (1943, 1958), Ferdinand Oyono's *Une vie de boy* (1956), *Le view Nègre et la médaille* (1956), *Chemin d'Europe* (1960) and Bernard Dadié's *Climbié* (1956).

Protest fiction is said to have been "inaugurated by the Congolese Jean Malonga" (Nkashama, 1986: 523) who has been credited as one of the earliest writers in the modern People's Republic of Congo the capital city of which is Brazzaville. Malonga's *Coeur d'Aryenne* is a love story between two adolescents, a young Congolese, Mambeké, and a French girl, Solange Morax, whose father, Roch Morax, runs a plantation in Mossaka. Mambeké is the son of Roch Morax's cook. While still children, the boy saves Solange from a crocodile in the river. When the two meet later in Brazzaville, they fall in love and Solange has Mambeké's baby. Unhappy with the situation, Roch Morax attempts to kill the unwanted grandson and in Solange's efforts to protect the baby, she unintentionally

kills her father and finally decides to kill herself too. Roch Morax himself is portrayed as an immoral person who sleeps with all the young girls between 10 and 13 years-old and has mulatto children all over the village, he would, if possible, even have sex with a monkey, as Malonga argues in his *Coeur d'Aryenne* Georges-Louis Hingot quotes from:

> Aussi, les romans regorgent-ils de véritables "mania-ques" sexuels, tel ce Roch Morax dans Coeur d'Aryenne, qui après s'être attaqué à la femme et à la fille de son cuisinier, s'en prend a toutes les gamines du village de dix à treize ans qui "amenées par groupe de cinq à six tous les soirs, subissent à tour de rôle les ruts de l'aliéné plus que déchainé, ce qui ne l'empêche pas de se défendre d'avoir jamais été " l'amant d'une guenon. (Malonga, p. 186 in Hingot, 1969:54)

Morax is also portrayed as an extreme racist as shown through his ingratitude for after saving his daughter's life, the boy is rewarded by Morax with insults:

> Mambeké qui vient de sauver Solange de la noyade en l'arrachant de justesse aux dents d'un caïman, se voit accueilli par un Roch Morax bougonnant: '…qui t'a dit d'aller te frotter contre la fille du blanc,' et congédié sous les insinuations les plus venimeuses. (Hingot, 1969:54)

Racism is a form of violence amply explored in this text. To Fanon's mind, "l'attirance qu'exerce la femme blanche sur le noir participe au désir d'effacer le souvenir des humiliations de sa race" (in Hingot, 1969:53). Viewed from that angle, Solange's love affair with the black boy should be understood as something beyond a simple romance. Such a love revalorises the "self" of a black person distorted by the colonialists. Thus, as Fanon eloquently shows, and much of this early literature no less eloquently demonstrates, "the violence of exclusivity brought about by colonialism and hardened by racial division, will inevitable yield reactive violence" (Priebe, 2005:53).

Laye Camara's popular twentieth century novel, *L'Enfant noir,* first published in 1953 and retranslated several times into English, became one of the most widely read African literary texts in French depicting childhood. The novel provided an insightful perspective on childhood in Africa before and after the arrival of white men. *L'Enfant noir* has been recognized as a classic in the African francophone fiction. Camara's novel has also repeatedly provoked the interest of academics and historians from the late twentieth century to our day, a book which has consistently been regarded by many as one of the finest ever produced on childhood. This text, however, has been challenged by black

intellectuals for not contributing to the polemics of the time[8]. The "novel", as Nkashama notes, "was taken to task when it appeared because it was utterly free from any militant trait…" In fact, "it did not even contain the slightest trace of the anticolonial militancy which had been stirred by black intellectual circles" (Nkashama in Gérard 1986:516). However, Anne Pitte Loud is of the opinion that there is in fact violence in this text: "Si Camara Laye, l'auteur de *L'Enfant noir* s'est réfugié dans la contemplation du passé, c'est pour rejeter le présent trop compromis par le colonisateur blanc" (Pitte Loud, 2004:1).

Ferdinand Oyono's *Une vie de boy* (1956; *The Houseboy,*1966) is a story of Toundi's suffering during colonial rule in Cameroon. Many writers (Irele 1981, Palmer 1979, etc.) have found *Une vie de boy* to be a bitter denunciation of colonial rule. This view is also reinforced by Corti who says: "Toundi's story is like Joseph's tale of exile and loss" (Corti, 2003:45). In *Une vie de boy* Toundi Ondoua provides evidence of the bleak reality of colonial oppression[9]. The boy enters the world of the Europeans where he is badly treated by Father Gilbert. He does all the house work for no reward, except for an old shirt or an old pair of trousers. But he surprises us all, including Simon Gikandi, with his "inexplicable attachment to the characters responsible for his demise" (in Corti, 2003:46).

The boy also carried the trauma of the brutalities he saw happening around him. For example, he finds Moreau cruelly beating somebody:

> When Ndjangoula brought down his rifle butt the first time, I thought their skulls would shatter. I could not hold myself from shaking as I watched. It was terrible. I thought of all the priests, all the pastors, all the men, who come to save our souls and preach love of our neighbours. Is

[8] Alexandre Biyidi (also known as Mongo Beti) Nkashama severely criticized Camara's book, which for him, presented a false image of Africa as an idyllic world showing the optimism of large infants bound to interminable feasts and carnival initiations. Biyidi argues, "Laye obstinately closes his eyes to the most crucial realities, precisely the ones that have always been hidden from the public here. Did this Guinean, a person of my race, who was, according to him, a very sharp boy, then never see anything other than a peaceful, beautiful and material Africa?" (Nkashama in Gérard, 1986:420).

[9] Toundi Ondoua (baptised Joseph) does not want to be punished by his father and therefore flees his native home to live at the French mission in Dangan where he is taken in by a French Catholic priest, Father Gilbert as his "houseboy". When Father Gilbert dies, he is introduced to the French Commandant. But very soon, his role as a witness of the adulterous affair between the commandant's wife and the prison director, M. Moreau leads to his ruin. As a witness of the conflict between the Commandant and his wife, he unwillingly becomes a judge. Like his namesake in the Bible who was falsely accused of raping his employer's wife, Toundi Joseph is arrested on the pretext that he is the accomplice of Sophie who stole money from the agricultural engineer and is thrown into prison where he is beaten and subsequently dies in Spanish Guinea.

> the white man's neighbour only other white men? Who can go on believing the stuff we are served up in churches when things happen like I saw today… (Oyono, 1966:114)

The violence that colonial agents display is touchingly evoked in this passage. But it is not long before Toundi himself has to go through the same experience. In fact, Toundi's ruin comes when he stands in moral judgment of the whites. For the whites, Toundi had become a dangerous element. His childhood fantasy that he could "connaître les villes et les Blancs, et vivre comme eux" has proved to be an illusion (Wake in Arnold 1998:22). The child expresses his bitterness at a society that calls him a Frenchman but does not accept him as such and he dies haunted by the memory of black men being murdered by whites.

Through *Climbié* (1956), Dadié also contributed to the evocation of childhood suffering during colonial times. *Climbié* is, according to Blair, "a collection of Dadié's most poignant memories of his own life assembled under this title of 'Climbié,' a fictional name for his *alter ego* meaning *'un jour'*" (1976:218). Erickson relates that in 1930, "young Dadié left for Bingerville to attend the Advanced School, whose oppressive regimen he suffered until 1934 when he departed for the famous École Normale William-Ponty on the island of Gorée in Senegal" (1979: 73). From a very early age the child Dadié is made aware of the anguish of being black – his alter ego is shown a picture by his uncle of a black man in chains. The child narrator asks:

> "Did he steal?"
> "No."
> "What has he done then?"
> "He is fighting for his black brothers who are unhappy."
> "Where is it happening?"
> "Oh! Far away, in Harlem in America. That man was speaking of Africa for Africans and such things." (Dadié in Erickson, 1979:72)

As Adejunmobi argues, "the novel takes on an anticolonialist dimension as the protagonist gradually realises the ills of colonialism." (Adejunmobi in Losambe 2004:91). That the novel is one of the earliest to reject colonialism as highlighted by Ezekiel Mphahlele's comments below is true:

> Although Climbié often seems a passive character ...[he] grows like a plant, he gradually absorbs a way of looking at the world, which is only stated clearly towards the end of the book, when he becomes a political journalist. (Mphahlele in Gérard, 1986:494)

Mphahlele adds, “often, even a matter- of-fact descriptions Dadié gives cut like a rapier, whether they are regarded as humorous or not” (Mphahlele in the preface to the book, *Climbié*, 1971:x).

The theme of childhood and violence runs as well through most of Mongo Beti’s works. In their article, Kemedjio, Tabue, Djiffack and Tsoualla argue that “the involvement of Beti in the struggle for social justice and freedom goes as far back as his youthful years” (Kemedjio, et al., in Arnold, 1998:421–4). Some childhood memories such as when he was expelled from a mission school on the accused of infesting the school with his revolutionary ideas also provide much basis for his creative writing. Skilfully, the writer interweaves these memories and immagination in his works. He once observed that, “In Europe, writing has become nothing more than a pretext for sophisticated futility, gratuitous indulgence, whereas with us, it can destroy tyrants, save children from massacre, free a race from millenary slavery” (1979:91). The question is: How did Beti’s writing save children?

Beti carefully used his art not only to show the sufferings of colonial children but also the terrible impact of colonialism on their psyche and their resulting rebellion. Starting with his novella, *Ville sans haine et sans amour* (Without hatred or love, 1952) in which he tells the story of a young Cameroonian terrorist fighting with the Mau Mau rebels (or guerilla fighters) in Kenya and expresses his hatred of whites and his disgust for their black friends, he uses youths as his protagonists. In his *Ville cruelle* (*Cruel city*), written under the pseudonym of Eza Boto, the young man Banda is the central figure while in his second novel, *Le pauvre Christ de Bomba* his protagonist Denis is fifteen years of age. Similarly, Kris in *Le Roi miraculé* and Medza in *Mission terminée* are still at high school. His characters which are children in the true sense of the word are found in *Les deux mères de Guillaume Ismaël Dzewatama* and its sequel, *La revanche de Guillaume Ismaël Dzewatama*. Beti’s choice of children or adolescents as protagonists clearly reflects the childhood he experienced.

Although Beti’s works fall under the post-independence dispensation or the second generation of francophone African writing, they carry with them the same anticolonial tone as found in his early works of the 1950s. It is worth noting that although some works are published in the 1950s, 1960s or 1970s, they portray events that occurred in the 1930s. In his *Mission to Kala* (1964), the child protagonist, Jean-Marie Medza, rejects his father, a collaborator with the colonial authorities who upholds the French civilising mission which destroyed the traditional values he came to appreciate on his trip to Kala. It is in Kala that the boy breaks with colonial

ideology and embraces tradition which facilitates the rediscovery of his true identity. According to Eustace Palmer, "As far as Beti is concerned, these traditional rural people [the pygmies or Kalans], living a life largely untouched by western civilisation, are vastly superior to their counterparts from the westernised city" (1979:146). He reasons that "they must therefore by no means be regarded as barbarous children of nature" (146). For Wa Nyatetu-Waigwa, the novel offers "a profiteering, tyrannical, violent, and exploitative figure", who, for the son, represents "twenty years of colonial terror" (1996: 86). The father and the son engage in a fight which the boy wins. Young Medza represents the rebellious pubertal Rubenist band in their struggle against paternalist France. Medza and his cousin, Zambo, leave Kala and even Africa for a life of wandering. In this novel, the writer also "allows personal bitterness to penetrate the words of his hero Jean-Marie Medza when he recalls in the name of his generation the school system of Cameroon" (Blair, 1876:11). The narrative also evokes life at the colonial school and the sufferings the learners had to endure:

> Do you remember that period? Fathers used to take their children to school as they might lead sheep into a slaughter-house. Tiny tots would turn up from backwood villages thirty or forty miles upcountry, shepherded by their parents, to be put on the books of some school, it didn't matter which. They formed a miserable floating population, these kids: lodged with distant relations who happened to live near the school, underfed, scrawny, bullied all day by ignorant monitors. The books in front of them... (Beti in Stephen, 1998:317)

Remember Ruben (1973, the title of which the writer wanted to keep in pidgin English although the book is in French) is couched in the same aesthetic and revolutionary tone as the above novel. Here a village orphan, Mor-Zamba, is given a gun which his friend, Abéna (also known as Ouragan-Viet) brought back from the Second World War. One feels in Beti's work a deep sense of the violence we now find in literature about child soldiers. The child in Beti's novel has profound reverence for his people's fundamental rights, and it is for this reason that he takes up arms to fight for freedom and does not harm those who experienced the the same suffering, as child soldiers do today.

The same can be said for the works of the 1960s (i.e. during and after the independence period), which are openly indebted to their African readers, those who suffered under colonialism. Ousmane Sembène is another African francophone novelist who exposes readers to revolutionary ideas through his child characters. In the 1940s, Ousmane Sembène was part of a transportation workers strike in Senegal. In 1960, he used some of those experiences to create the novel *Les bouts de bois de Dieu* (*God's bits of wood*). The novel tells a realistic

story of the strike by Dakar-Niger railroad workers who were demanding better pay, family allowances and pensions. The Europeans cut off their food and water supplies. Women fought with policemen and marched in protest against their treatment and to support the strikers. What makes an impression on the reader in this novel is the role played by children in the story. Sembène's sympathies lie with a small girl of eight or nine years, Ad'jibid'ji whom he describes in positive terms: "Ad'jibid'ji n'était ni irrespectueuse, ni effrontée. Au contraire sa maturité, sa spontaneité, sa lucidité stupéfiaient tout le monde et d'abord Niakoro elle-même" (Sembène, 1960:19). By choosing Ad'jibid'ji as a voice in this narrative, Fawzia Ahmad-Slavin observes that Sembène uses this "little girl as the first representative of his preferred ideology of progressive change as she represents modernity and evolution" (1995:52). Ahmad-Slavin further argues that "the spirit," of Adjibidji, "crosses the frontier that separates the old from the new as she sets out to join the men's meeting" (1995:52). Ad'jibid'ji is a character we cannot but compare to Laokolé in *Johnny chien méchant,* as we shall see later on, whose final act against the perpetrator is liberating.

African children suffered the traumas of violence as they saw how their parents were abused by the colonial regime. The psychological consequences for children inform interesting works of fiction of which Bhêly-Quénum's *Un piège sans fin* (1960) is an example. This book focuses on parents' humiliation viewed through the eyes of a child. The child, Ahouna, watches how the commandant mercilessly beats his father to the extent that the latter, highly-stressed, finally decides to kill himself. The passages below demonstrate how the child is united to his father's suffering in his dying moments:

> Et il [le Commandant] l'a battu, mais battu comme je n'ai jamais vu battre un homme… La cravache siffla encore; les oreilles de mon père recommencèrent de ruisseler de sang. Pour la première fois depuis les ravages du cholera et ceux des criquets, mais aussi pour la dernière fois, je vis les larmes couler des yeux de mon père. Il regardait sa dague, je m'approchai du chantier…
>
> Mon père avait déjà plongé la dague dans son cœur! Le sang coulait avec furie, on se précipita vers lui; je le vis tomber…
>
> Pareil à un dément, les bras en l'air, saisi de vertige et jeté dans une course d'automate, je criais ma douleur et ma misère à travers champs et montagnes, allais d'agglomération en agglomération, de case en case: Mon père est mort! On a tué Bakari! Le Commandant l'a tué!... Je l'ai vu, mon père est mort sous mes yeux! Venez! Venez! (Quoted from the novel by Ikonne, et al., 1992:122)

As we have seen, the condition of the African child is one of pain and suffering under colonial rule. In an editorial review entitled *Mots Pluriels* (2002) and themed "Etre enfant en Afrique", a number of articles refer to "the condition of the child in Africa" as affected by violence. In "L'enfant colonial dans le roman postcolonial" Marie-Francoise Chitour (2002), for example, offers us a reading of two Guinean novels, *Les écailles du ciel*, by Tierno Monénembo, published in 1986, and *Mémoire d'une peau,* by William Sassine (1998), which portray two childhoods of the colonial period in flashbacks. Cousin Samba in *Les écailles du ciel* is rejected by his father and treated cruelly by the villagers who believe him to be a sorcerer and condemn him to solitude whereas Milos Kan, this colonial child, in *Mémoire d'une peau* is an albino, without a childhood, without a father, and, who also suffers insults and brutality, which are exacerbated by the load of curses that weigh on an albino as Chitour observes, "Milos, qui a donc vécu son enfance à l'époque coloniale, a été agressé, brutalisé par ses camarades, parce qu'il était différent des autres, marginalisé par sa peau" (Chitour, 2002 para 14). In the article entitled "'Être albinos': the trope of albinism in William Sassine's *Wirriyamu* and *Mémoire d'une peau*" Charlotte Baker argues that "Sassine's portrayal of the protagonist of *Mémoire d'une peau* demonstrates that being albino means being associated with weakness, madness, marginality and curiosity" (2010). Baker also proposes that Sassine's use of the symbolic trope of albinism raises important questions about the paradigms around which the colonial and postcolonial worlds of these novels are structured and demands a re-examination of what constitutes postcolonial African identity.[10] To paraphrase Xavier Garnier (2002), Sassine's *Mémoire d'une peau* is a manifestation of the disappearance of childhood. As such, it is a text of great violence, since the lack of recognition is constantly met with protest or agitation. After his father's death, Milos, an only child, has to confront life's adversities alone. However, there is a difference in the treatment of this theme in Sassine's other novels. While the child in *Wirriyamu* (1976) has dreams of peace and happiness in a world full of hatred and violence, Milos in *Mémoire d'une peau* (1998) is enclosed in total solitude, becomes violent and would not hesitate to kill to avenge himself for his humiliation. Once an adult, however, Milos, discovers after investigation that everybody could be albino in their own way either by being weak or solitary. Sassine's *Le jeune homme de sable* (1997) and *Le Zéhéros n'est pas n'importe qui* (1985) respond to the same logic. Sassine is himself Oumarou, the *jeune homme de sable*, and the vagabond Camara, hero of *Le Zéhéros n'est pas n'importe qui,* whose unhappy childhood is the source

[10] For Véronique Tadjo, "albinism could also be understood as a symbol of racial difference" (personal communication, November 3, 2008).

of his writing's power. These feelings of exclusion have left numerous traces in Sassine's writing, which is why he is regarded as a writer of marginalisation, a key subject of postcolonial debates. The late Guinean writer always chose the marginalised as his characters. He himself experienced a marginalised childhood – rejected by friends on the ground of his skin colour. Very early in his life Sassine recognised that his situation was not typical: "I was a mullatto and people made me painfully aware of it. I've always experienced a certain kind of solitude, and because I was afflicted with a speech impediment (I stammered), I found myself all the more isolated" (Chevrier, 1992:133).

In an online article on "Enfance et contestation: le parcours romanesque de Tierno Monénembo"[11], Florence Paravy discusses childhood in the context of civil wars as represented by the Guinean writer. In Monénembo's work the world is very hard for children, even if they succeed to survive, "Dans l'ensemble de son oeuvre, Tierno Monénembo's décrit un monde dur, dans lequel l'existence se réduit le plus souvent à un périlleux exercice de survie" (Paravy, 2002 para 2). The child is in Paravy's words, the preferential victim of history's convulsions (diseases, wars, etc.), "C'est ainsi que l'enfant", he argues, … apparaît essentiellement comme un réflecteur des réalités socio-politiques, le jouet et la victime privilégiée des soubresauts de l'Histoire" (2002 para 6).

L'ainé des orphelins (2000; translated into English by Monique Fleury Nagem as *The Oldest Orphan* in 2004) by Monénembo is about a fifteen-year old boy from Nyamata who has been sentenced to death in Kigali's central prison where he is awaiting his execution. He introduces himself to with these words: "Je m'appelle Faustin, Faustin Nsenghimana. J'ai quinze ans. Je suis dans une cellule de la prison centrale de Kigali. J'attends d'être executé." The story relates how the boy, born of a Tutsi mother and a Hutu father who wished to be killed and die alongside his wife. On 15 April, Faustin plays peacefully with his kite when he is drawn into the adults' world of deadly violence. Imprisoned with his parents in the village church, the narrator loses consciousness when the killers throw grenades before

[11] Tierno Monénembo was among the African authors invited to Rwanda after the 1994 Tutsi-Hutu massacre to write genocide into memory. The project "Rwanda – Writing in Duty of Memory" was initiated by Nocky Djedanoum, Chadian writer and director of the festival Fest'Africa, and the journalist Maïmouna Coulibaly. Ten African writers of different nationalities were invited for residence in Rwanda in 1998 in order to research and write about the genocide. The paper entitled, "Creative writing in the aftermath of the genocide in Rwanda: The project "Rwanda – Écrire par devoir de mémoire" is anonymous. It has been presented at the third international and interdisciplinary Trauma Research Net Conference 2006 "Trauma – Stigma and Distinction: Social Ambivalences in the Face of Extreme Suffering", St. Moritz, Switzerland, 14-17 September 2006. (www.univie.ac.at/afrika/mitarbeiterinnen/kopf_04.pdf)

dismembering those inside with machetes. The boy was found seven days later clinging to his dead mother's breasts among the abandoned dead bodies in the church. How he retrieves his severely traumatised younger brothers and sisters from an orphanage and how he joins the other orphans in the streets, shoots his friend and close relative, Musinkôro that he caught having sex with his sister, is narrated in detail in the story.

An anonymous paper entitled "Creative writing in the aftermath of the genocide in Rwanda" argues that "*L'ainé des orphelins* represents a multilayered and powerful critique of how official 'truth' is constructed by distortions, simplifications and projections" (Creative writing, 2006: para 39). The writer believes "Faustin confuses the reader and his notion of justice and guilt by consistently resisting classification" (Creative writing, 2006: para 39). Regarded from an African perspective, there is nothing confusing about it as the critic seems to suggests. Faustin murders Musinkôro to restore the dignity of his family: "L'honneur de la famille, ça ne se discute nulle part au monde, en tout cas pas chez les Nsenghimana!" (Monénembo, 2000:135). Furthermore, on closer analysis, this murder not only restores family honour but that of all the victims of genocide. As Franco Fornari notes in his *The Psychoanalysis of War*, in some ancient tribes, "the duty of avenging the death of his nearest relative is the most sacred duty" (1974:56). This means "finding the culprit and killing him" (56) and this culprit is none other than a member of the offender's tribe. Such a duty cannot be left unfulfilled because "the stain (i.e guilt) must be cleansed with blood" (1974: 56) – either the culprit's or a member of the offender's tribe. Faustin's killing of the Hutu boy, Musinkôro, reminds us of blood revenge for the Tutsi killed by the Hutu during the genocide. Musinkôro dies as a scapegoat.

Lisa McNee's article "Monénembo's *L'Aîné des orphelins* and the Rwandan Genocide" is also insightful in its treatment of this novel. Françoise Sironi (in McNee, 2004) considers the child's guilt, arguing that the myth "contient la configuration de la culpabilité du survivant" (Sironi in McNee, 2004:3). For Sironi, "il est question de culpabilité pour rendre compte du fait qu'ils parlent des morts, qu'ils sont parfois avec les morts et qu'ils ont du mal à vivre parmi les vivants" (Sironi in McNee, 2004: 3). Barrois feels the same way: "the problem of the survivor is that she/he is caught between worlds; unable to return fully to the world of the living because she/he has not been able to mourn those lost to the genocide. Caught in a half-life that cannot be called death, the survivor tries to straddle both worlds" (Barrois in McNee, 2004:3). Barrois and Sironi are right when they observe that those who survive traumatic experiences live in a state of guilt although they don't show clearly how it can be escaped.

According to Faustin, Musinkôro's blood (as representative of the offender's tribe), as already argued above, is meant to cleanse his guilt. This is why the answers he gives to the judge do not reflect any anxiety or discomfort. Asked if he regrets killing Musinkôro, Faustin says, unflinchingly, "Je m'excuse , monsieur le juge, mais je n'ai aucun sens du regret" (Monénembo, 2000: 136)[12]. Someone warns him that he should think of saving his life, but to this one, too, he replies: "Je n'ai fait que ça, ces derniers temps: sauver ma tête. Si on me la coupe, je n'aurai qu'un regret: n'avoir pas suffisamment profité du bon temps" (137). Such a statement shows that the boy does not need their justice nor is he afraid of death. What matters to him is that he has cleared his honour even if it appears to us to be rooted in violence.

What is interesting here is that the judge's fear of murder as disrupting public order or social security and Faustin's own fear of disrespecting his ancestors failing in his duty to avenge his family's honour appeal to the same ideal. In other words, each of them respects his values. Crime here becomes as righteous an act as the execution of a criminal is considered by the judicial system in other places. Monénembo's book offers us a child protagonist who sacrifices all he holds dear, even his childhood itself to do what he believes is right. "It is not every one that is prepared so to act up to his ideals" to borrow Fornari's words (1974:57). Though *L'aîné des orphelins* raises complex questions, it is nonetheless regarded as "one of the most realistic and most consistent representations of the irreconcilable contradictions" (Creative writing, 2006: para 38) produced by the Rwandan genocide. Most importantly, however, the writer seems to argue that we can evaluate human beliefs and behaviour only in terms of their cultural context. However, caution should be taken against thinking that African people kill each other out of hatred. Writing about *Misinterpreting ethnic conflicts in Africa*, Father Clement Mweyang Aapengnuo argues that "People do not kill each other because of ethnic differences; they kill each other when these differences are promoted as the barrier to advancement and opportunity" (2010:14). As Faustin's father Théoneste who is seen as the village idiot says to his fellow countrymen: "Ça ne veut pas dire grand-chose, hutu et tutsi, c'est comme si tu perdais ton temps à comparer l'eau à l'eau" (Monénembo, 2000:139).

[12] One can speculate that for Faustin Musinkôro's crime is punishable. In so doing, he takes responsibility, not only for pleasing the ancestors but also deals with issues which have destroyed African culture and have led the country into chaos. As the title indicates, Faustin's role is that of the eldest of the orphans – the eldest of the remaining members of the Nsenghimana family, and thus the responsible figure. He is the one who is left to preserve our traditions after all the others have been killed.

Couloubaly (2003) who also analyses *L'aîné des orphelins* shows how the image of the child as the main victim in this war betrays the logic of cruelty, death and its meaninglessness. Reminding us of children's suffering during the genocide he describes a Tutsi child, Lizende who carries a shroud in the knowledge that the killers' arrival is inevitable. But since these people only know how to kill and not bury, dying with a burial garment at hand would be as if he had given himself a burial (*L'Aîné des orphelins*, p.151). According to Couloubaly, "Cette accoutumance de l'enfance avec l'idée de mort est grave, car l'on tue l'enfance avant d'éliminer l'enfant" meaning that this familiarity with the idea of death is a serious matter of concern because it indicates the death of childhood even before his physical death. This, however, is contrasted with Faustin who is unaware of the danger he was facing, he still played with his kite until a policeman, Nyumurowo, snatches this toy as he remarks:

> Mais c'est le fils de Théoneste: Voyez-moi ça: il joue au cerf-volant! Les tueries vont commencer et il joue au cerf-volant. Il n'y a pas à dire, les idiots sont nés pour être heureux! (Monénembo, 2000:150)

The playing attitude of this child is related, according to Monénembo, to Africa appearing to be at peace before 1990s. The basic theme of the powerless child is a denial of civil war as an internal problem.

However, in contrasting Monénembo's two recent novels, *L'aîné des orphelins* (2000) and *Cinéma* (1997) – the story of an adolescent enamoured of cowboy movies in 1950s Guinea – Paravy argues that:

> [...]whereas *Cinéma* presents a crisis of adolescence and ends happily with the movement of the child from the role of fictional hero to the status of "Hero", *L'aîné des orphelins*, inscribed in the after-effects of the Rwandan genocide, begins and ends in despair, finally relegating "the scenarios of happy childhood to the universe of impossible fiction. (Paravy in Borgomano, 2002, para 14).

Nevertheless, the child figure in both novels arises from the same theme of pain.

Monénembo's *L'aîné des orphelins,* Tadjo's *L'Ombre d'Imana,* Kourouma's *Allah n'est pas obligé* and many others want to remember those horrifying times (genocide) by writing about memories that most people would only want to forget. But Monénembo and Kourouma portay children as victims writing about their experiences not only to preserve the history of the event, but to help those who were not involved and those who did survive to understand what really happened. They want the people of the world to realise how viciously they were

treated. As the political unrest that led to the African wars of 1990s was gathering pace, these novelists relentlessly and courageously started to question the death not only of the child but also of childhood.

The article "Child soldiers in Ken Saro-Wiwa's *Sozaboy* and Ahmadou Kourouma's *Allah n'est pas obligé*" by Patrick Corcoran presents us with a very interesting comparison between *Sozaboy* (1985) by the Nigerian writer Ken Saro-Wiwa and *Allah n'est pas obligé* by Ahmadou Kourouma (2002 para15). These are two novels whose hero-narrators are children or very young people involved as soldiers in conflicts that have nothing to do with them. Both these novels deal with history, but in very different ways. In *Sozaboy,* the (Biafran) war is never named or located, whereas the "tribal wars" that are tearing Liberia and Sierra Leone apart are clearly named and located by Kourouma. According to Corcoran, *Sozaboy* can be read as a novel of apprenticeship, in which the character is seeking to draw lessons from his experience, even though he finally gives in to despair whereas in *Allah n'est pas obligé,* despair is at the very origin of the journey (2002). Birahima is cursed for the evil he has done to his mother – the worst has already happened and, according to the belief system, his fate has already been determined, making questions pointless. A commonality shared by both novels is the significance accorded to language. In *Sozaboy,* language is strongly associated with social conditions and more broadly with the human condition. The words in *Allah n'est pas obligé* are also harsh and difficult to swallow. Both novels can be understood as attempts to express the inexpressible.

As indicated in the articles above and encapsulated by Madeleine Borgomano "childhood is changing very rapidly and very radically throughout the world" (2002:1). According to her it is specifically in the poorest and most politically unstable regions that such changes "take their most spectacular forms and seem to be symptoms of real social change" (2002:1). In Borgomano's view, "childhood has become an indefinable state, without fixed boundaries, where all stereotypes are overturned and all values are questioned" (2002:1). This is so because representations of childhood are becoming highly ambivalent. Although Borgomano and other critics succeed in depicting childhood as a shocking symbol of today's world, they fail to realise that in addition to claiming their suppressed identities as victims, these African children go a step further. They are featured in this fiction as "portraying childhoods that point to the dissolution and reinvention of a symbolic order in a post-national African space" to borrow the phrase by Robert Muponde (2006:1). In this context, we agree with Muponde that "childhood is recalled both as narrative and source of narrative" (1).

In her review essay "Writing the child, youth, and violence into the francophone novel from Sub-Saharan Africa: The impact of age and gender" (2005), Odile Cazenave is especially insightful on the study of childhood and violence. Her work involves, as the title indicates, both male and female voices on children, youth and violence. Twenty-four novels are summarised of which 11 are written by male writers and 13 by female writers. Cazenave appears to argue that in recent African francophone literature male writers address the issue of violence differently from female writers. The former engage with the issue of political violence or war affecting children and also confront issues concerning the future of the society whose foundation (i.e. children) has been destroyed by violence as has become the *modus vivendi*. In contrast, women writers focus mainly on the violence affecting youths as opposed to violence in war. It appears clear, therefore, why gender is reflected in African representations of violence. Among the male writers are Couoa-Zotti, Dongala and Kourouma whose works focus mainly on child soldiers' brutality in the postcolonial period. In works by Jean-Roger Essomba, Gaston-Paul Effa, and Ludovic Obiang, Cazenave (2005) argues that the child narrative and the presence of violence serve as a point of departure for a reflection on history, on the rapport between memory and history, and how history is shaped by the collective (200). Although she succeeds in presenting the literary images of childhood as idealised through different generations, she fails, however, to discuss the issue of authorship and the context in which these writers wrote their works, aside from their shared response to civil war. She also makes no mention of how some of these works, for example, *Allah n'est pas obligé* and *L'Ainé des orphelins* appear to waiver between pre-(colonial) history and post colonial history. Of the female francophone postcolonial writers, the figures which are very visible in this group include Tanella Boni, Fatou Keita, Ken Bugul, Mariama Barry, Isabele Boni-Claverie, Natalie Etoke, Bessora, Flore Kouamé, and Calixthe Beyala. Other notable francophone African writers include Werewere King, Aminata Sow Fall and Véronique Tadjo whose texts present, according to Irène Assiba d'Almeida a shift in women's writing (1994). Cazenave does not include them in her study, probably because their major themes do not resonate directly with children and violence. As argued by Cazenave, the re-analysis of the theme of violence by women does not directly address the child soldier issues dealt with by male writers. However, these writers do address, in her view, the issue of violence from the perspective of postcolonial urban youth and the associated notions of danger as well as an inescapable vicious circle directly affecting young women. If, as she asserts, women tend to focus on youth rather than on children, it is for a purpose. The ideology behind their writing ties in with their push to improve women's status in society in the eighties. However,

Cazenave acknowledges that as in men's texts, rape and destructive sexuality are used as tropes to express violence (2005:66). They are also represented in Fatou Keita's *Rebelle* (1998) and Monique Ilboudo's *Murekatete* (2000). Ilboudo's *Murekatete* and *L'Ombre d'Imana* (2000) by the Ivorian writer Véronique Tadjo, focus on the 1994 Rwandan genocide and depict utter violence. The fact that Cazenave does not refer to Tadjo's *Reine Pokou* (2005) is surprising, as the theme of violence is even more pronounced in this novel than in *L'Ombre d'Imana* despite the 2000 novel's theme of genocide in Rwanda. *Reine Pokou* (2005) deals with the victimisation of children and child sacrifice, which is a major concern of Cazenave's review essay.

Tadjo's *Reine Pokou* is the semi-historical story of the Baoulé Queen Pokou who sacrificed her own child to ensure the success of her people's migration. This legend is narrated in different versions but nearly every version has as the common denominator the sacrifice of the son(s). In the Ivorian playwright Charles Nokan's *Abraha Poku* **(**1971**)**, the heroine queen who is willing to sacrifice her own child to ensure the survival of her people stands for "the ideal of the future of a democratic Africa, where there will be no exploitation or oppression, and where women will have the same rights as men" (Nokan in Gérard 1986:592). In its exploitation of the idea of sacrifice, Tadjo's *Reine Pokou* (2002) seems to condemn Pokou's repeated sacrifices (of her own two sons) as having nothing to do with salvation. One cannot quarrel with the scorn the writer casts on the tragic custom of infant sacrifice. Pokou's infanticide serves as a metaphor for African rulers who take pleasure in watching children dying in war while enjoying the longevity of their powers. Reflecting on this issue of sacrifice in Franco Fornari's *The Psychoanalysis of War* (1974), the French sociologist Gaston Bouthoul brings new insight as he connects it with the story of Abraham. According to Bouthoul "the culminating moment of patriarchal power is when the father orders the sacrifice of the son" (Bouthoul in Fornari, 1974:26). In Bouthoul's opinion, therefore, war involves the concrete realisation on the part of the leaders of their wish to sacrifice their best citizens for the good of the nation. He recalls, in this connection, the words spoken by an old grenadier of Napoleon's guard after the emperor's farewell to his troops at Fontainebleau: "Sir, we shall no longer have the joy of dying in your service" (26).

Similarly to *L'Ombre d'Imana*, Tadjo's *Reine Pokou* seems to also correspond to the author's inner journey in an attempt to understand and to trace the cruelty which menaces our continent and humanity in general. However, that is not without challenges, especially when

"referring to traditional myths which have become de-historicised over time and hence appear to be independent of ordinary experience" (Gikandi, 1987:150).

Yet as Cazenave's work shows there is a relationship between childhood and violence in the works by some francophone African women in the late 1980s and early 1990s, in particular Calixthe Beyala, who advocates for minority and women rights both in France and Africa in works produced since the 1980s which are "best characterised by an unrelenting attack on the patriarchal oppression of women" (Irele, 2009:238). Beyala's novels of both the 1980s and 1990s, *Le petit prince de Belleville* (1992), *Maman a un amant* (1993), *C'est le soleil qui m'a brûlée* (1987) and *Tu t'appelleras Tanga* (1988) are good examples of the female narrator's voice and of child abuse. In the first two novels (1987 and 1988), children are abused both physically and emotionally. Tanga, for instance, laments:

> [T]ous ces enfants qui naissent adultes et qui ne sauront jamais mesurer la sévérité de leur destin, ces enfants veufs de leur enfance, eux à qui même le temps ne promet plus rien. (Coly, 2002:35)

The protagonists of the two novels are in Coly's words, "young girls under seventeen obliged to sell their bodies" (2002:36). While Tanga refers to herself as a "girl child-woman", this appellation also applies to Ateba in *C'est le soleil qui m'a brûlée* as well as to other young girls in the two novels who have been sold into prostitution. In Coly's view, *Tu t'appelleras Tanga* offers the bleakest image of a persecuted youth, for the simple reason that "all the children are exploited and are stripped of their rights" (2002: 36) as reflected in these sentences: "Enfant, tu n'existes pas. Enfant tu nais pour être l'esclave de tes parents" (2002:36). According to Coly, when Beyala was asked by Emmanuel Matateyou in 1996 why youth is persecuted in her novels, she simply replied that

> Je ne la persécute pas. C'est la réalité africaine qui tue sa jeunesse. [...] La jeunesse en Afrique vit de quoi? Est-ce qu'il y a une jeunesse en Afrique aujourd'hui? [...] Une jeunesse qui vit de quelques espoirs, qui rêve beaucoup, qui s'inquiète beaucoup et qui mourra de plus en plus si on ne trouve pas de solution à son problème. (Beyala In Coly, 2002:36)

She claims she does not persecute youth in her novels, but it is the African reality that kills them and she warns us that they will continue to die if we do not quickly find solutions to their problem. What may impress Beyala's readers most is her courage in attacking parents. Not only do Beyala's young girls lack protection from their parents and become mothers, but

they are also abused by their parents. The suffering of African children is painted in most of Beyala's works. In her works the child character comes to figure increasingly as a marker of discontent with the modern world. Under this asphyxial situation, the black children cannot be seen as enjoying their childhood at all. Such images of child exploitation evoke a decadent society, a view corroborated by Rangira Béatrice Gallimore who also argues persuasively that this mutilated and persecuted youth is suggestive of a dying society:

> Une société qui ne se soucie pas du bien-être de ses enfants est une société sans avenir. Une société qui 'dévore' ses enfants est donc une société en voie de destruction car elle rompt le cycle de la vie. Elle détruit une étape importante de l'existence humaine, celle de la régénérescence. (Gallimore in Coly, 2002:36)

A vision of Africa turned upside-down is offered by Coly in Beyala's novel:

> Comment vivre dans un pays qui marche la tête en bas? Se tourner vers le ciel? Il se tait, obstinément. Les hommes se soûlent au jojoba et s'évertuent à blasphémer contre un dieu oublieux. Prisonnières dans les barbelés des traditions, les femmes rodent par les rues boueuses, suivant toujours et encore des sexes qui les écartèlent. Quand aux gosses, ils laissent la mort les prendre, vieux d'avoir pilé trop de kwem pour nourrir les parents. (Coly, 2002:38).

These works remind us not only of the presence of violence, but also of the dangers of not identifying it before it manifests itself in civil war. We agree with Cazenave that regardless of gender, the female writers' gaze is directed at the renewed violence permeating the African world today. They indicate a renewal of committed artistic expression: a commitment to be the voices of awakening, a commitment to the problems of African children and youth.

In the 1980s, Pius Ngandu Nkashama made child or youth characters his central protagonists. Tcheuyap argues that in Nkashama's first works of prose fiction such as *Le fils de la tribu* (1983), *La malédiction* (1983), *La mort faite homme* (1986), *L'empire des ombres vivantes* (1991), *Le doyen marri* (1994), *Yakouta* (1994) the youth is portrayed as university students, while in his other works such as *Les étoiles écrasées* (1988), *Les enfants du lac Tana* (1991), *Des mangroves en terre haute* (1991), *Yolène au large des collines* (1995) and *Mayilena* (1999) they are simply portrayed as children (2008:1). In Tcheuyap's view, although francophone literature has recently brought, with some success, the life of small soldiers to fiction, these children were present in many of Nkashama's novels a long time ago, whether it is the 16-year old Manuel Pereira Songolo in *Les étoiles écrasées* (1988) or the narrator in *La malédiction* (1983). According to Tcheuyap (2008), the Rwandan genocide was anticipated in

Les enfants du lac Tana (1991) as well as in an essay entitled *Y-a-t-il une tribu dans cette brousse*? in which all its signals were presented although generally ignored. Seen in this light, one is tempted to conclude that Nkashama is the precursor of much contemporary writing about children at war. As we have seen, however, child soldiers made their first appearance as early as 1926 when Bakary Diallo depicted them in his *Force-bonté.*

Violence is everywhere in Nkashama's works. His first work *La délivrance d'Ilunga* (1997).This theme is taken up in *La malédiction* (1983) and *Yakouta* (1994), where the earth is no longer a public possession, but the object of lust that has led to bloody wars and occupation. Cazenave (2005) also highlights how Nkashama's early works such as "*Le fils de la tribu* (1983) and *Le pacte de sang* (1984) are drenched in violence as "…bodies are dislocated, guts gush out, pregnant women are torn open" (2005:1). Nkashama's novels set a new benchmark for the grotesque effects of violence causing disgust and "since then violence has been much more graphic**,** much more violent, taking the readers to the limits of the unbearable" (2005:1). In *Narrating Ethnic Conflict in Zairian Literature*, Janice Spleth argues that the narrative fiction produced by writers from former Zaire during the Mobutu era is a "literature of social and political criticism, a narrative of failed nationhood" (1998:103). Although Nkashama uses children's sufferings as a metaphor to describe aspects of a disembodied pain, opening a bridge into another space where one is forced to speculate on the question of this curse on the African people, it's equally valid to see the writer's disquiet as connected to the semantics of children's real pain. The sufferings of Congolese people during the civil wars of the 1980s and early 1990s spared no body as detailed in Vumbi Yoka Mudimbe's *Shaba Deux* (1989) in which the catholic nun, Marie-Gertrude, is killed, confirm the restlessness of this period. However, Nkashama's relevance is not limited to his fiction featuring children. Our understanding of the child soldier theme in literature is also credited to him. In his essay, *Les "enfants-soldats" et les guerres coloniales. A travers le premier roman africain* (2003) he writes:

> Une observation attentive indique clairement que, en dépit de la médiatisation assourdissante, les textes publiés depuis la 'culture coloniale', et qui sont considérés comme les plus représentatifs des 'mythologies africaines', sont justement ceux qui exaltent à la caricature les souffrances des 'enfants-soldats. (Nkashama, 2003:30)

Nkashama identifies fates of child soldier figures in the early novels: the genius child Samba Diallo in Cheikh Hamidou Kane's *L'aventure ambiguë* is killed by a former colonial soldier

and Laye in Camara Laye's *L'enfant noir*, is clearly defeated by colonial powers which prevent him from exploring the ancestral mysteries he was meant to know. Such an approach not only informs Nkashama's expanded concept of *enfants-soldat* (child soldiers), but also alludes to the idea that the theme of the child victim or warrior, particularly as preserved by African early myths or writings, constitutes a good source for understanding or explaining the child soldier phenomenon in recent writings.

Just as the child figure in Nkashama's works suffers, so does the young character in Sony Labou Tansi's works. In his *La vie et demie* (1979), Tansi depicts incestuous family violence in which a father sexually assaults his own daughter, Chaïdana. This girl is raped by 363 soldiers who use her for three nights and leave her almost lifeless. She, too, kills government ministers and recruits young boys supplying them with pistols. Tansi's boys with pistols in *La vie et demie* (1979) can be seen as a precursors to child soldiers[13]. One could argue that these writers began experimenting with new forms which fall under what Xavier Garnier refers to in his *Les formes "dures" du récit: enjeux d'un combat* as "La littérature comme forme monstrueuse" (2002). Tansi often resorts to the usage of the fantastic, gigantic, horrible chaos and injustice in his books. His stories take place in settings dominated by political violence, deviant sexuality, human cowardice, ugliness, corruption, silence and death. His oeuvre endeavours to lend a voice to those who live in situations of enforced silence, encouraging them to resist death and to stand up to dictatorship and repression.

Such memories of childhood, as Robert Muponde considers them, are implicated in society's techniques of self-perpetuation. Urie Bronfenbrekenter believes that "representations of childhood are deployed as 'technology' to predict how well a nation will survive" and extrapolates that "thoughts about childhoods reflect the concern of one generation for the next" (Bronfenbrekenter in Muponde, 2005:26). Harry Hendrick corroborates this idea

[13] Achille Mbembe refers to Sonny's works as "prime examples of literary imagination about the postcolony" (Mbembe in Veit-Wild, 2005:95). "Sonny's novelistic universe is ruled by the flesh" (2005:96) adds Veit-Wild. One of his most powerful novels remains *L'État honteux* (1981) with its "repugnant secretions and odours. The excesses of such male bodies are very evident in this work." (Veit-Wild, 2005:97). His narratives' style is a combination of politics and what many refer to as magic realism which, for us, constructs the postcolonial subject identity. He does not hesitate to ridicule postcolonial rulers denouncing their voracious appetite for food, for material wealth, for sex (abusing small girls and impregnating them). The parties where these rulers kill and engage in erotic activities and make sexual advances on women offer an explanation for their everyday monstrosity and willingness to possess people and hold them captives. This is the "way through which power speaks as metonymy of the body politic, an overriding symbol of corrosion and corruption" (Veit-Wild, 2005:97). Clearly, there is a link between political excess and sexual promiscuity.

arguing that "different generations have always sought to incorporate childhood into a larger philosophy" (Hendrick in Muponde, 2005:26).

The role in the 1980s of African francophone writers of the grotesque was superseded by a new generation with a new direction. We argue that although graphic violence became more and more physical, climaxing visibly in the fiction written during the 1970s and 1980s with its overabundance of brutality which Pascale Perraudin observes, "manifests itself through detailed descriptions of 'excorporations' (i.e. the recurrence of blood, urine, sperm, and sweat), 'torture', 'abuse', 'rape', 'condemnations to death', and executions" (2005:72),[14]the war novel only becomes the focus of fiction in the 1990s and 2000s. The excesses, stereotypes, and frequent absurdities of war made francophone African fiction a rich source of grotesque imagery. The most famous representation of the grotesque is vividly felt in the novels about child soldiers in which children are murderers. Another type of child protagonist and narrator also surfaced in the literature of the 1990s and beyond – the child soldier. Unlike children in earlier fiction, the child soldier figure does not just suffer, but reacts. In this new capacity, he is both perpetrator and victim. What he suffers is exploitation, damage and death – features which constitute a more complete image of violence than that experienced by children in previous francophone African fiction. It is in these painful childhoods that the empty, hollow and even odious characters who serve as the novels' derisory "heroes" are formed. The opposition to dictatorship in the works of the 1980s writers was adopted in the francophone novel of the 1990s where we also witness the intensification of graphic violence. "While Kourouma and Ouologuem are clearly the fathers of the *roman de la dictature* [novel of dictatorship], its maturity would really belong to writers… of the second generation." (Irele, 2009: 135). Among the many texts associated with this literary shift Irele cites Valentin Mudimbé's *Le bel immonde* (1976), Tierno Monénembo's *Les Crapauds-brousse* (1979), Henri Lope's *Le pleurer-rire* (1982) or Sony Labou Tansi's *La vie et demie*. Although Irele puts emphasis on the works of 1980s, the 1990s writers built on the tradition of the previous works of the 1980s. In the context of the political unrest of this period, this is what makes them unique. The childhoods represented in these works often have much in common with what African intellectuals and authors experienced in their youth during the 1980s. The

[14]These motifs clearly stand out in such works as *Devoir de violence* (*Bound to violence*, 1968) by Yambo Ouologuem, *Le récit du critique de la vallée des morts* (1975) by Alioum Fantouré, *La vie et demie* (1979) and *Parenthèses de sang* (1981) by Sony Labou Tansi, *Les crapauds brousse* (1979) by Tierno Monénembo, and *Les fruits si doux de l'arbre à pain* (1987) by Tchikaya U Tams'si, and so on.

re-emergence of the child soldier figure in the recent fiction of the 1990s and 2000s appears as a new way of looking at this literature and our 'new' postcolonial culture even though it feeds on the same tradition.

The discourse of violence is at the centre of African francophone fiction, it represents a site of discursive struggle in which the colonial ideologies of oppression continue through postcolonial ideologies of war. It is precisely this ability of the African francophone novel to critique the systems of oppression that allows us to see much of the writers' efforts, interest and engagement in their treatment of this theme of war.

Novels dealing with violence are too many to enumerate. African francophone novels remain and continue to grow as a permanent memorial to perpetual wars as highlighted by Tcheuyap who says:

> […] textes littéraires africains francophones qui ne cessent de reproduire, que ce soit dans leur(s) thématique(s) ou dans leurs conditions d'émergence, des guerres apparemment perpétuelles. Car combien de romans africains, pour se limiter à ce genre, peuvent être traversés sans que le lecteur ne se heurte à la violence totale ou à la guerre? (2003:9)

Critics and theorists such as Nganang and Levy among others, also note that "la guerre et le sang ne sont jamais loin, et il ne faut pas grand chose pour déclencher le chaos" (in Tcheuyap, 2003:28). For Tanella Boni, what African francophone writers have in common is their discourse of violence or what she calls *écriture de l'urgence*. Boni claims that these writers write in order to save humanity from danger using words as the only weapon to testify and perform their duty towards memory, reminding us of where things started to go wrong:

> Écrire pour sauver la part d'humanité en péril dans le monde (...) les écrivains africains n'ont que les mots pour dire et témoigner. Ils n'ont pas d'autres armes. (Boni in Couloubaly, 2003: para 62)

This is also what led Beti to argue that "In Europe, writing has become nothing more than a pretext for sophisticated futility, gratuitous indulgence, whereas with us, it can destroy tyrants, save children from massacre, free a race from millenary slavery" (Beti in Stephen,1998:422). To offer a particular application of the above arguments, this rhetoric of blood has been examined in a number of works dealing with childhood from the earliest books to the current ones where violence has proved to be the main theme developed in sub-Saharan francophone African Literature.

2.2. Tropes and characteristics of the novels depicting child soldiers

2.2.1 African folklore, historiography and the novels about child soldiers

Before we ask ourselves how we can read these texts about child soldiers, let us first claim the centrality of the African tradition (lore) in the texts about child soldiers. This tradition provides the foundation for African culture and aesthetics. Elements continuing an oral tradition, which is considered by many to contain the essence of African precolonial culture in these novels, are represented by the choice of poetics (e.g. the "orphan child", the use of the "journey motif" although *Johnny chien méchant* by Dongala does not entirely rely upon the journey as a framework). The Gabonese writer and critic Luvodic Emane Obiang shares this view in his *Sans père mais non sans espoir: figure de l'orphelin dans les écritures de guerre* (2006) by pointing out that the trope of the orphaned child is a continuation of an existing theme in African folktales where the child was the mediator between the world of the living and that of the dead. Recent writers include much of the fantasy realism of orphan tales in their novels. While the tradition is inevitably a part of francophone African novels, we might call attention to it by evoking a few elements (themes) of the oral traditions that are paired with the theme of childhood. For example, the case of "strange lands", "forests", "water", "death" and so on, which are used in order to recreate the African reality in which child soldiers live – a world of supernatural powers and belief in the ghosts of ancestors. Karen C. Hath draws on Marie S. Tollerson's *Mythology and cosmology* in her preface to Dadié's *The Black Cloth* (1987: xviii-xxxv) and gives us insight into African fantasy. "The strange lands are invariably far away from the village of the protagonist and those whom he knows and loves or they sometimes lie in lushly forested areas, sometimes in areas once frightening and magical" (Tollerson in Hath, 1987: xxvii). Birahima in *Allah n'est pas obligé,* like John and Charly in *Charly en guerre* takes the reader through the West African forests where they confront dangers and famine, fight wars and kill people. In *Johnny chien méchant*, the young female protagonist, Laokolé, meets up with wild pigs in the forest and fights with them over a few bananas. It is important to note that the journey the orphaned child (soldier) undertakes through these alien lands (forest) and the tasks he is asked to perform become a part of his initiation process. We watch this child grow into an adult, but is he better prepared than other children? While the folktale child faces these dangers leading him to a fulfilling

life as a final reward the opposite is possible in the novels about child soldiers where the latter are often punished and condemned to suffering as people who have no right to happiness.

Water is an important theme both in the folktales and in stories about child soldiers. In folktales, crocodiles, for example, take people across the river. 'Water' is perceived by Tollerson as "not only the giver of life, but also disseminator of the word" (Tollerson cited in Hath, 1987: xxv). Charly in *Charly en guerre* nearly drowns but it is in the same sea where he will be reunited with his mother. As such, water becomes both a symbol of death and life (i.e. rebirth and restoration).

Anyone who has ever attempted to read the novels about child soldiers will attest that the one constant is the writers' depiction of the hardships children survive. Such details are all but universally known among readers of folktales as "initiation rites". According to Chid Ikonne, et al. (1992), "it is a period of physical, intellectual and moral test, trial, purgation and break-in" (1992:112). In general, "it is a period of formal education, a crash programme with all the setting, discipline and devotion which characterise a modern classroom"(112). Nazi Boni's *Crépuscule des temps anciens* (1962) exposes this violence while admitting

> […] qu'il fallait soumettre les candidates à la torture pour les éprouver, car on ne saurait confier le sort d'un pays ou d'une ville à des gens incapables d'endurer les pires souffrances. (*Crépuscule* page 196 quoted by Ogike in Ikonne, et al., 1992:113)

The Malinké children in Laye Camara's *L'enfant noir* (1966, first published in 1953) are reminded of a certain scary monster-like person called Kondén Diara, the chief of the initiation rites. Accompanied by his lions, Kondén would make his way around the initiates roaring. The famous monster's job was to put children through a fear test. When older Camara finally discovers these lions were not real lions, but mere imitated sounds performed by their coaches during this fun test. What remains primary in his story is the emphasis he places on the discipline with which these rituals were conducted:

> Un nouvel ordre a retenti, et nous nous sommes assis devant le feu. Nos ainés, à présent entreprennent notre initiation; tout le reste de la nuit, ils vont nous enseigner les chants… et nous ne bougeons plus, nous reprenons les paroles après eux, l'air après eux; nous sommes là comme si nous étions à l'école, attentifs pleinement attentifs et dociles. (*L'enfant noir* page 99 quoted by Ogike in Ikonne, et al., 1992:113).

Indeed, Laye's quote above is central, not only to the appreciation of these rites, but also to countervailing critiques. There seems no doubt that these initiators are motivated by anything other than a desire to bring children into manhood, although other francophone writers, such as Seydou Badian in his *Sous l'orage* (1957), have criticised "the tests of endurance intended to harden the young men" (Blair, 1976: 240). For Abiola Odefide, "there is a recurring theme that an adequate dose of sufferings or deprivation is good for children since it has a maturational and even emancipator quality" (Odefide in Ikonne, 1992:156). Despite the harsh discipline that these rituals exhibit, many still believe in their incorruptible sacred value. Advocates maintain that their purpose is not to inflict pain and injuries or to train to kill but to empower the youth to become capable adults. Qualities inculcated by these rituals such as patience, endurance, obedience, respect for elders, solidarity, etc. are indispensable, not only for the initiates, but to the stability of the society in general. However, the overwhelming presence of this motif in the recent novels about child soldiers inevitably provokes challenging questions. Should these harrowing experiences of pain in war – injury to young bodies, wounds and so on – worthy of praise? Our aim here is to not to question these practices themselves but to spotlight the parallels between recent novels' versions of these rites of passage and those in folktales in order to show how child soldiers have been forced by hardships into manhood.

At times, the stories about child soldiers also resemble trickster tales. The child at war uses his wits and deceit in order to survive. Faced with death and other challenges in life, this child is forced to develop strategies to find his way out. Despite his involvement in war, however, his ability to challenge the world through his wits is his alone. But unlike the folktale child, the child soldier in recent stories meets with a different fate, the most common of which is death or disappearance.

.It remains of paramount importance to underline the oral tradition and assert that child soldiers represent an ancient African tradition. Through them the traditions, culture and values of a tribe can be studied and understood. One way of doing this is through an in-depth study of the folkloric elements that emerge through the novels. The evocation of African folklore imparts traditional knowledge through which we can understand the child soldier issue. Although these stories owe much of their structure to oral storytelling most of their features remain bound to modern/postcolonial realities. The child soldier in this sense is seen as the meeting point of the old and the new.

2.2.2. Child warriors and empire (nation) builders

Although the child soldier's reputation still rests on his destruction of the social fabric, his growing desire to be perceived as a nation-builder is to be considered within the historic context. Alexie Tcheuyap (2003) and Pius Ngandu Nkashama (2003) believe that one can draw on early legends which continue to be associated with the child. Denying the reality of history can prevent us from understanding this phenomenon. In this regard, the two scholars offer some new observations and suggestions, clarifying the changing thematic role and evolution of this character through various retellings of ancient child warrior myths.

Western critics are frequently suspicious of the role of childhood in traditional society because of its apparent ties to traditional warfare. Chitour (in Borgomano, 2002) argues, for instance, that "the misfortunes of childhood are not a new thing in Africa and… the present situation has its source in colonial times but… also perhaps to project onto the past the darkness of current times" while Borgomano herself maintains that "children in Africa were, even before colonialism, affected by violence." African scholars (e.g. Bennett, 1998, Honwana, 2007, and Sesay, 2003), on the other hand, refute such views claiming this phenomenon to be a merely postcolonial issue thus leaving this whole question open to debate. For Sesay, "the recruitment of child soldiers should be seen as war time exigency rather than a manifestation of pre-war history or cultural disposition" (Sesay, 2003:17). It is our argument that primitivism, despite being mocked, is essential to African art. By turning away from it or refusing to explore it in detail, African scholars rob themselves of the richness of their culture and of this past. It is our task to investigate this heritage in order to find in it an appropriate image of the African child. And key to our discussion of precolonial childhood in this section is not necessarily to establish whether or not ancient society used children as warriors, but to examine closely how the legendary children came out of the violence in order to build their nations.

Not unexpectedly, semi-historical, semi-mythical aspects of local African lore show a remarkable concentration on the sufferings of abused children. The suffering, however, is not only a source of stress for the child, but also of strength. "The highly visible presence of the abused child in these stories also highlights traditional beliefs about the prerequisites for achievement" (Odefide in Ikonne, 1992:156). Given that these epics, legends or myths focus not only on aesthetic possibilities (they are loaded with magic elements) but are also preoccupied with such tropes as suffering, heroism and victory which intersect with the

theme of child soldiery. Aside from conveying the supernatural, these epics or semi-historical legends also illustrate a general and very basic question of childhood and war which transcends the fantastical elements of magic, madness and illogic. The importance of these legends cannot be overemphasised. The historical figures depicted in these novels connect us to the origins of things. The greatness of men like Shaka in Thomas Mofolo's *Chaka* (1931), Soundjata Keita in Djbril Tamsir Niane's *Sounjata: Ou l'épopée Madingue* (1960) derives from their childhood heroism while the tragedy of Samba Diallo in Hamidou Kane's *Aventure ambigüe* (1961) and Bernard Dadié's *Pagne noir* (1955) which recounts the adventures of Aiwa and Koffi derives largely from sufferings of these heroic children.

What is required here is to establish the relationship and continuity between the traditional and postmodern worlds. One might ask in reading these legends, what is the African meaning of violence that inhabits them? Has violence couched in these legends any correlation with modern warfare? And if a correlation exists and if violence becomes the denominated reality throughout African history, why is it that the traditional child was able to build nations while the child soldier seems unable to do so?

2.2.2.1. Shaka

The legend of Shaka, the Zulu empire-builder has captured the imaginations of many critics and writers. The details of his life are disputed, which has allowed it to become buried in myths and fantasy. It is a pity, however, that the Zulu king is often misrepresented. Most critics fail to transcend the political implications of their subject. They align themselves to a predominantly psychological interpretation of the legend. As a result, they only associate Shaka with terrorism and sorcery. He is described, according to Blair as "a savage and terrifying matricide" (1976:99). The extent to which Shaka came to be regarded as nothing but a terrorist is a result of distortions perpetuated by those who either prefer to ignore Africa's history or disregard Shaka as an African military genius, visionary and political organiser. However, we contend that it is possible to objectively examine his rule through the lens of his childhood heroism – which ties in to our discussion of the child soldier issue, while at the same time, rejecting the preconceptions imposed on black children when discussing the subject of violence. This also helps correct erroneous views that fail to admit him as an ordinary child who was turned into a warrior much as common prejudices reinforce the belief that child soldiers are killers. The questions that need to be asked here

are: How is this legend connected to the child soldier issue? How does Shaka's legend inspire us today? In what way can his legacy be continued?

There are many written sources which can be used in the study of Shaka. In our study, we will draw heavily on Thomas Mofolo's *Chaka* (1931 first published in 1925)[15].

Most accounts (both fiction and non-fiction) seem to agree that Shaka, the first son of the Zulu chief Senzangakhona was born out of wedlock. According to Mazisi Kunene, although conceived in a premarital relationship between two members of aristocratic families (an act considered a heinous crime in Zulu society), "Shaka was not born illegitimately"(1979:xvi) as some seem to suggest."His father, King Senangakhona married his mother, princess Nandi" (xvi). His position, however, became precarious after Senzangakhona's senior wives began to bear him male children. It is said that Senzangakhona's wives conspired to have him send Shaka and Nandi away from the palace. Eugene Victor Walter writes that "as a boy, he was subjected to physical assaults as well as mockery" (1969:125). The news of Shaka's rejection and his illegitimacy spread, making him the object of ridicule and persecution both by village boys and royal princes. Afraid that her son would be killed, the princess "took him to her witch-doctor to be treated with medicines, which would protect him from people who wished to take his life" (Mofolo, 1931:15) and "from that time Chaka had a wonderful love for fighting" (16).

According to Walter's analysis "all the narratives of his [Shaka]early sufferings seem to provide a psychological explanation for rage and destruction in the years of his despotism" (1966:125) whereas Mazisi Kunene sees the circumstances of his birth providing the driving force of his empowering and charismatic personality" (1979:xvi). Either way, the boy's childhood experience offers evidence of the bitterness that the stigma of rejection can cause. His soul is seared by sufferings and pain which even Mofolo's *Chaka* (1931) cannot refuse to acknowledge. "A gang of boys... seized him and beat him till he fainted and then left him for dead" (Mofolo, 1931: 14). Though Shaka suffers violence at the hands of his own, the consequences of this situation later on become destructive are spelt out below:

> This incessant fighting taught Chaka how to use a stick, how to parry the many blows directed at him at one and the same time, and how to strike while keeping his head guarded: also it taught him swiftness and how to

[15] Mofolo is a Sotho writer and his book has been recognised by some as a classic. The book explores the life story of a controversial Zulu King, Shaka.

> escape by running. He was quite fearless when fighting, because he had become accustomed to it, nor was he short of breath when he took to fight. (Mofolo, 1931:13)

The book unfolds Shaka's heroism through a series of grievances and persecutions endured which caused him to have a quick temper. But, young Shaka's bravery spread throughout the land and women began to sing to his name after he single-handedly killed a lion and rescued a young girl from the jaws of a hyena. One might think that these acts prepared him to be king, instead, they attracted more enemies and hatred. There was a long battle between Shaka and his half-brothers. In each battle, Shaka grew stronger and stronger, and his enemies weaker and weaker. This state of restlessness lead him into exile. In his wanderings he met Isanusi a diviner (witch-doctor) who gave Shaka all the medicine that would make him great and strong and even promise him that he would accede to power if he submitted to King Dingiswayo.[16] When Isanusi requests the blood of a loved one as an ingredient required in formulating the medicine that will make Shaka the greatest king in all the land, he sacrifices his beloved pregnant wife, Noliwe, who was given to him by Dingiswayo who took him when he was wandering. In Léopold Sédar Senghor's poem "Chaka" published in *Ethiopiques*, future king claims that he had to free himself from his love for Noliwe in order to give himself whole heartedly to his people (Blair, 1976: 97). Such a claim no longer attributes the greatness of Shaka to bravery and strength but to politics and sorcery. It could be deduced that fearing death Shaka needed protection which Isanusi promised to offer; he had no strong or free will and offered his soul to this diabolical man, Isanusi and did whatever the witch-doctor requested.

Shaka finally becomes king over his own small tribe without a name, and he needs a new name. When asked by Isanusi what the name would be, "he" writes Mofolo, "smiled and laughed aloud, until the tears came into his eyes" (1931:125) and said, "Zulu, Amazulu," meaning "heaven and the people of heaven" (125). He further explains:

> Amazulu. Because I am great, I am even as this cloud that has thundered, that is irresistible. I, too, look upon the tribes and they tremble. If I fall upon any they die, even as Zwide. Zulu. Amazulu. (Mofolo, 1931:125)

[16] Mofolo's treatment of Isanusi is regarded by some as fiction used for dramatic effect. While others have suggested that Isanusi was a mythical figure created by Shaka himself to pursue his agenda of power acquisition and wanton revenge. But let us assume that as a creative writer Mofolo knew well that "a great national hero must of necessity be surrounded by a mystic aura – that he must possess qualities that inspire the common man to transcend his own limitations, his own morality even - whence the necessity for the insistence on the divine, the miraculous or the supernatural element in the true epic" to borrow the words from Blair (1976:99).

While his strength is admirable, the king who made the small Zulu tribe into a great nation also saw reforms of society and the army as essential. Not only were the youths of both sexes exposed to intensive military exercises (drills)[17], but they lived in camps. Of all the king's decrees, the most controversial of all was his control over the youths' sexual lives. Under Zulu law, the *impis* (warriors) were required to remain celibate until the king gave an individual permission to wed, which he would not do until the soldier reached the age of 30 or 40 and if he had a successful military career behind him.

As already stated, the legend of Shaka attracted many African francophone writers and poets of Négritude movement. Mofolo's *Chaka* which was translated by V. Ellen-Berger in 1939 provided a springboard for Léopold Sédar Senghor and Tchicaya U Tam'si (as spelt as Tchikaya) to reproduce the story in their own way, namely, Senghor's *Chaka, poème dramatique à plusieurs voix* (1956, 1958) and Tchicaya's play, *Le Zulu* (1977) respectively. In her *Senghor et Tchikaya: La réecriture de Chaka, une épopée bantoue,* Marie-Rose Abomo-Maurin (2002) study contrasts the above two texts. These texts converge in that they both look at the exploits of this African hero. But they also differ in many other ways. As Abomo-Maurin observes that Senghor wrote his poem while Africa was in the middle of the colonial period whereas Tchicaya's play was written after Africa's independence. Also important to note, Senghor starts his story where Mofolo's ends. He imagines the dying Shaka explaining his politics to the white people while Tchicaya's drama is based more closely on Mofolo's story.

Discussing Shaka's military exploits, Tchicaya's characters comment:

> Je venais de le féliciter [Chaka] de la manière dont il avait organisé le combat. Sais-tu ce qu'il m'a répondu? 'Ça ne sert à rien de gagner une bataille si la suite n'est pas le commencement d'un nouvel ordre des choses'. Je n'ai rien compris. (Tchicaya U Tam'si in Abomo-Maurin, 2002: para 26)

In Senghor, Shaka, acknowledges using violence for the good of his people:

> J'ai porté la cognée dans ce bois mort, allumé l'incendie dans la brousse stérile. En propriétaire prudent. C'étaient cendres pour les semailles d'hivernage. (Senghor in Abomo-Maurin, 2002:para 29)

[17] The Zulu *impi* was also trained for physical endurance. Aside from working the king's lands, the warrior impi would be expected to be able to run distances greater than today's marathons and still be able to fight immediately upon arrival. This gave the Zulus great mobility, rivalling even that of European cavalry. (Morris, 1965: 50-51).

Abomo-Maurin explains that as a *proprietaire prudent*, it is up to Shaka to feed his people. In other words, as the father of the Zulu nation, he cares for his children – he destroys the forest and prepares it for sewing. It is exactly in this context that one is forced to understand Shaka's sacrifice of his beloved Noliwe. Senghor, in Abomo-Maurin's words, suggests that for Shaka no obstacle can be allowed to prevent him from achieving his objective. She, Noliwe, is this obstacle. By "Je ne l'aurais pas tuée si moins aimée Il fallait échapper au doute", Senghor seems, according to Abomo-Maurin, to show that Shaka made the sacrifice to put all doubts to rest. Noliwe becomes a weak link in his life which Shaka had to overcome in order to fulfil his great ambition – that of saving his people from his enemies. Unlike Senghor, Tchicaya interprets this sacrifice differently. In his play, Shaka says, "Elle voulait que je sois infirme, oui! [...] Dans le ventre de Noliwe il n'y avait qu'un peu de mon sang mêlé au sien, donc avarié par beaucoup de folie" (Tchicaya U Tam'si in Abomo-Maurin, 2002 : para 31). What is cause for doubt to Senghor is mere folly to Tchicaya. Where Senghor sees a liberator, Tchicaya sees a dictator, Abomo-Maurin argues. One would add that Shaka is perceived by Tchicaya in this sacrificial myth as a prophet of death.

That the writers interpret Skaka's legend differently is not surprising. At a time when the continent was fighting to free itself from colonialism, Shaka, to paraphrase Abomo-Maurin (2002), became for Senghor an example of a man who refused to be colonised by whites, who fought, sacrificing himself without compromise to this cause. As in Senghor's poem, Shaka is also regarded in Condetto Nénékhaly-Camara's drama *Amazoulou* as "the first founder of a modern African nation" (Blair, 1976:98). This clearly dismisses the charges that Shaka was a "tyrant" and precolonial Africa "un monde barbare, soumis aux ambitions personnelles des uns et des autres" to borrow Senghor's words (in Abomo-Maurin, 2002: para 42).

The man whose name we remember was assassinated by his own bodyguard Mbopha and half-brothers, Dingane and Mhlangana who were either jealous of his power or tired of the incessant wars. The dying King last words are revealing:

> It is your hope by killing me ye will become Chiefs when I am dead. But ye are deluded; it will not be so, for Umlungu will come and it is he who will rule, and ye will be his bondmen. (Mofolo, 1931:198)[18]

[18]In Kunene's account: "He smiled and said: So, my brothers, you are killing me?

Book 17 of Kunene's *Emperor Shaka the great* says:

> The mountain has fallen
> Shaka sleeps in the land of the Ancestors.
> The winds carry his voice and the Palm Race shall rise again.
> It shall build its legends on his sacred ground. (Kunene, 1979:430)

Shaka's legend is about the child who fought for his right to life and serves as a symbol of a continent which had controlled its own political systems and armies. The myth of Isanusi constitutes according to our time an analogy to warlords who mislead child soldiers and promise them to become great if they killed their own people. The legacy of Shaka cannot be downplayed: he fought against European colonising powers and was never subdued. He has earned renown throughout Africa, not because he was a warrior but an empire builder.

2.2.2.2.Soundjata Keita, the emperor of Mali

"In the thirteenth century, the kingdom of Mading or Mali grew rich with the discovery of gold mines. The young king Soundjata Keita of Mading overthrew the cruel tyrant Soumaoro reputed to owe his power to sorcery and was proclaimed emperor" (Blair, 1976: 4). Like Mofolo's *Chaka*, Niane's novel, *Soundjata* (1960) refers to the mysteries of Africa's past. But unlike Mofolo who sees evil in this past probably due to his Christian convictions, Niane reminds his readers of the glory of this past. "His books tells the story of "Sogolon, the [ugly] buffalo-woman given to [a very handsome king] Maghan Kon Fatta, the father of Soundjata, by the hunters who have captured her, but are unable to possess her" (Blair, 1976: 79).[19] Of course, the hunter-diviner from a foreign land had already warned the king, Maghan, that he would marry a buffalo changed into a woman and made predictions about the boy who this woman would conceive to succeed him (Niane, 1960:20).

King Maghan's first wife, Sassouma, was very jealous and wanted her son, Dankaran Touman to become King of the Mading. Sassouma plotted to kill Sogolon, but the buffalo

---

And you, Mbopha, son of Sthayi! You think you shall rule Zulu land after my death. No, you shall never rule. Only the swallows shall rule over it" (Kunene, 1979: 425). By swallows, it is said, he meant the white people, because they made their houses of mud, like the swallows. According to members of his family, Shaka's last words were, "Are you stabbing me, kings of the earth? You will come to an end through killing one another." He died on 22 September 1828 without an heir and Dingane succeeded him, but Shaka's prophecy haunted him and he was wary of white people. Shaka's successors, Dingane, Mpande, and Cetshwayo and the Zulu monarchy profoundly influenced the course of South African history (http://home.intekom.com/southafricanhistoryonline/pages/people/zulu-shaka.htm).

[19] To possess her' means to sleep with her. She was untameable because she would change into an animal if you approached her by night, but Maghan managed to handle her.

woman's powers were too great, and the boy was born. He was named Mari Diata, but people called him Sogolon Diata, and eventually, Soundiata. According to Ikonne et al. (1992), "in spite of the prophecy, nothing in the childhood of the hero prepares him for the greatness he was going to attain in his life" (115). Ikonne, et al., further observe that, "As a child, Soundjata was mentally and physically retarded: at the age of seven years he still crawled like a baby; physically ugly, he carried an extraordinarily big head over his shoulders, his eyes were monstrously big, his speech was distorted, greedy, wicked and taciturn; his playmates shunned him, he became the object of ridicule" (115). Such a difficult childhood emphasises how it was impossible to expect such a child to become a hero let alone a nation-builder. His father nearly denied him the inheritance of his throne. Although Sogolon Diata could not walk and rarely spoke, still, honouring the prophecy, the dying king gave the boy the gift of a *griot* named Balla Fasseke, the son of his own *griot*, believing one day he would be king. When the king dies, his first wife sees to it that her son Dankaran claims the throne. Soundiata is helpless until miraculously one day he says, "Eh bien, je vais marcher aujourd'hui, dit Mari-Djata" (Niane, 1960:43). The great day arrives "when he awakens at the age of seven, rises to his feet for the first time, bends the huge iron bar into a bow and uproots the baobab which he plants before his mother's hut" (Blair, 1976:79). His first steps were those of a giant and his *griot* composed and sang "The hymn to the bow" on the spot which we are told is still a part of the musical epic of Soundjata sung by *griots* over eight hundred years later:

> Place, place, faites de la place,
> Le lion a marché.
> Antilopes, cachez-vous,
> Écartez-vous de son chemin (Niane, 1960:47)

Now capable of taking the throne, the boy became a threat to the weak king Dankaran and Soundjata's mother decided to take her son into exile for safety. One day in the far off kingdom of Mema, Soundjata is discovered by people from Mading (Mali) selling baobab leaves in the market. They persuade him to return and claim his throne which had been taken by the evil king, Suomaoro of Sosso. On his way home, Soundjata gathers fighters, archers and horsemen from different cities thus constituting a strong army which attacked Soumaoro's forces, although the latter escapes. When Soundjata discovers the secret of his magic, "he vanquishes the sorcerer king Soumaoro with a secret weapon, returns in triumph to the capital, Niani, and establishes a powerful empire, based on the rule of Islam in the western Sudan" (Blair, 1976:79).

Unlike the Zulu King, Shaka, Soundjata reveals himself a man of character who even when his soul is seared by suffering and injustice, Soundjata rejects sorcery. With a sense of confidence rooted in his conviction that his destiny is to rule, he is a king whose his self-esteem combined with military tactics gain him fame and respect everywhere. "Victorious Soundiata invited all the leaders from the twelve kingdoms of the savannas who had helped him to come to Kaba, a city in old Mali. There, he told them they could keep their kingdoms, but would join in a great empire"[20]. This is how the tale is told by the *griot*:

> Écoutez l'histoire du fils du buffle, du fils du Lion. Je vais vous parler de Maghan Sondjata, de Mari-Djata, de Sogolon Djata, de Naré Maghan Djata; l'homme aux noms multiples contre qui les sortilèges n'ont rien pu. (Niane, 1960:11)

Thus, Soundjata "put[s] an end to the ceaseless strife and establish[es] a peaceful, prosperous, well-organised society whose greatness continued under his successors throughout the fourteenth century" (Blair, 1976:4). Soundjata Keita died in 1255, probably of drowning but there is no sure evidence. Tradition has it that he had three sons who succeeded him to the throne of the Mali empire: Mansa Wali Keita, Ouati Keita and Khalifa Keita. The famous West African ruler Mansa Musa was his grandnephew. Soundjata was unique in his time and is still cited as an inspiration today:

> Maghan Soundjata fut unique. De son temps personne ne l'égala; après lui personne n'eut l'ambition de le surpasser. Il a marqué pour toujours le Manding, ses 'dio'[21] guident encore les hommes dans leur conduite. Le Manding est éternel. (Niane, 1960:150)

Counterpointed to this historical context, however, is Yambo Ouologuem's *Le devoir de violence* (1968 translated as *The wages of violence*, and as *Bound to Violence,* 1971). The novel reads as a counter history of Niane's *Soundjata* (Niane, 1960) – despite dealing with a different set of kingdoms. It helps correct defective vision of the writers of Négritude may have had as they only saw the good in Africa's past. This form of cultural nostalgia is what Ali A, Mazrui (2005) refers to as "*romantic gloriana"* (2005:77 emphasis in the original).[22] *Le devoir* is likewise a chronicle of the fictional empires of Nakem in Sudan from the

[20]http://www.somaliaonline.com/community/showthread.php/13608-Duke-s-History-thread...

[21] Selon Niane le dio est un interdit posé par un ancêtre, le terme désigne également les fétiches (1960: 150).

[22] According to Mazrui, "*romantic gloriana* celebrates Africa's more complex achievements. It salutes the pyramids of Egypt, the towering structures of Aksum, the sunken churches of Lalibela, the brooding majesty of Great Zimbabwe, the castles of Gonder. Romantic gloriana is a tribute to Africa's empires and kingdoms, Africa's inventors and discoverers, great Shaka Zulu rather than the unknown peasant" (2005:77)

thirteenth century. “For Ouologuem the link from century to century is the despotic, tyrannical rule of the African Potentates – the Saïfs – who created and perpetrated a brilliant, barbaric society based on slavery, intrigue and the most ruthless violence” (Blair, 1976:307). Following Blair, Ouologuem’s “avowed aim is to demonstrate that the character of the Black man of West Africa and the texture of his society has been formed by the bloody violence of his history” (308). Yambo Ouologuem’s *Le devoir de violence* and Ayi Kwei Armah’s *Two thousand seasons* are meditations on the precolonial past and the turbulent events which in Palmer’s view brought Africa to the present era. “The legendary Saïfs with the combination of Jewish, negro and Arab blood running in their veins, seem to demonstrate the worst qualities of all three people. These Saïfs turn[ed] out to be the worst slave owners and traders in history, their chief victims being the blacks, the paupers and the nigger trash” (Palmer, 1979:201).

Many African critics felt uneasy reading Ouologuem's *Le devoir de violence* despite it being awarded the Prix Renaud. One of these critics is the Nigerian literary and cultural critic, Francis Abiola Irele who “condemned the work for indicating that the past has only bequeathed to the present generation of Africans a legacy of crime and violence” (Blair, 1976: 305). In contrast, John Erickson (in Palmer,1979) makes an important point about Ouologuem’s book: “through the very force of its mockery, it makes us aware that the veiled truth Ouologuem utters is that we must readjust our view and accept the African as that compound of good and evil we call a human being” (243). He also adds that “The end of the novel presents a return of the prodigal child, back to his origins, accepted with all his faults” (243).

With these children’s special gifts and the challenges presented to them, their special exploits clearly constitute a rich seam of possibilities for African creative writing. Although these empire builders’ lives are now well-known myths, the legends underscore their childlike qualities. Niane and Mofolo, just to mention a few, saw such stories necessitated the recording of African past. These mythical dramas, not only offer a striking contribution to the understanding of the recent literature about child soldiers, but also show that there is a rich reservoir of material to be drawn on when dealing with the child soldier theme or violence in Africa in general. *Shaka* and *Soundjata* are mythic narratives, and cannot otherwise be accounted for in any way that is not open to well-founded critical objection.

To close, let us note that even if these legendary children are seen as warriors, it is still difficult to identify their actions with the behaviour of child soldiers today.[23]For this reason, we subscribe to the view of many others that child soldiery is a postcolonial phenomenon. Also important to note is that Shaka and Soundjata fought battles as children, not as a matter of principle, but according to their circumstances. The temptation to cling to such a line of reasoning by tying the past to recent instances of child soldiery is strong, even if this would mean considering child soldiers as future nation-builders. Clearly, we cannot deny the childhood sufferings and the political injustice which drove these legendary child figures to violence, much as child soldiers today are forced to take up arms. This point is eloquently made by Nkashama when he argues that

> […] ce qui date au moins de l'époque de Chaka, l'enfant africain a toujours été embarqué dans la guerre pour des motifs que seule peut élucider la démence des adultes ivres de pouvoir ou mus par des besoins matériels. Ils ont participé à toutes les conquêtes et servi de victimes sacrificielles dans toutes les tourmentes sociales, depuis *L'aventure ambiguë* de Cheikh Hamidou Kane jusqu'à *Johnny Chien Méchant* d'Emmanuel Dongala. (Nkashama in Tcheuyap, 2003:8)

The question that remains is, 'Can child soldiers become tomorrow's leaders?

2.2.3. Postcolonial characteristics of the novels about child soldiers

In the preceding pages we tried to identify the features of legends or epics which establish some links with recent fiction about child soldiers. While the recent texts share with these legends some features, there are still those which are unique to the recent fiction about child soldiers and it is to these which we now turn.

---

[23] Both during and before Shaka's time, children were not warriors. Walter emphasises that "The standing army was made up of young bachelors in the warrior age grade" (1969:121) It was young men in their twenties who saw action. "Adolescent boys", he adds, "lived a barracks life in military kraals, serving as aides and herd boys until their age set was organised ceremonially as *ibutho* and they were elevated to the status of warriors" (121).Most studies on this issue claim to have never used children as warriors. Studies do, however, show that African society was structured in age-grades and age-sets which have some connections with war. It should be made clear that although these institutions (age-grades and age-sets) are closely connected with the formation of armies, age-sets were primarily created for socio-cultural matters such as marriage. It therefore appears reasonable to argue that if children were initiated into groups (age-sets) in preparation for armed attacks as future warriors (i.e. after 18 years of age) then children were indirectly part of the army. In general, however, it was the age-grades or age-sets formed by *adult* warriors i.e. able-bodied males that were expected to venture into such an activity. Writing about the Kipsigis tribes of Kenya, Ian Orchardson notes that, "Kipsigis of all ages, married and unmarried went to war, with the exception of the very young men, who had to obtain permission from the elders and war leaders" (1961:14). It is sometimes claimed that it was these young men who had been refused permission to fight, who followed the army at a distance and became looters. In the Gikuyu traditional society, the recognition of manhood and the full right of citizenship was marked by circumcision and this gave young men "full rights of citizenship, including the right to be warriors" (Ocaya-Lakidi, 1977:138).

The novels embody many features pertaining to postcolonial life. Chief among these are: murder, bodily pain experienced by the victims of violence, madness, the killers and the postcolonial cityscapes in which these monstrous acts take place are described below.

The first feature of these novels is the body. This body is often open – it is hacked to pieces, tortured, wounded, bleeding, maimed and decaying both while alive and dead. It never displays just one of these elements but always two or more simultaneously. This demonstrates how the body in a war situation is really a body in severe or intense pain[24]. The second characteristic, which is related to the first, is the relationship between the killer and the victim. Killers in these novels are boys made monstrous by a political system such as tribalism. They are instructed to kill unquestioningly while their victims are for the most part women and children, especially the most beautiful ones. The victims are not necessarily guilty of any offence; most of them die for simply stumbling into the cursed camp, for belonging to the wrong tribe, or the wrong political party as perceived by the killer. War generally provides a masculine world view since most of the perpetrators are young men, but girls are also portrayed in *Johnny chien méchant* and *Allah n'est pas obligé* as killers or female victim-heroines. A female victim-heroine, however, does not fight throughout the story to save people, but rises to defeat an adversary. "Female killers", as James Donald argues, "are very few and their reasons for killing differ significantly from men's" (1989:100). According to Donald, female killers' motives are psychosexual; their anger derives in most cases not from childhood experience but from specific moments in their adult life (Donald, 1989:100). Also noticeable in these novels is that violence and sex are not concomitants but alternatives: one operates as prelude to the other. For example, sex sometimes takes place at gunpoint. This leads us to a third characteristic which is the weapon. The killers' preferred weapons for attacking unarmed civilians are firearms, machine guns or machetes. While it was traditionally believed that strength plays an important role in war, technical advancement in the production of light weapons means this is no longer a prerequisite. An important point to add in the discussion of this issue is the social significance of light weapons. Because of the increasement of the illegal firearms, they have become so cheap that even the poorest of the children could afford to have one. This is why as destitute as he was, Faustin, *in L'Aîné des orphelins* had a pistol with which he killed his friend. The analysis of the use of weapons also shows that they have some

[24] With reference to the body politic, the figure is quite plastic. The politicians or child soldiers form a body of destruction.

phallic associations and can be related to sexual objects. Thus, for example, the gun could be regarded as a metaphor for the penis as much as the female body could represent the rebel territory. The language of sex is a rich source of idioms in war novels. Such language is part of the domain of desire which, reflects the violation of conventional codes. Analysing *Black boy* in his *Blues, ideology, and Afro-American Literature,* Houston Baker found that it is the code of desire that reduces conventional discourse to zero (1984:149). The body is always simultaneously inscribed in the "economy of pleasure and desire and the economy of discourse, domination and power" (Bhabha, 1994: 214). Acts of violence such as killing (e.g. killing one's parents as shown in *Allah n'est pas obligé*) and sex, as when seven soldiers publicly violate a woman in front of about fifty people including the woman's daughter (as shown in *Johnny chien méchant*), are not only chronicled in terms of disgust, but are also associated with madness because the perpetrators show no sign of sympathy.

Madness is the fourth major trope in these novels. Reading a story recounted by an almost mad first person narrator is very effective. If we are to understand these novels, we have to analyse the child soldiers' actions in order to determine where things went wrong. If we consider that these children might have convinced themselves collectively or individually to commit crimes in order to survive (i.e. their life depends on the death of the other), there is logic and not utter madness. There is a rationale motivating the perpetrator who believes the other has to die in order for me to live. This arises from the consciousness that "life feeds on death" (Harpham, 1975:58). So, what we call madness might be seen as quite sensible. Bakhtin's famous study of the functions of the rogue, the clown, and the fool in the novel and their right not to understand stupid conventions is applicable to child soldier novels. The concept of the child soldier implies the rejection of all conventions. Such characters do not respect societal rules which is why others see the child soldier as a fool or insane. If the child soldier is regarded as mad, he only appears that way to those who see themselves as "normal" or "civilised". Such a view is however very simplistic. Sedgwick's formulation of ignorance as power as opposed to Foucault's analysis of knowledge as power throws new light on madness in these novels. In *Fables of Responsibility*, Thomas Keenan also powerfully states that "humanity is this madness, its subjects and its object" (Keenan, 2008:133). According to Keenan, "it is not simply the ignorance of not knowing what to do; it is rather the terror of still having to do, without knowing" (133). In the light of this assumption, we can also argue that child soldiers *know* what they are doing – they know

how to shoot or kill because they have been shown how to do it. This is well expressed in the most recurrant phrase in Kourouma's *Allah n'est pas obligé:* "Ils ne connaissent que ça, tirer, rien que tirer" (Kourouma, 2000:117). What they probably don't know is how to survive without killing and how to protect rather than kill. If accepted as such, the behaviour of child soldiers appears as a sign of a power struggle which seeks to bring about a certain kind of social order. Violence can bring chaos instead of order but it is also true that children's violence reveals more about their inner experience than the acts they perform. In other words, violence by its very nature implies a point of view. A parent will never wish his child to be insane, but it is only when a child is mad that one can know what it means to be the father of an insane person. In addition, madness as ascribed to child soldiers in these texts need not be an entirely negative experience but seen as an inevitable response to society. As Bernard McElroy argues, "The lunatic offers the possibility of being used as a commentator on the world" (1989:94). Madness should not be regarded as pursuing a subversive aim, instead we should start looking at it as Veit-Wild (2005) does – as a sign of wisdom. The trope of madness offers avenues for comprehending the child soldier's belief system and actions today. As McElroy puts it:

> If madness can suggest to a rationalistic viewer the animal nature of man and can simulate the primitive rage below the patina of civilisation, madness can also fascinate, for it is a foreign and frightening way of life, a form of knowledge, of alien knowledge certainly, but knowledge nonetheless. It is the very otherness of the madman's view that can often make his observations unsettling; he can see, and can admit he sees, things that the sane man with a vested interest in the sane world must ignore, repress, or flatly deny. (McElroy, 1989:95)

Without denying a degree of madness in child soldiers, however, we do acknowledge that it is a corrupt society that has made them so. If madness as a trope serves the carnivalesque function of undermining the child soldier, the society in which they live, suffers the humiliation of being exposed to ridicule by its little ones' actions. Bakhtin is right when he argues that, "Folly… [is] deeply ambivalent. It has the negative element of debasement and destruction… and the positive element of renewal and truth…" (Bakhtin in Castellanos, 1994:126). Elsewhere Bakhtin acknowledges that:

> A fool introduced by the author for purposes of 'making strange' the world of conventional pathos may himself, as a fool, be the object of the author's scorn. The author need not necessarily express a complete solidarity with such a character. Mocking these figures as fools may even become paramount. But the author needs the fool: by his very

> uncomprehending presence he makes strange the world of social conventionality. By representing stupidity, the novel teaches a sort of prose vision, the vision of a world confused by conventions of pathos and by falsity. (Bakhtin in Castellanos, 1994:125)

This leads to the assumption that within child soldiers' madness, even in its low form, an idea is conceived: "the idea of deleting limits between the high and the low, the sacral and the earthly" (Gurtueva, 2004 para16). In *Man in the ontological space of the newest time*, Tamara Gurtueva (2004) shows how the process of person destruction caused by influence of the city led Gogol's characters to madness. In his *Johnny chien méchant*, Dongala lists several scenes of rape by child soldiers. As, we know, the victims of rape are women, but portrayed as occupying high social status despite being brought so low. While these women are made to fall very low, child perpetrators of these acts of barbarity or madness convince themselves of having risen so high. In other words, the divide between rich and poor is, in their eyes, abolished. The question of social relationships in these novels could be regarded as framed within the broader perspective of a fictional conflict between class pride, represented by politicians and rich people, and aggressive personality, represented by child soldiers.

The civil war novel is also characterised by its drive toward the city as a space where most monstrous acts occur. While for some early writers, the village, the epitome of primitivism or tradition, was mocked, while the city was praised as a place of modern social advancements or enlightenment. But this perception has changed, the city has become a place of trouble and has begun to receive attention in the modern novel and even more so in novels about child soldiers. In fact, what makes the city so remarkable in these novels is not its modern advancements, but the criminal acts that come out of it. Once a safe haven, the city no longer promises security. Despite its well constructed mansions and bungalows, people run to the bush for protection. The killer in these urban spaces is recognisably a young male and his victims are rich and beautiful young women. They are brutalised, raped, humiliated and killed. This literature shows that the city has become a dominant literary space, radically altering the idea of the beauty of Africa and replacing it with destruction and war. But the idea of a damaged city explains more than just war, it maps the postcolonial city in its "new streets of expectations" to borrow the phrase from the late critic and novelist, Phaswane Mpe (cited in Veit-Wild, 2005:25). Mpe argues that, "cities are spaces where diverse changes and expectations are apparently at their most remarkable" (25). With the advent of modernity and urbanisation came capitalism which meant that the rich became

more and richer and the poor and poorer. In this context, we assume that the child soldier lives in the world already rendered grotesque by the cruelty, poverty, and unemployment created by war or encouraged by war.

Last but not least, the child soldier novel also places emphasis on laughter. While the pervasiveness of war is expected to offer insight into misery, cruelty and death, it also embraces the comic. Writers use laughter to ridicule the barbarity which leads a human being into war. Just like the picrocholine war in Rabelais's *Gargantua* and *Pantagruel*, which, according to Bakhtin, mocks the military aggression of the Emperor Charles IV, so the misadventures of child soldiers constitute a travesty of civil war which African francophone scholars can laugh at. However Rabelais's popular and festive laughter symbolised oneness which allowed ordinary people to laugh at officialdom, and in so doing attempt to bridge the distance between rich/master and poor/slave. Similarly, by attacking the rich, child soldiers seem to follow the same philosophy. They seem to reinforce the distance between them and the poor civilians who they are constantly ridiculing. It is also interesting to note that parody underlies these novels as evidenced by child soldiers' embrace of folly as their most basic tenet. What this means is that the target of the comic is incorrigible human folly, its aim is more to instruct than to ridicule even though the latter remains an essential part of its logic. Moreover, laughter has a deep philosophical meaning in these novels. As Bakhtin puts it: "[laughter] is one of the essential forms of the truth concerning the world as a whole; through it "the world is seen anew, no less (and perhaps more) profoundly than when seen from the serious standpoint" (1968:66). This simply means that certain essential aspects of the world are "accessible only to laughter" (Bakhtin, 1968:66). The laughter which is a part of the narration, is not only an indication of freedom of spirit and speech, but also allows us access to the forbidden spheres of violence behind which lawlessness and ruthlessness lie. In reading such novels, one is made to see what one cannot believe when told – we are shown what human beings are capable of (what one would not have imagined is possible). Fornari (1974) relates that "war forces men to become disillusioned about the value of their civilisation; since it leads them to rediscover the barbarity they believed they had overcome" (80-81). Follies and nonsense divert child soldiers in these texts. The novels clearly juxtapose the ludicrous and the fearsome and dramatise perverse human passions. Thus, children are portrayed as raping girls and women in public or making relatives make love to each other while they are watching. The adult world is relegated to triviality while children's actions and jokes are presented as glorifying

war and absurdity. As we shall see, child soldiers also laugh at rich people and hold them up to ridicule. This is the case of Mr and Mrs Ibara in *Johnny chien méchant*. So, laughter, it would seem, allows children to have contact with adults or use unacceptable language, a privilege severely restricted for them in African traditional society. Pushed further, watching child soldiers laughing and joking despite the fact that they themselves are exposed to death is very insightful. This type of laughter by child soldiers is not so different from the Bakhtinian analysis of medieval Europe. It reminds us of Lucian's work, *Menippus* in which Menippus is portrayed as laughing in the kingdom of the dead (Bakhtin, 1968: 69). Arguably, postmodern culture has reached the ironic stage at which most characters we meet in novels are disillusioned, violent, yet comic in many ways. Morris Fraser argues that "Apparent excitement and laughter in a stressful situation does not mean that a child needs no reassurance rather the reverse" (1973:83), and by reassurance, implies accurate information which invariably reduces stress. Following Fraser, "shielding a child from the facts is usually self-defeating, since his fantasies tend to depict the event as much more terrible than it really is" (83). Besides reassuring, he adds, "a child has an intense need for physical closeness to trusted adults, usually his family, during the period of impact" (83). And this to him, explains why "a child usually fares better emotionally in the riot situation with his parents than out of it and separated" (83). Fraser goes even further and illustrates his argument by children who play "disaster games" after earthquakes and floods or build barricades, divided into groups and throw missiles in war zones. In so doing, he argues, children try to control their experiences and so feel less anxiety. According to him, this kind of laughter can be seen as regenerative. It is, in this sense, an expression of freedom. Understood from this angle, why should we not also expect child soldiers to laugh? By laughing, the child soldier is absorbed into the collective laughter (of society). Equally important in our analysis is showing that laughter is part of human culture; it is a sign of sociability. The link between the child and laughter is also reinforced in Aristotle's analogy that "a child does not begin to laugh before the fortieth day after his birth and only from that moment does it become a human being" (Bakhtin, 1968:69). The transition from bitter violence to contradictory humour is not as illogical as it first appears, but indicates how the child takes a step to ridicule society's (or his own acts of) violence. If we understand laughter as erasing difference and uniting people, we can also interpret it as a universal language. The novels' laughter is universal because, "like festive laughter, it is directed at all and everyone, including the carnival participants" (child soldier in this context; Bakhtin 1968:12).

In his article, "Le recit de guerre: une écriture du tragique et du grotesque," Adama Couloubaly also reminds us of the narrative techniques used by writers of African grotesque novels. This feature (laughter) seems also of particular importance to him in his treatment of war novels. According to Couloubaly, there is a language revolution in which the art of exaggeration has gone to new heights. Such a deliberate choice finds its basis in modern tragedy as he suggests:

> Le constat est qu'il existe une révolution langagière, un 'dévergondage textuel', une licence verbale dont on peut analyser le fondement en rapport avec le tragique moderne. Ainsi Domenach pose-t-il (dans un contexte plus général) la langue incohérente, transgressive, carnavalesque et grotesque typique de l'art contemporain (cinéma, théâtre) comme 'le témoignage ultime de l'aliénation contemporaine'. Un fait redondant dans les récits étudiés est ce rire caractéristique dont il faut analyser le mécanisme général de production et les motivations. (Couloubaly, 2003: para 38)

According to Couloubaly, African francophone writers know that art is the antidote to the tragic. "Le rire", Couloubaly says, "amortit la lourdeur infaillible du mécanisme tragique"(2003: para 47). He draws attention to the fact that when the trauma, anguish, and bloodshed became too tragic, writers are forced to dedramatise the tragic through what he calls "bouffonisation du tragique" in order to produce shades of laughter which the war novels have become well known for. It is t not surprising, therefore, that to tell the story is a child. This is where the choice becomes a useful aesthetic choice that it becomes obvious to an attentive reader that the African writer of war novel (tragic) novel is not only depicting war but reacts in the boldest manner possible to a situation he believes is very serious. His use of the child point of view is a way to state in clear terms that he is in total support of this group against every kind of abuse.

Closely linked with the use of madness and laughter for the purpose of profanation in these novels is the employment of *sexuality*. Here too, Dongala and Kourouma claim some responsibility for this technique. Kourouma describes in *Allah n'est pas obligé*, for example, how a boy called Jean Bazon eyed his teacher's crotch.[25] Such jokes throw an important light on what runs through these novels. *Johnny chien méchant* also contains

[25]It is said that pupils often leaned under their desks to watch through her thighs until one day she figured out quickly what Bazon was doing. Bazon kills the one boy the teacher had sent to arrest him with a stone and decides to join the child soldiers for protection. "C'est le gnoussou-gnoussou de la maîtresse qui l'a perdu; (...) oui c'est le sexe de la maîtresse qui l'a conduit aux enfants-soldats" (Kourouma, 2000:192).

references to sex that upset and make readers laugh at the same time. As already argued above, grotesque language and sex go together hand and glove to produce laughter. The function of laughter here is, as already pointed out, to reduce the tragic weight in these works of art. The child soldier character carries with it the aesthetic of parodic and ironic styles and this explains why these works provoke laughter. "C'est à travers un symbolisme plus fort, celui de l'enfant avorté,"Paravy argues, "que l'auteur exprime le caractère tragique de l'histoire africaine récente"(Paravy, 2002: para 6). These jokes are almost lost in *Charly en guerre*, the the story is conceived here as a story of sacrifice as opposed to satire.

Along with these writers' renewed representation of the grotesque, one more striking postcolonial characteristic of these texts is the juxtaposition of personal characteristics. The bleeding of these discordant characteristics often occurs in a single character where they exclude one another. The postcolonial grotesque war novel "weds and combines the sacred with the profane, the lofty with the low, the great with the insignificant, the wise and the stupid" to borrow Castellanos' (1994:128) words. More to the point, many characters in *Allah n'est pas obligé* exhibit a paradoxical combination of traits. This is, for example, the case of Colonel Papa le bon who wears a white soutane, has a papal staff with a crucifix on top and as a priest he carries his Bible. But all this does not prevent him from being a rebel; an AK-47 is always slung over his shoulder and he has a lot of gris-gris. Like him, Mother Superior Marie-Beatrice is a saint, but one who makes love like every woman in the universe. She is too muscular and too tall and as a result, her looks and manner are masculine. She has rolls of fat at the back of her head just as men have and also wears a soutane on top of which is a kalash as a true soldier. We see them as trying to mask their veritable identities or they are simply in a state of confusion resulting from conflicting values dictated by the urgent conditions of war which they have accepted and which have made their existence no better than clowns. We need to remember that such a mingling of traits in the least appropriate contexts has the effect of producing the most ironic and parodic passages in these novels.

This recent fiction, we argue, contains more than two times as many references to grotesque elements as any other texts in francophone African fiction, a few of which we have mentioned, namely: body, weapons, city, madness, sex and laughter. These features are associated with the grotesque which is why we often refer to them as grotesque bodies, grotesque sex, and so on. It is thus fitting that the grotesque should occupy a place of central importance in this fiction which is often read as a return to tragic realism. It follows

that the use of these features in these novels is the most astute means used by francophone writers to expose conventions and the ills of our society. However, caution should be taken against thinking that these features merely function in a negative way to expose society's failings or unveil the follies and hypocrisy of the officials. "The eccentric discourse of the novel's fools" as Castellanos remarks, "serves to carnivalize life, to allow us to adopt an irreverence which holds few things sacred and defeats even the solemnity of death" (1994:131). This "irreverence: according to Castellanos, "is not destructive...but is based on a deep sense of community" (131). Unlike the violence out there (in the world) which is destructive, the violence in these texts, despite the fact of denying social rigid rules, revives and makes us understand the meaning of the society we live in. That is why child soldiers make the theme of sex, death, torture and war laughable or the subject of jokes despite them being regarded as serious in the eyes of many. So, our attitude toward these serious themes of child misconduct should be in agreement with the writers' determination to use the grotesque as a basis for ideological reflection on society and avoid judging characters by what they display without going further. These works are satirical in many aspects. McNeil reminds us that "when scholars refer to a work as satirical, they usually mean that in some way that work ridicules an identifiable human folly or vice with the intent to reform" (1990:21). In this manner, the francophone writers' satirical bent will not affect us positively as readers if we fail to understand it as part of fiction.

2.3 The connection between the child soldier and the grotesque

A close reading of this section will provide a means of understanding the two interrelated concepts of the grotesque and the child soldier, the common ground between them and the part they might have played in the conception of the novels by their writers.

The grotesque is particularly useful in analysing francophone fiction. However, as a stylistic form, it presents many difficulties. Firstly, it intersects with many other stylistic variations such as comedy, parody, caricature, horror, the bizarre, tragedy and the absurd. First impressions of child soldier's inhuman behaviour often confuses, making it difficult to speak of these actions without wishing to classify them as grotesque. Before looking at the possible application of this theory in these novels, a brief review of the concept of the grotesque, and the essential features of the grotesque needs to be provided. In so doing, the relationship between the child soldier and his grotesque actions will be established.

The concept of the grotesque is often applied to indeterminate nouns such as 'monster', 'object' or 'thing'. Gysin comments, "As a noun, it implies an object that either occupies multiple categories or that falls between categories; it implies the collision of other nouns, to the impossibility of finding a synonym…" (1975:3). According to Harpham, the word "designates a condition of being just out of focus, just beyond the reach of language. It accommodates the things left over when the categories of language are exhausted; it is a defence against silence when other words have failed" (1982:3-4). In art some objects or things are presented to us as grotesque or monstrous, but as Harpham explains, "hideous … dragons and gorgons and terrible beasts are not necessarily grotesque… Knotting the alien whole with more or less familiar parts, these creatures simultaneously invoke and repudiate our conventional, language-based categories" (1982:5). At its very base, the grotesque is understood by most critics as a mingling of human with animal features or mechanical elements; the comic, the monstrous, the misshapen, which Sachs simply refers to as "the inverse of the ideal" (Sachs in Gysin,1975:31). According to Sachs, "it is evil or baseness, or abnormality, portrayed in incongruously compounded human and non-human images that are in various degrees both disturbing and absurd"(1975:31). If reduced to its essential characteristics, the grotesque occurs in the border regions between fantasy and reality, beauty and ugliness, the tragic and the comic, the human and the non-human, the living and the dead, etc. As such, it does not exclusively belong to one of these border regions but always to two or more of them simultaneously. In her assertion of the grotesque, Susan Stewart brings in a useful distinction between types of non-things: "the anomalous stands between the categories of an existing classification system… the ambiguous is that which cannot be defined in terms of any given category…" (Stewart in Gysin, 1975:31). As Harpham also observes, "the ambivalent is, however, that which belongs to more than one domain at a time" (1982:4). Since this concept cannot be defined satisfactorily, it is referred to as a "non-thing" by Stewart (in Gysin, 1975:4). If the attempts to describe the grotesque have resulted in contradictory opinions, the quest for its meaning has led to even more divergent answers (Gysin, 1975:30). However, for Kayser obscurity of meaning is a characteristic of the grotesque. Therefore, he argues, any explanation that goes beyond indicating the presence of ominous or chaotic forces destroys the grotesque effect. Kayser does not stop there, but continues by stating that the obscurity of meaning has a special significance: "We are unable to orient ourselves in the alienated world; because it is absurd… It [the grotesque] is primarily the expression of our failure to orient ourselves in the physical universe" (Kayser cited in Gysin, 1975:31). It becomes clear therefore that

failing to grasp the meaning behind the grotesque forces us to create another understanding of it based on fear. This can be associated with Mary Cass Canfield's view of the grotesque as, "spring[ing] from a primitive love and fear of the unknown – a shuddering lust for the impossible" (in Gysin, 1975:31). Harpham has much the same idea when he writes, "No definition of the grotesque can depend solely upon formal properties, for the elements of understanding and perception, and the factors of prejudice, assumptions, and expectations play such a crucial role in creating the *sense* of the grotesque" (Harpham, 1982:14).

Like the grotesque, the concept of the child soldier is complex. In her study *Child Soldiers in Africa* (2006), Alcinda Honwana, describes child soldiers as those who find themselves in an ambiguous position that defies dichotomies between civilians and combatants, victims and perpetrators, initiates and initiated, protected and protectors and, as others argue, even human and non-human. The best example is the title character in *Johnny chien méchant* who is portrayed or at least calls himself *chien méchant*, "mad dog" and the equivalent of the English sign "Beware of the dog". What is unusual is that he is, at once, man and dog. "With these multiple positions child soldiers epitomise the condition of simultaneously having multifaceted identities and utterly lacking a permanent, stable, and socially defined place" (Honwana, 2006: 4). As demonstrated in a number of cases in Honwana's book, child soldiers occupy a world of their own. The child soldier creates a world that remains incomprehensible because while childhood or the child is usually associated with innocence, weakness, and dependence upon adult guidance and care, the concept of soldier, which forms part of this neologism is, by contrast, associated with strength, aggression, and the responsible maturity of adulthood. "Children should be protected and defended; a soldier's duty is to protect and defend" (Honwana, 2006:5). In her analysis, the paradoxical combination of child and soldier becomes unsettling because "Children at war find themselves in an unsanctioned position between childhood and adulthood. They are still children, but they are no longer innocent; they perform adult tasks, but they are not adults … [because they] are still physically and psychologically immature … Child soldiers live between a world of make-believe – a child's world of games and fantasy, of playing with guns – and reality – where the playful becomes shockingly lethal and the game turns deadly" (Honwana, 2006:3). Child soldiers (and childhood as we shall see) are fluid and shifting categories. As subjects, child soldiers are simultaneously producers and products of violence. On the one hand, they are initiators and responsible for actions of violence while on the other hand, as subjected beings (i.e. they submit to the authority of an ideology, a

leader, etc.), they respond positively to the needs of those they are loyal to (their captors). As such they are simultaneously implicated in structures of domination and subordination. In the role of soldiers, they are put in a position of domination, while as children, they are unambiguous victims of abduction.

The child soldier's grotesque qualities arise not so much from the nature of the concept as from the fact that it resists a specific category or definition – it embodies confusion. In other words, if child soldiers seems grotesque, it is not necessarily because of their odd appearance (as is the case with a terrible beast), but simply because as individuals they represent a corruption or alienation of familiar forms. The figure simultaneously represents a child and an individual in military uniform carrying a gun. Taken as symbols of life and death, the child and the gun are two elements that fuse two opposites into one. Although the gun the boy holds up (as soldiers do in a time of war) is a symbol of death, it is the same gun used for self-protection and therefore life. As Harpham acknowledges, in the grotesque "multiple forms inhabit a single image" (1982:130). Instead of characterising the child soldier as playing some sort of an adult game, one should ask: Does this child only resemble a soldier or is he really one? The issue of child identity is also at stake here. We need to establish first that the child soldier's individuality is confused and threatened by two types of individualities: his own true identity, on the one hand, and that imposed on him by dominant elements of society which refer to him as an outlaw, outcast or a public danger. It is tempting to argue that the prevailing grotesque image of the child soldier, as seen through the distorting lens of society, is part of its appeal for novelists. To paraphrase Gysin (1975), grotesque material is an indicator of a strong tendency in a writer to see and present the world in paradoxes, a tendency that must be combined with a very creative imagination. One might therefore further argue that the grotesque figure of the child soldier in fiction is partly an indication of wilful distortion by the author. Although influenced by real life, the causes and meanings are based on the imagery, imagination or intentions of the artist or novelist in this context. Last, but not least, it should be noted that fear of what appears foreign to us is also one of the factors that led people to label children involved in war as "child soldiers". The opposite is also true. For McNeil, "humankind possesses a morbid curiosity about death and violence especially when it is perpetrated on a grand scale" (1989:24). It would therefore seem that by using this concept, the writers bring in social sensibilities such as fear of and curiosity about child soldiers.

To sum up, the two concepts (i.e. the child soldier and the grotesque) stand out at the margin of consciousness between the known and the unknown, the perceived and the unperceived, calling into question the adequacy of our ways of explaining each of these. These concepts have been brought together in this study because they share common features. When people speak about child soldiers, they do so in terms either of their innocence (we wish to prevent them doing what adults do) or of their bad actions (they are merciless killers). In this context, the child soldier and the grotesque illustrate what it is like to be misunderstood in this world. As one may gather, the mingling of the human and non-human features, the good and bad, makes the child soldier a suitable subject of analysis in terms of the grotesque, which, as previously mentioned, plays a major role in the interpretation and understanding of these texts.

In order to understand new writings and the theme of child soldier, one must take into account not only the historical context but also the sudden change in style that has occurred, reflecting an unbelievable reality that unfolds under our noses. Through their imaginative landscapes, the writers attempt to respond to the challenges of describing the indescribable lives produced by African wars. As a result, they have produced works that contain the possibility of opening a door to new reading habits shaped by non-normative style and stories that transgress.

2.4. Application of the theory of the grotesque to this study

How do we explain a social issue such as child soldiery through body topography? The challenge is not only in getting it right but also making it comprehensible. The child soldier's words and actions entail a movement from a state of innocence to a state of tragedy or wrongdoing. Accounting for such a process of transformation (in the mind of a child) through literary analysis is not easy even if the child's actions and words are narrated.

We are of the view that to introduce the concept of the grotesque in the study of child soldier characters (as illustrated in section 2.3) is to open an avenue for the investigation of the relation between the grotesque and language. This relation is of the utmost importance, since in addressing the trope of the grotesque we must ask, not only what the grotesque implies or means and how its links with language are to be understood in general, but also how the grotesque can be analysed specifically in these stories dealing with child soldiers.

To unpack this, let us argue that while grotesque (magic) realism may offer a promising approach for the study of language and the child soldier, it does not appear that it provides a specific model to follow in the study of these texts. This is because the grotesque or magical realism arguably places emphasis on symbols of the body and the strange material world people live in. As a result, what is provided by critics within this tradition cannot help us to look at the ways to analyse the child soldiers' language of war.

We contend that war and child soldiery constitute a field or a realm of conflict in which meanings relating to the concepts of the child soldier and the grotesque. As already argued, magic or grotesque realism does not provide a step by step procedure for the purpose of our analysis. We propose to undertake this task by taking our cue from Fritz Gysin's study *The grotesque in American Negro fiction* (1975) which offers some practical approaches applicable to grotesque material. Our investment in this book is significant, since it invites the reader to discover the grotesque through very simple techniques. For Gysin, methods such as direct comment, characters' reactions, realistic descriptions in plain language are contrasted with descriptions and processes such as *distortion, animation* and *alienation* constitute the poles of linguistic figuration. What is specific to Gysin's theory is the argument that "the intensity of the grotesque depends on the function a figure has within a specific story or sketch because this function determines the length and the frequency of the description of the grotesque traits" (Gysin, 1975:129). Based on this argument, we propose that if a grotesque character only appears once, it is most likely to be a minor as opposed to a main grotesque figure. It goes without saying that the child soldier might not be the central grotesque figure we think he is. The theory is useful in that it shows both inactive and active movement in the child's actions. This dynamism emphasises action and indicates a relationship between figuration and narration. According to Hayden White's definition of tropes as "deviations from literal, conventional, or 'proper' language use, swerves in locution sanctioned neither by custom nor logic" (White, 1978:2), Gysin's theory fits the ends of troping which White refers to as "both a movement from one notion of the way things are related to another notion, and a connection between things so that they can be expressed in a language that takes account of the possibility of their being expressed otherwise" (1978:2). The transformation of the child soldier into a cruel being may or may not be descriptively convincing – all we know is that his body is a reflection of a decadent postcolonial world. By aligning tropes (e.g. madness, the obscene, violence, etc.) with these techniques of grotesque analysis (e.g. distortion, animation, etc.), we show that the tropes are devices provided by language which we can use to identify

problematic areas of child soldiers' cognitive experiences and submit them to analysis. While there is much to be praised in Gysin's model, it remains too literal, which limits the usefulness of his techniques in a study of complex socio-historical issues. We further suggest that it is also essential to analyse the grotesque features in these stories by taking in terms of both language and socio-historical specificities or external factors relating to the production of texts. We cannot study the grotesque without looking at the factors which condition it. In so doing, we concur with Bourdieu in whose view "the power of words is injected into language from outside, that is, from the institutions which delegate authority to the speaker" (Bourdieu in Thompson, 1984:69). Hence, it is senseless to see the child soldier's grotesque language and actions as having an independent force of conviction or destruction beyond the power conferred on them by the institutions of war.

While we espouse Gysin's techniques on a stylistic level, the line of thought that inspires this work is Harpham's theory of the grotesque. In his comprehensive and wide-ranging study, Harpham asserts that we should view the grotesque not as a marginal or aberrant form. Among his many examples, he argues that faith in God is a faith in the hidden order of apparently disorderly things, the hidden meaning of the apparently meaningless. And therein lies the paradox: "to really understand the grotesque is to cease to regard it as grotesque" (1982:76). In the same manner, we argue that to understand the child soldier requires first that we cease to regard him as grotesque and instead find a new core of meaning.

2.5. Conclusion

The African child has been for centuries, and still is, the most debated topic even today though angles have shifted. Former controversies raged round the colonial exploitation of the African child. At present, the discussion is even more vital, for it is a matter not only of his suffererings, but also of interpreting why he has become so violent. The literature on the African child soldier as it stands is expected to say more about who this child really is. But very little satisfactory effort has been done to show this. Methods of social orientation have proved their inadequacy. Through the analysis of the novels about child soldiers, a fresh look in criticism must be made by applying a broader text-critical method. To be specific, the grotesque assumes a fresh aspect as the result of a text-critical investigation of the child soldiers' lives as will be shown in the next chapters.

Chapter 3: Reading the Grotesque Novel: Distractions of Violence, Misreading, and Misconceptions about the Author and Africa.

3.1. Introduction

As shown above, texts about child soldiers pose a challenge to readers. Dongala and Kourouma are good examples of contemporary African francophone writers who enjoy a global reputation. Kourouma's *Allah n'est pas obligé* and Dongala's *Johnny chien méchant* are widely read around the world, while Couao-Zotti's *Charly en guerre* has not yet reached a large audience. Its realism also places it in a slightly different category to the other two. Librarians are perhaps right to classify it as a youth novel. This, however, does not make the book less grotesque. The depiction of grotesque acts by the rebels in *Charly en guerre* is markedly more detailed than in the other two novels. Although Kourouma's *Allah n'est pas obligé* reads as a classic example of magical realism or metafiction, the same does not apply to Dongala's *Johnny chien méchant* even though there is kinship between its magical traits and Kourouma's book. Its message remains more couched in the grim realities of the grotesqueries of war. That the novel falls predominantly under grotesque realism is undeniable. It's even tempting to categorise it as what Tchivela calls *réalisme prodigieux* (in Moudileno, 2006: 31) in the works of Congolese writers such as Labou Tansi who expresses his vision of the postcolony predominantly through sexuality, cruelty and violence.

As absorbing as these three books may be, they pose significant problems in their reading. Like any grotesque novels, they are a mixture of genres and combine both reality and fantasy. However, if their portrayal of reality is not given its due, the reader's search for artificial truth may easily lead many to question their art. More than this, the literary critic or reader may become so preoccupied with the violent aspects of their works whether realistic or not that he or she risks overlooking crucial hidden meanings in these works. It is therefore not surprising that Kourouma's *Allah n'est pas obligé* has been exposed to criticism regarding supposed literary shortcomings.

The article "Kourouma, the myth: the rhetoric of the commonplace in Kourouma criticism" by Christiane Ndiaye in *Research in African literature* (2007) raises the same questions addressed in this chapter about the difficulty of reading this new genre, the war grotesque novel whose characters and themes are determined by the ugly, the supernatural or the monstrous. Ndiaye speaks about reviews, books, interviews, articles and scholarly journals

which testify to the interest that people have in these novels dealing with the sensitive and burning issues of war and child soldiers. While efforts have been made to analyse these works and these have contributed to our understanding of these books and the decadent or perverse characters they portray, they have tended to interpret the characters in these books subversively. In other words, the critics do not convey the books' fundamental message as intended by the writers. Even more disturbing is when these works are mistaken for journalistic reporting or non-fiction, and Kourouma is seen as a good "teller of truth" (Ndiaye, 2007: 101). And yet, as Ndiaye argues, "the truths seen by his readership are not always those he sought to express (2007: 100-102). An example of such a misinterpretation can be found in *The Complete Review*:

> Allah n'est pas obligé is narrated by a young boy, Birahima. Not even a teenager, the boy gets caught up in the regional turmoils and conflicts, a boy-soldier witness to the outrages perpetrated by the corrupt and evil leaders of various West African countries, especially Liberia and Sierra Leone, in the mid-1990s. *Sadly, the book is hardly fiction, the events that are described solidly based in fact*. (Complete review's Review, 2010 para 1 emphasis ours)

To call Kourouma's book a work of non-fiction is to ignore some of the nuances of discourse in his novel, particularly the connection between language and myth which underlies the author's reshaping of reality in his fictional universe.

In exploring the question of reading, two questions come to mind: How does one read novels written by African francophone writers about war? And how does one read novels written by Western writers about war? Although it is not our intention to explore the second question in this section in detail, it is worth pointing out the difference between the two groups of novels. Whereas the African novel about war or violence is truth, the Western novel about the same theme is seen as dreamlike. The awareness of this distinction is cleverly observed in the comment below by Tcheuyap when he argues that:

> "Mais on peut relever d'emblée une différence fondamentale: la violence dans les faits culturels au Nord peut être interprétée comme le résultat d'un 'surdéveloppement' qui conduit à l'invention d'un nouveau type de récits et de représentations où le fantastique est important. Il s'agit d'une violence surtout ludique, alors que les romans africains font de la violence une expérience humaine parfois fatale, et non pas forcément culturelle. Le spectateur ou le lecteur du Nord voit, regarde la violence qu'il ne vit pas forcément comme celui d'Afrique." (Tcheuyap, 2003: 7-8)

Not only does the reader need to be reminded about how the African novel has its specificity, but also that reading it is a difficult and complex practice. Thus, we agree with Virginia Woolf who argues that "to read a book as it should be read calls for the rarest qualities of imagination, insight, and judgement" (Wolf in Ikonne, et al., 1992: 10). The general hypothesis is that any meaningful reading of the novel about child soldiers starts with the understanding that it is set firmly in the immediate history of war.

While it cannot be denied that African francophone writers of novels about child soldiers are inspired by the real world knowledge of child soldiers' lives, their stories remain to some extent products of their imagination. The argument that the novel is a product of the imagination alone is out of the question. There is a link between art and society that cannot be denied. We can understand this if we consider the statements by the scholars below. Couloubaly, who wants to free us from the ambiguity of the term realism, writes:

> Le rapport dialectique de l'œuvre d'art à la société est manifeste. La société fournit à l'œuvre ses modèles, ses références, ses personnages, et sa langue et autres ... (Couloubaly, 2003:para 6).

Couloubaly continues to quote Claude Duchet by way of explantation for this dialectic movement between society and art that he calls *écriture de la socialite*:

> "Elle est d'abord tout ce qui manifeste dans le roman la présence hors du roman d'une société de référence et d'une pratique sociale, ce par quoi le roman s'affirme dépendant d'une réalité socio-historique antérieure et extérieure (...). La socialité est d'autre part ce par quoi le roman s'affirme lui-même comme société et produit en lui-même ses conditions de lisibilité sociale." (Duchet in Couloubaly, 2003)

In both approaches, Couloubaly argues, the work of art appears as a structure which reflects society. Such a simple definition allows us say that realism is an attempt to imitate reality in art: "le réalisme est une tentative d'imitation d'un réel en art" (2003: para 8). This is why the novels under scrutiny have reference points which evoke historical figures, countries and well-known places thus allowing readers to identify , for example, Congo in *Johnny chien méchant* and Liberia and Sierra-Leone in *Allah n'est pas obligé* and so on.

There is no question more important at the present moment than this. What is realism? It is important to explore the concept of *realism* at this point in our discussion. In "Toward a definition of realism in the African context", Mineke Schipper rightly argues that "the word realism has been so randomly applied to all sorts of texts and literatures that we must very

carefully define our use of it" and rememeber that "reality is experienced and expressed by artists and writers in different ways" (1985:559). For her, "the aim of the realistic writer is constant: "to write, with respect to the valid norms of his time, more veraciously and to put reality more directly into words than his predecessors have done" (1985: 559). Most critics like Schipper concur that realism does not just mean to be true to the hard facts. As Gikandi also acknowledges, African "novels are not a mere mimesis" (1987: x) despite drawing heavily on reality. It is our argument that any critic who attempts to place Negro African creative writing in this category of artificial truth or evaluate it based purely on its aesthetic significance will be constantly tripped up in most African novels and, above all in these ones, by the nature of that which defies perception. Yet the reflection of reality does not make these works less fictional. To overcome this debate, Nigerian writer Wole Soyinka argues that: "The artist has always functioned in African societies as the record of mores and experience of his society and as the voice of vision in his own time" (Soyinka in Ezeigbo, 1991:122)[26]. Ezeigbo also steps out in favour of this view when she argues elsewhere that "through their recreation of the reality of war, the writers hope to provide new insight into these experiences for the purpose of enlightening their people so that the lessons of the past are applied to solve the problems of today for future direction" (Ezeigbo, 1991:124).

It is difficult to see however why fiction should be separated from reality, or mere history. In this matter Schipper says frankly that despite the fact that the concrete historical situation or identifiable framework creates conditions for the realisation of realism"the realistic writer destroys certain norms of his time in writing" (1985: 559) and Harry Levin's (in Schipper) view, the literary realist is "a professional iconoclast, bent on shattering the false images of his day" (Levin in Schipper, 1985:559).[27] Also important in Schipper's discussion of realism is the point she makes about the author's attitude toward reality, which falls into one of two main categories: Either "he believes in the existence of reality in itself as an object of

[26] Soyinka's further claims that "[I have] special responsibility because I smell the reactionary sperm years before the rape of a nation takes place" (Soyinka in Ezeigbo, 1991: 124). The same attitude is found in Nkashama whose works, as Alexie Tcheuyap (2007) recalls warned people against the Rwandan tragedy. Likewise, the Guinean writer Tierno Monénembo whose impulse behind the writing of *L'Ainé des orphelins* was not only to record the Rwandan genocide but also and more importantly to provide a reminder for Rwanda, without which the worst can be expected to happen again. The reality of war created by African writers serves in this sense to show the writers' devotion to their society and educate the people, although this does not mean that African art acquires value only if it is engaged with social affairs of the community. To put it in Fisher's words, "Literature is born of reality and acts back upon reality" (Ezeigbo, 1991: 1).

[27] See Harry."On the Dissemination of Realism" in *Grounds for Companion,* Cambridge, Mass., 1972, p. 248.

knowledge, and he feels confident about knowing and representing it…" or "he does not believe in the existence of objective reality" (1985: 560). The second of Schipper's possibilities is the one most often adopted by Western writers who often feel that language is inadequate and insufficient to represent objective reality. As a result, he "fixes his whole attention on his own person in the belief that the only reality left is the one he experiences in his own consciousness" (560). He, according to Schipper, "no longer believe[s] in the possibility of describing the world outside," and instead "withdraw[s] into a personal consciousness without any concrete reality context" (560). The African writer, in contrast to the Western, not only believes in reality, but also sees it as his task to put this reality into words as it is, even if reality is not an end in itself. Despite using many realist techniques (e.g. naming of places and people), his text goes beyond this reality by incorporating motifs derived from local lore, mythology, fables, proverbs, uncertainties, ambiguities, ironies and so on, which, as we already know, distinguish the realistic text from strange, marvellous, fantastic or magical literature which is more commonly the domain of such things. It is because such devices are considered detrimental to the seriousness of these stories that they need to be explored. While we cannot dispute the fact that these novels reflect the current reality, it is useful to bear in mind that the writers' representation of characters (child soldiers in this context) s both real and ironic (imaginary). Since child soldiers' war experiences are embedded in grotesque images, myths and symbols which constantly distort them, their meaning cannot be obtained without a deep analysis of these devices. The crucial question in reading these texts is not whether reality is represented or not, but how that reality has been depicted.[28] In other words, how do these authors transorm known facts and known spaces to produce a fictitious world? It is in this context that realism, while the convention for war literature, embraces the tragic, fantasy, magic or simply the grotesque as will be illustrated in the following sections. Before looking at these, let us first look at the mistakes people make in reading these works.

[28] Several other questions which arise in relation to these novels that need our attention are: How and to what degree does the writer make us believe that his art reflects objective reality? Where does imagery start and end in these novels? How different is reality from unreality in the process of representation? Does the question of reality matter to our understanding and appreciation of the novel? How do we determine in the novels the events in child characters lives which they are unable to interpret correctly? Are these books more real in people's eyes than the reports in the media? Can we doubt the veracity of the novels in their portrayal of reality? Is the chasm between truth i.e. factual reality and fiction a problem? What purposes do myths serve in these novels if they are not understood? To what extent can authorship suffer if the work is misread? These, we think, are questions the reader must ask himself or herself before reading one of the novels.

3.2 [Mis]reading African war novels

Children, flesh, and blood are central tropes pointing to the reality of war in the novels about child soldiers, but the idea that truth and reality in fiction is mere artifice is widely contested and has led many to misread this recent fiction.

In an article mentioned above, Ndiaye reminds us, for example, of Isaac Bazié. Ndiaye draws heavily on Bazié's insightful article entitled, "Ecritures de violence et contraintes de la réception: *Allah n'est pas obligé* dans les critiques journalistiques française et québécoise" (2003) to elaborate on the issue of misreading Kourouma's novel. Bazié, according to Ndiaye, comments and argues that when reading Kourouma's work(s), people focus on the first level, which he refers to as "thematic reading" (Ndiaye, 2007:96). Since *Allah n'est pas obligé* is by nature constructed on a set of known facts, it is easy to understand why most readers cling to this first level of reading. Articles and interviews which display a preference for such first-level reading abound "as if Kourouma was the author of historical documents or ethnographic studies" (Ndiaye, 2007:97). But Bazié, according to Ndiaye, warns against the fact that critics are not expected to "stop at this bipolar reading that merely offers a summary description of form and content" and content themselves with what he calls the "idle pleasures of a superficial reading" (97). For when realism is used by writers like Kourouma, it turns out that he represents, "not just the "matériau historique" or 'historical material', not just any "real", but "the real in its constitutive obscenity" to borrow the words from Moudileno (2006:36). Bazié suggestes, therefore, that readers should go beyond these "absolute truths and also consider a certain conception that engages both the writer and literature and their function in society" (97). This assumption underlies our stance that these texts should be read within the context of African culture. Such references place the African culture on higher ground than anything else in African writing. After all, as Ndiaye testifies: "The African writer is defined as an 'authentic' witness of his/her culture, the one capable of revealing to the world 'the soul of the black people'" (2007: 97). This role does not preclude African writers from engaging seriously with the use of poetic devices such as similes and other metaphors to describe characters in their books. In *Reading the African novel*, Simon Gikandi strongly advocates this view when he argues that "I do not believe that we can read the African novel meaningfully and effectively without bringing content and form into play as elements of literature which are equally significant" (1987: ix). And Gikandi's stated purpose is "to show why these elements cannot be mutually exclusive" (1987:ix). Although he clearly argues that the African novel is "an instrument of understanding on the individual and socio-

cultural levels" (1987: ix), Gikandi also cautions readers against falling into the trap of perceiving a literary form as little more than a mute vehicle for mimesis. In his words, the African text "is not mere content or mere form," it is what he describes as, "the process of form recreating reality in the terms set by authorial consciousness, constituting a world which might resemble external reality, but is also the novelist's own universe" (1987:ix). Most critics tend to ignore these dimensions and Ndiaye is dismayed that "more often the readers seek a better understanding of African politics, culture and tradition through his [Kourouma's] works" (2007:100). While there is nothing wrong with exploring themes, the failure to consider how themes interact with socio-cultural aspects and language in the story is alarming. Those unfamiliar with African works mistake the political issues dealt with by the continent's writers for an obssession with issues of violence, mismanagement, flesh, blood and pain because their novels continue to recycle myths through which the child soldiers' experiences or consciousness can be assessed. To be deemed "truly African," a writer must, in Ndiaye's words, not only be "called upon to create a piece that conveys some absolute truth about Africa but he must also produce aesthetics where the reader can perceive this African authenticity" (2007: 99). Such aesthetics, however, are encoded in myths and other fantastic elements, the importance of which we have already highlighted in relation to a successful reading of these novels.

When Kourouma was interviewed by Catherine Argand about truth in his *Allah n'est pas obligé* as standing in opposition to fiction, the author's reply, recorded by Ndiaye, was simple: "Only the manner in which the events are weaved together. I fictionalise the *truth*" (2007: 102, own emphasis added). In an interview with Gérard Meudal, Kourouma stated that "The book is not a document but rather a novel and the prose fiction resides mostly in the fact that it is narrated by a child soldier. This is what allows a certain distance. The reality was so harsh that humour became a necessity" (Ndiaye, 2007: 102). Again, in an interview conducted by *Notre librairie* (No. 87, 1987) with the same writer concerning the publishing of his *Les soleils des independances* (1970) which had become the best-selling book of that period, he related how this book was repeatedly rejected by editors in France before it was accepted by the University of Montréal Press. There the publisher asked him to delete political passages, which were important to him, because they were regarded as unnecessary or making use of a journalistic style.

> "Ils m'ont demandé de supprimer ce qu'ils considéraient comme du journalisme et qui, pour moi, était essentiel. Le livre a été réduit de plus

> d'un tiers car il y avait beaucoup de passages politiques. Je l'avais écrit à un moment difficile et la rancoeur n'en était pas absente". (Nkashama, 1997:144)[29]

As one maysee, the writer suffered the kind of accusations and misconceptions that were to greet his later works.

Like Kourouma, Dongala also explained his interviewers that the content of his novel was dictated by his personal experience of war in his native country (People's Republic of the Congo). In that sense *Johnny chien méchant* draws irrevocably on the reality of shame and humiliation. Dongala thus makes a very effective use of a war novel anchored in truth or verifiable history. However, it would be a mistake to read Dongala's narrative as a mere ethnological collection of data. Despite drawing on the lived reality of war, the importance of his novel is credited chiefly to the rich representation of conflict that emerges out of the narrative voice he gives to the child soldier. In addition, the novel is important in its parodic reference to a society gone mad.

The question as to to the position of these texts is of great importance for our reading. On the grounds stated, we argue, on the one hand, that these novels are generally realist, on the other, we assert that they are parodic. In fact, the world in which these texts are grounded is not necessarily the world of ordinary reality as we might think, but a world of discourse. Some light has been shed on this concept by Linda Hutcheon (1989). The "world of discourse", she writes, "has direct links to the world of empirical reality, but it is not itself that empirical reality" for she argues, "the representation of the real is not the same as the real itself" (6). So, there is a way to believe that what we know as in these books derives partly from the discourse developed by writers from the popular culture (views) with regard to these children. It is a mistake to label these texts as non-fiction. Consider for a moment that these texts are non-fiction, we will still be surprised to hear that "the non-fictional novel [itself]'"whatever its claims to factual veracity of historical reporting-overtly structures its report on fictive intertexts" Hutcheon (1989:15).

[29]Writing about the same issue, Yetunde Osunfisan points out that "he simply used what was familiar to him and refused to make excuses, unlike his predecessors who wore themselves out trying to please a foreign audience" (Osunfisan in Ojo, S , et al., 2000:237). According to Osunfisan, "if Kourouma had concerned himself with any of the above worries and had tried to satisfy the preferences of a foreign public, albeit more lucrative, *Les Soleils* and *Monnè* would have lost their appeal, all those things that add up to the salt and pepper of Kourouma's writing" (238). "His novels demonstrate" he further argues,"a refusal to be intimidated particularly by "what will the critics say?" "how would they receive it?" (238). This, we admit, is where Kourouma's ideology has proved so useful.

The issue of truth in fiction generated and continues to generate debates as critics struggle to find its contours. But deciding what truth or fiction is, is not as straightforward as we would like it to be, for most creative writing contains both truth and fiction. Readers imagine the fictions created by writers and make them part of their own reality. Are these realities now truth or fiction? Novels about child soldiers display the characteristics of the novel, as Bakhtin defines it – a site of competing discourses some of which are even encountered in nonfiction.[30] Maggie Ann Bowers is right when she argues that many of the problems of the definition of a genre "arise because of the frequent difficulty of placing texts into narrowly defined genres and categories" (2004:28).

3.3 Writing in the marginal or postcolonial space

One other important aspect which might facilitate our reading of these texts is understanding what prompted them.

When we look at child soldier "characters and their actions in the postcolonial space, [their] connotation is most frequently negative since" as Moudileno argues, "it is repeatedly connected to other terms evocative of postcolonial horror" (2006:33). In like manner, the postcolonial writer is caught between two evils: on the one hand, the traditions that most people reject today and, on the other, the postcolonial culture of violence which we have alluded to. This leaves room for the natural presumption to tell that this writer writes form a very difficult space. This Catch-22 situation was explained by Nigerian writer Achebe, when he told Robert Serumaga that the postcolonial situation represented in his novels is one in which "the worst elements of the old are retained and some of the worst of the new are added on to them" (Achebe in Duerden and Pieterse, 1972: 8). The texts about child soldiers are shaped by the ambiguous postcolonial space between these evils.

In *Reading Chinua Achebe*, Gikandi quotes Vumbi Yoka Mudimbe's definition of marginality as "… the intermediate space between so-called African tradition and the

[30]Bakhtin argues that "the novel can be defined as a diversity of social speech types (sometimes even diversity of languages) and a diversity of individual voices, artistically organised. The internal stratification of any single national language into social dialects, characterise group behaviour, professional jargons, generic languages, languages of generations and age groups, tendentious languages, languages of the authorities, of various circles and of passing fashions, languages that serve the specific socio-political purposes of the day, even of the hour (each day has its own slogan, its own vocabulary, its own emphases) – this internal stratification present in every language at any given moment of its historical existence is the indispensable prerequisite for the novel as a genre" (Bakhtin in Lee, 1992:51).

projected modernity of colonialism… This space reveals not so much that the new imperatives could achieve a jump into modernity, as the fact that despair gives this intermediate space its precarious pertinence and, simultaneously, its dangerous importance" (Mudimbe cited in Gikandi, 1991:78). Consequently, writing the child soldier is like crossing the boundaries of African traditions into the realities of the postcolonial world where these children are forced to live. The narration of these stories takes place in this marginal space which Mudimbe also describes as "the locus of paradoxes that call into question the modalities and implication of modernisation in Africa" (1988: 5). Clearly, these texts present the reader with a world subject to te opposing forces of so-called civilisation and the mythical past – both of which fail to produce meaning today. It would appear then that by making a child soldier the locus of these paradoxes, these texts "call into question the modernisation of Africa" to repeat Mudimbe's words. As characters these small soldiers are either torn between modernism and traditions or they reject both. In so doing, they strive to find a new space in which to live, until then, they wander like Birahima, the protagonist in Kourouma's *Allah n'est pas obligé*, in the forest of West Africa. The fictional truth that comes out of the representation of child soldiers in these texts is that of a society shifting to and fro, without direction or purpose.

But, the postcolonial space created in writing these texts and the ugliness it evokes could largely be attributed to the use of fantasy, magical and grotesque realism rather than the writers' mere depiction of reality.

3.4 The magical, fantastic and grotesque realism in the novels

In creative art, especially that based on traditional folklore, mythology and fables, events occur with such unpredictability that they tend to destabilise our habitual sense of logic or reason (Ikonne, 1992: 13). The novels under scrutiny embody the above elements, a mixture of which we call magical realism.

Magical realism is defined by Luis Leal in these terms:

> Magical realism is, more than anything else, an attitude toward reality that can be expressed in popular or cultured forms, in elaborate or rustic styles in closed or open structures...In magical realism the writer confronts reality and tries to untangle it, to discover what is mysterious in things, in life, in human acts. The principle thing is not the creation of imaginary beings or worlds but the discovery of the mysterious relationship between man and his circumstances. In magical realism key events have no logical or psychological explanation. The magical realist does not try to copy the surrounding reality or to wound it but to

> seize the mystery that breathes behind things. (Leal in Zamora& Faris, 1995:119-123)

Leal summarises this idea stating that in magical realism, the real and magical are linked in a formula, the content of which makes us discover what is mysterious in things, in life or in human acts.

The above quote agrees in part with Angel Flores's view of magical realism as "an amalgamation of realism and fantasy" (Flores, 1955:189). For many critics magical realism differs from pure fantasy primarily because it is set in a normal, modern world with authentic descriptions of humans and society. In his exploration of magical realism in *The Cambridge Companion to the African Novel*, Nigerian critic Abiola Irele also reminds us that "magical realism is first and foremost a literary mode in which equivalence is established between the code of the real and that of the magical" (2009: 164). According to Abiola "the real stands for the pragmatic and ordinary sense of everyday life as most people experience it" whereas "the magical is an umbrella term to denote elements drawn from mythology, fantasy, folk tales, and any other discourse that bears a representational code opposed to realism" (164). Another key point is that "in the magical realist discourse, there should ideally be no sense of surprise or alarm shown by the characters within the text on the appearance of the magical" (164). Here, Abiola allows us to understand why writers of the novels about child soldiers have their characters kill, eat human flesh without any sign of distress. If there is any sense of surprise it is found on the part of the reader who does not know that this has become normal to child soldiers.

Additionally, fantasy uses magic and other supernatural phenomena as primary elements of plot but magical realism's exaggerations meet reality without becoming pure fantasy as Zamora and Faris point out:

> Magic Realism stretches the boundaries of realism in order to stretch the definition of reality. Magic becomes ordinary, 'admitted, accepted, and integrated into the rationality and materiality of literary realism.' But, no matter how elastic that definition, Magic Realism stays grounded in the phenomenal world, unlike fantasy, which is set in the unreal. (Zamora and Faris, 1995)

Since these texts allow for both the real and the fantastic, it becomes difficult for the reader to distinguish where the imagery starts and where it stops. Lindsay Moore proposes that "[m]agical realists incorporate many techniques that have been linked to postcolonialism,

with hybridity being a primary feature" (1998). In this sense, Moore further argues that "magical realism brings together opposites such as 'urban' and 'rural', and 'western' and 'indigenous'" (1998). The connection between magical realism and postcolonialism is amply reflected in these novels about child soldiers and their treatment of postcolonial themes ranging from the child soldier issue, war, immigration, globalisation, etc.

Considering the above, we assert that magical realism as an approach reveals itself as the most appropriate in this war fiction given its capacity to house both the magical and the real. Novels such as *Johnny chien méchant* and *Allah n'est pas obligé* cannot therefore be said to be entirely fantasy as they cannot be said to ignore factual reality. As pointed out, their grounding in magical realism does satisfy their intent to represent reality while, at the same time, fantasising the very same reality is unavoidable. In this manner, magical realism reduces the gap between fiction and reality, and contests the limits that some critics use to separate the two.

Magical realism occupies an important place in a war context. In his book *Spirit of carnival: magical realism and the grotesque*, David K. Danow aptly shows how "the carnivalesque embraces both a bright, life affirming, 'magical' side as well as its dark, death-embracing, horrific aspect" (1995:5). These features of the carnivalesque are illustrated in numerous novels depicting the dire experience of the Second World War as well as in the literature of Latin American writers. The same imaginary forces are at work in the novels about child soldiers through the magical realist borderlands depicted.

Magical realism reads as a variant of grotesque realism. In the analysis of the grotesque body, the work of Bakhtin (1968) was epoch-making. Bakhtin's carnival body owes its enduring popularity to its theatricality, its indulgence of excess, intense sexual desires, and so on. The grotesque body in Bakhtin's view was emphasised as "mobile, split, multiple self, a subject of pleasure in the process of exchange" (Stallybrass & White, 1986: 22). The body he described is in this respect, seen as simultaneously hybrid, disproportionate, exorbitant, outgrowing all limits, obscenely decentred and off balance. It appears as an image of impure corporeal bulk with its orifices (mouth, flared nostrils, anus) yawning wide with its lower regions (belly, legs, feet, buttocks and genitals) given priority over its upper regions. Hoever, the body he described is a very different thing from the body of child soldier in the francophone fiction. But what they share in common is that just as Bakhtin's body is in a perpetual state of flux so is the postcolonial Africa in perpetual changes, the phenomenon of the child soldier as a

manifestation of them. While it is plain that the novels about child soldiers are grotesque in nature, it is disputed that they are carnivalesque in Bakhtin's sense of the word. In Bakhtin's time the body was defined chiefly by the comic whereas it is here by violence although the comic is not entirely excluded. The underlying basis of whatever be the meaning which the analogy used by the African writers was intended to convey, their body in context appears to make it clear that it is not be exuberant or joyous. It is instead, the body of colonial and postcolonial exploitation, a body of sufferings and pain. In this respect the type of magical realism seen in these novels could be referred to as "African magic realism" or what Pageaux refers to simply as the *grotesque africain* (Pageaux in Veit-Wild, 2005:88). Pageaux argues that "The African grotesque will serve to write and describe the inadmissible, intolerable; from the unaccepted, unacceptable reality one passes to states of delirium (verbal, first of all) and of excess" (88). This comment suggests the extent to which the grotesque realism used in these novels is not a borrowed approach. It minimizes Bakhtin's (or Rabelais whose texts Bakhtin analyses) literary innovation while acknowledging the grotesque realism as African in origin.

The online *Encyclopedia of African Literature* acknowledges that there is what we may call "African magical realism" (2009). According to this encyclopaedia, "it is probably true, as a generalisation, that African magical realism has been a mode emerging predominantly from West Africa in general, and influenced by Yoruba stories most specifically" (2009). Furthermore, the "Yoruba influence is buttressed by the powerful tradition established by D.O. Fagunwa and Amos Tutuola[31], whose use of Yoruba tales, which they moulded and modernised, has had a profound influence on magical realist writers in Africa" (2009). Also important in the discussion of magical realism is a mode of irony or double speech. On the one hand, magical realist narratives "strives towards incorporating indigenous knowledge on new terms, and their irony is employed in order to rethink tradition and to herald change" (2009) while opposing the western hegemony, on the other:

> If magical realism can be characterized as arising from particular socio-economic circumstances, and if it can be seen to be participating in the cultural politics of postcolonialism, then it also has to be understood as a set of devices. These include its language of rhetoric, riddle, and doublespeak, which enables the fictional medium to enact its message of opposition to the hegemony of Western scientific thought. Magical realist

[31] Between 1948 and 1951, Fagunwa wrote *The Forest of a Thousand Daemons* in Yoruba as one among at least nine other books along with Amos Tutuola's mutated folk tales, written in a kind of Yoruba English, which have provided the ancestry for African magical realism.

> writers contest the obliteration of indigenous ways of seeing by the blinding light of so-called progress. (Taylor and Francis, 2009, Cooper, 2001:32)

This encyclopedia also points out that "realism and magical realism are modes of narrative which can be associated with particular social and historical contexts and struggles" (Taylor and Francis, 2009). The two are regarded as a natural vehicle through which African writers describe or bear witness to the challenges of their daily lives.

That which is mythical/magical grows up unconsciously. But if our novels are constructed to describe historical circumstances, they are no longer mythical or magical. We regard magical realism as a little outside the province of historical inquiry although when the greatest facts of history seem to be emphasised, we simply admit that they produce a historical novel and not a magical novel per se.

Tragic realism is another genre that is related to realism, as indicated in its name, and is often confused with magical realism. For his part, Adama Couloubaly identifies 'tragic realism' as the most dominant defining feature of these books. "Le réalisme tragique", Couloubaly argues, "gère une contradiction terminologique qui fait la particularité de *ces œuvres*" (2003 : para 15), meaning recent war novels. The bringing together of the real and the magical by magical realism agrees with aspects of tragic realism. However, Couloubaly shows also reveals the relationship of tragedy with humour (comic) that brings it even closer magical realism. Surely one of the most exquisite features of these artists as writers of tragic novels is the yoking of war wth death.

It may be further observed that the writers' achievements in this fiction stem not only from the fact that they adapted grotesque language or used magical elements, but also because, in their depiction of reality, as we now call it, they demonstrate their knowledge of child soldiers. This is verified by the exposition of their views. For example, Kourouma's *Allah n'est pas oblige* shows how he allows a connection in all likelihood between the child soldier being an interpreter of ancestral beliefs, and the dilemma of his violence. This is probably what Gomis refers to as "l'épistémologie littéraire africaine" (2011:105).

Ojo, Sam Ade and Olusola Oke, in their little but important book, *Themes in African Literature in French: A Collection of Essays* (2000), are loud in their praises of the way in which recent writers write so strikingly in the lowest level of language as compared to the early generation of francophone writers whose language was soigné. This is so because the

classic language cannot measure up with the subject matter, the types of characters created by the grotesque and violent world the recent novel depicts.These new conditions dictate the use of the grotesque language in the recent novel. It must be remembered that the ludicrous or grotesque language of war referred to alone cannot be sufficient to make recent novels successful without the addition of folklore material (idioms, proverbs and myths) which we would like to elaborate on.

3.5 Myths, language and culture in the novels

Myths used by the writers in their stories have both coloured and defined their works. Myths can be defined as "prose narratives which in the society in which they are told are considered to be truthful accounts of what happened in the remote past" (Boscon in Finnegan,1970: 361). In this context, myths are seen simply as the embodiment of dogmas – they are cited as authority in answer to ignorance. Myths, however, Joseph Minga claims that "They are made up [by people] to explain forces and objects in the world around them" (1996:23). He distinguishes among other things, the myths that early peoples invented to answer questions about nature, they are called *explanatory myths*, those which were made up with the sole purpose of entertaining are called *aesthetic myths*, and finally those explaining the origin of man, they are called *ontological myths* (1996:23). When reading these novels one has to bear in mind that the writers not only collected ancient myths and legends from their cultures to try and explain the origins of the rebellious child but also manipulated them in an attack on this new phenomenon. As Gikandi argues, myths can be "a mode of insight into phenomena… or delude people about their real interests" (1987:150). It is also necessary to bear in mind that "myths are not eternal, but a manifestation of individual or communal needs" (Gikandi, 1987:151), and as such, should always be assessed in context. Issues such war and death are difficult to address and definitive answers about them are out of reach. Instead, writers content themselves by trying to elucidate them through myths or a mythological language.

Careful attention should therefore be given to them in reading these novels because, as already argued, their significance extends well beyond magic and highlights socio-political issues that characterise postcolonial society.

3.5.1. Dongala's use of myth and symbolism

Dongala uses both old and new myths in his book. For example, he uses the 'tribal wars myth' which is a belief shared among people that wars in Africa are caused by tribal tensions.

The fact that military factions and political parties are often divided along tribal lines has served to reinforce this myth. In traditional Africa, however, a tribe was a source of common identity and not a political entity. But when politicians started to exploit tribalism for their own interests these tribes started to become a threat to each other. The statement in *Johnny chien méchant* that: "Jamais nous n'avions vécu en termes de tribus" (Dongala, 2002:104) supports the above argument. It is this attitude toward war and this effort to misrepresent it that we call most readers to read Dongala's myth carefully. One other myth in his novel is 'cattle raiding.'[32] Through the symbol of the pig the child soldiers confiscate from somebody, he provides his novel with the ideal way of introducing the child soldier issue by liking it to cattle raiding. Some tribes, he argues, do not find it as a crime to pay a dowry with a stolen pig. Elevated to such a symbolic status, the animal becomes a signifier, not of theft (robbery), according to this traditional society, but symbol of strength, bravery or even the bridegroom 's way of showing love for his bride by willing risk his own life for her. Gikandi is probably right when he says that "the reason why symbols and myths are such appropriate tools for political and cultural domination is because they are so arbitrary and depend on a particular culture's willingness to accept them as the truth" (1987:154) in the material life. Arguably, Dongala attacks such a naive beliefs in myths leading to violence; he is against the idea of "hiding private madness by socialising it" (Fornari, 1974:63).

With this myth, however, one may be mislead to read cattle raiding as source of the practice of child soldiery or the condition for its existence. What it is at stake here is that the writer transcends the warfare theme into this myth of cattle raiding probably to underline the tropes of war and destruction. Although he unveils the motives behind war as archaic, primitive and goes back to prehistory and myth; it is clear that through the myth of cattle raiding he parodies the looting of Africa's resources both human and natural. Such a myth is clearly a portrayal of capitalist exploitation. The writer exposes the power of money, greed, and use of violence over the less powerful. Myth is a double edged sword, it forces us, on the one hand, to question our past while it makes us rethink and reinterpret our history, on the other. The similarity between cattle raiding in traditional society and the equally corrupt and violent modern society killing and looting resources is obvious. We suggest that cattle raiding and the stolen pig (which motivates it, at least in the context of the novel) are both reminiscent of

[32]A cattle raiding has traditionally been interpreted as a means of economic survival. The raiders often invaded the neighbours thus causing loss of their property although it was not uncommon also to see women and children taken as captives, a practice we do not wish to dispute here.

violence in traditional society as civil wars and the looting of mineral resources that go with are to our postmodern society. Having said that, however, we contend that Dongala's use of symbolism is tricky; it is often left to the reader to make connections or inferences.

3.5.2 Couao-Zotti's own created myth

The myth of rebels as redeemers which led child soldiers in war is dramatised in all three novels but especially in Couao-Zotti's *Charly en guerre*. In *Charly en guerre*, this myth is recreated through the symbol of a snake. The snake is a creature of chaos in ancient African mythology. The writer refers to the snake that deceived the first woman Eve to introduce the theme of lies in his novel. The writer provides a view of how children had been seduced by promises of receiving a good deal of money if they agreed to become soldiers and to kill the enemy. Through this myth, the warlords are stereotypically represented as snakes.

As we read the novel, we find Charly and John in the forest where they escape the bite of a snake. The novel shows how the boys celebrate after slaying the snake as they touch and admire it. Charly discovers that the dead animal is totally different from the plastic toy snake he used to play with. The powerful image of the ancient snake and the crushing of its head could imply that the old traditional world has been destroyed giving way to a new one. "The child's mode of perception, working upon things to metamorphose them has a political significance; it sees the world as essentially fluid and therefore alterable, capable of being transformed into something other than itself" (1984:183) Michael Hollington obsrves. This is exactly what John and Charly do – they transform the dead snake into a toy. The grotesque quality is achieved here by the mixture of reduction and exaggeration. Such an attitude toward transformation is something we can learn from children and use to change the world for the better. In Bakhtin's words, "the object that has been destroyed remains in the world but in a new form of being in time and space; it becomes the outside of the new object..." (Bakhtin, 1968:140). The snake reminds us, therefore, of the old African world order, the one of rituals of initiation and lies. This ancient world is often perceived as evil and a threat to human rights. Yet this world which is slowly disappearing has given way to the so-called modern civilised society in which children, surprisingly, are no longer afraid of weapons of destruction but play with them as if they were toys.

3.5.3. Kourouma's use of language, myths and history in context

Any novel is subject to criticism of some sort. Camara Laye's *L'Enfant noir* (1953), for instance, was accused of being too romantic and idealistic. As already mentioned, fault was found with Kourouma's *Allah n'est pas obligé* because of its excessive journalistic realism. While we consider the novel a form of magical text where reality and the magical (mythical) intermingle, it's necessary to point out here that Kourouma's narrative devices are often ironic. On a quest for truth, the child soldiers this novel search for the meaning of the violence they are engaged in and exposed to and find it hidden in myths and mysteries. Another dimension that should be highlighted here is that of the use of language which has been discussed by a number of critics (Gassama, M., 1995, Huannou, A., 1975, Caitucoli, C., 2004, Koné, A., 2007, etc.). Since each of these points provides the reader with different responses to Kourouma's writing, let us look at them in some detail.

Amadou Koné's article "Discourse in Kourouma's novels: writing two languages to translate two realities" (2007), identifies more general features of Kourouma's manipulation of French language in his novels. Koné puts forth a good case for presenting these features although he does not include Kourouma's *Allah n'est pas oblige* in his discussion nor does he treat these features in connection with the subject of war. Soo, too, Yetunde Osunfisan's provocative article, "I write the way I like: Ahamadou Kouruma's language of Revolt" (2000) refers to Kourouma's use of language ,but suffers from the same short comings. The above critics lay greatest stress, and would have us lay the stress, upon Kourouma's distortion of French.

Kourouma himself admits his lack of respect for French language.

> Je n'avais pas le respect du français qu'ont ceux qui ont une formation classique. […] Ce qui m'a conduit à rechercher la structure du langage malinké, à reproduire sa dimension orale, à tenter d'épouser la démarche de la pensée malinké dans sa manière d'appréhender le vécu. (Kourouma in Koné, 2007:115)

It is argued by Koné that the problem that the writer faces is that of "translating his reality into a language that did not shape that reality and was not shaped by it" (2007:115). Kourouma further explains this:

> Les langues européennes générées par un substrat chrétien et latin forgées et polies par des littératures écrites ne peuvent pas exprimer tous les sentiments et aspects des richesses culturelles de peuples dont la

> littérature est orale et la religion de base animiste. La réciproque reste également vraie. (Kourouma in Koné, 2007:115)

We may confirm this in relation to Yetunde Osunfisan's above-mentioned article. She remarks that "language, according to the experts, is a product of the society and it is capable of expressing that thing or notion which exists in the society that fashioned it" (2000:221). She further asks, "how would an African writer explain in a white man's language that phenomenon which is fundamentally African, non-existent within the white man's culture? "(221). So, too, similar statements appear in Koné who argues that "European languages, shaped by another culture, cannot write African cultural treasures" (2007:116). All the above critics seem to suggest that language and culture are inextricably tied together. However, Osunfisan, Koné and Kourouma are not alone in accepting that language is a part of culture. Ngugi wa Thiong'o corroborates the same view in his *Decolonizing the mind: the politics of language in African literature* (1986) arguing that "the choice of language and the use to which language is put is central to a people's definition of themselves in relation to their natural and social environment, indeed in relation to the entire universe" (4). Clearly, culture is inseparable from language, as explored in the questions Koné's asks about Kourouma's works: if any reality can be written in a given language, is that reality expressed as those who inhabit that space would? Can it be understood by a foreigner as well as by the people who inhabit the given space? In the light of the above questions, it is hard to see how we can deny the difficulty there is for one to express well his feelings in a language other than his mother tongue. Writers such as Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Chinua Achebe, Yambo Ouologuem, Sony Labou Tansi, Thierno Monénembo, Emanuel Dongala and Ahamadou Kourouma, are what we would consider 'postcolonial writers' who played a leading role in decolonising our minds. Through their books, we assume, they argue against the assumption that literature is universal and rather see the value of literature in its detailed and concrete depiction of a community in a particular place and a particular historical moment seeking to understand and create itself. If as Koné suggests that "the need to write a French language informed by the Malinké language to describe a situation from the standpoint of a traditional Malinké character leads Kourouma to produce what [he] call[s] the linguistic gap" (2007:116), it could be argued that, it is precisely that gap which, in the context of this chapter, is understood as creating problems in reading Kourouma. Unlike Ngugi who tackles the troublesome problem of a single language for effective communication, especially in literature, Kourouma accepts the linguistic ambiguity of using both languages (the rhetoric of the African and that of French language) despite being aware of the fact that there are discontinuities between the two languages as

shown in the above quotes. He accepts this ambiguity not because he gives equal importance to both languages; but as Osunfisan notes, “he succeed[s] in super-imposing the Malinké culture on the French-even though he writes in French - somehow wrestling the weaker one to the ground” (239). We concur with Koné that “cultural experience can be translated satisfactorily only by the language to which it is tied” (2007:120). In *Allah n’est pas obligé,* for example, when the UN interpreter dies Birahima uses one of the four dictionaries he inherited in order to explain the meaning of certain words together with his own commentary on words in the vernacular he assumed his reader will not understand. That Birahima speaks broken French in the novel also emphasises not only his otherness, but verbal struggle is a symbol of resistance or war itself. Jean Marc Moura (in Ndiaye, 2007) presents similar view. As contentious as the debate sometimes gets over whether or not Kourouma is a protest writer, it can be safely said that postcolonialist writers avail themselves of devices of irony and parody, and are oppositional to imperialism as much as they are against the evil in their own cultures. To this end, Moura, in Ndiaye’s (2007) words, contends that “it is not on his artistic creativity as such that Kourouma achieved his reputation, but rather on the subversive character of his writing” (101). “Kourouma” (allusion being made to his first novel, *Les soleils des indépendances*, “reverses the balance of power in his writing by resolutely seizing control of the language which for so long served as one of the modes of this foreign domination” (101). “The French language is subjected to subversion by the Malinké culture and language" and so, "[t]he feigned orality fulfils a controlling function; it inserts [. . .] oral traditions into written prose fictions derived from Europe" (101). Kourouma is not an innocent writer that Laye Camara was; his writing is pregnant with revolt, it is aggressive and provocative. We may even assume that he grew as writer to resist exploitation. His revolt justifies in part his deformed characters. We can push this even further and look at the ‘transgressive figure’ of the child protagonist in *Allah n’est pas obligé* as the author’s double. Like the child, Birahima, Kourouma transgresses social norms or challenge specific norms that seem wrong to him.

Aside from the implicitness of the above political features, let us add that Kourouma mines a rich vein of history and myth to create his story. Myth gives Kourouma license to use non-standard language and to infuse it with history. Kouroma is again reported as telling Aliette Armel that, “To be African is to accept myths. To be an African writer is to accept presenting them in the African manner of formulating matters” (in Koné, 2007: 116). If the major theme of the text is history, there is a sense in which one can say that the writer traces the history of

child soldiery. Although fiction is not a real or factual account, it is nevertheless a window onto the broader questions of history and current world events. However, it should be borne in mind that for Kourouma history is truly represented as myth-making process. For example, one of the myths he uses in his *Allah n'est pas obligé* is the myth of 'cannibalism.' Such use of language presupposes, he thinks, child soldiery has become some sort of new primitivism. We can hardly argue against this uniqueness way of connecting child soldiery to precolonial myth.

When we look back at histrorical development, it is impossible not to be struck by the similarity between the the ancient records of children's violence and child soldiers. Historical records reveal that the first incidence of the use of children as warriors occurred with the slave trade. In East Africa in I871, Nyungu became the leader of a warrior band. "Tradition states that he had built up a force of *Ruga-ruga* at Itetemia. *Ruga-ruga,* or *valuga-luga* in Nyamwezi, means young, un-married, professional soldiers, and the term is possibly derived etymologically from *muluga*, the male sex organ, suggested by the plaited hanks of hair they wore" (Shorter, 1968: 240-241). The *Ruga-Ruga* were mercenaries in the service of the Nyamwezi and the Zanzibari. Some believe that their tactics were borrowed from immigrants who had run away from war in South Africa. With specifying their age, Aylward Shorter describes "these boys as 'wild young men'… a heterogeneous collection of war captives, deserters from caravans, runaway slaves and others" (1968: 241). Shorter adds that "they were without roots and family ties, and they owed no allegiance other than to their chief or leader" (1968:241). "White Fathers who were attacked by Nyungu's *Ruga-ruga* in 1878 described them as dressed in feathers, with bands of beads on their foreheads and pieces of brilliantly coloured cloth on their heads" (Shorter, 1968:241).[33] The same source shows that "magic played a greater part in their equipment" and this is the reason why "they incorporated human remains into their war costume, and why they wore the red *ngazia* cloth on their heads and round their loins" for protection during the battle and that their chief "possessed a potent war medicine compounded of parts of the bodies of slain victims which the *Ruga-ruga* had to

[33] It is also reported that Nyungu accompanied his *Ruga-ruga* to war, but in his later years, unlike Mirambo, he stayed at home and directed operations from his headquarters in Kiwele. He commanded a number of companies, each led by a *mutwale* or lieutenant, with a striking war name, e.g. Nzwala Mino ga Vanhu (Wearer of Human Teeth), Pundu ya Mbogo (Bull Buffalo), Nsikine (the Grinder), Kafupa Mugazi (Spitter of Blood), Kania Vanhu (Defecator of Men), Itovela Mbesi (Vulture), Kadele ka Nsimba (Lion Skin), Ituzya (the Pacifier) and so on (Shorter, 1968:141).

imbibe". Moreover, to "render them even more wild and excitable, they were encouraged to smoke Indian hemp" (1968:241). Although the *Ruga-ruga* had joined Mirambo and other local chiefs in their war with the Arabs, the Arabs had their own *Ruga-ruga* to guard their caravans. A close examination of this band reveals that they were forced by circumstances to become warriors as a means of survival in a world dominated by Arab slave traders and that they have a lot in common with today's child soldiers, as described in these novels. It doesn't seem unreasonable to conclude that in the same way that the slave trade encouraged evil through the exploitation of slaves, warlords' exploitation of child soldiers is having similar effect today. In *Daily lives of civilians in wartime Africa: from slavery days to Rwandan genocide*, John Laband also equates slavery with child soldiery arguing convincingly that "in child soldiering, as in slavery, the perpetrators are also victims" (2007:8). For Laband, "child soldiering is nothing less than a new form of slavery in which abducted children are turned (as in slave societies in the past) into predators on their own civilian communities" (8). Captured by the warlords as slaves, child soldiers listen and obey but have no freedom to think or decide.

Although European travellers' descriptions in the 1800s might be doubtful since they were recorded a long time ago, and may therefore not be very accurate. However, the reader of Kourouma's *Allah n'est pas obligé* will not be surprised to see child soldiers given almost exactly the same description as given them by the historians. Whether such depictions of children as cannibalists is done for dramatic purposes or whether the writer reports historical events is open to debate.

Kourouma's novel offers a sense of the presence of the past, a past that can be known from traces left by colonial slave trade, colonialism, and other ancient myths. Constructed as a complex architecture of images, Kourouma's narrative shifts back and forth between oral and written traditions, and in so doing, it recaptures history in vivid pictorial manner.

Those who are familiar with Kourouma's early works will easily discover that the writer acknowledges the destructive role played by the slave trade and colonialism in establishing the legacy of military conflicts which have refused to be quelled and have now drawn in children. In his "History, political discourse, and narrative strategies in the African novel: *Allah n'est pas obligé*" (2004), Pascal B. Kyiiripuo Kyoor, for one, is of the opinion that Kourouma makes use of historical causality the same way a historian does. But here again there is a problem. While we cannot deny that *Allah n'est pas obligé* is fiction based on

history, we must not forget that Kourouma's selection of topics and deliberate presentation transcends history and serves dramatic purposes although suitable for historical fiction. Nor must forget that Kourouma recounts the historical events of West Africa's war of the 1990s and this is done by a fictive 10 year-old boy in whose recounting (narrating act) some events are simply exaggerated or carried to an extreme in a way that they did not really happen if they were verified. In this manner, the writer does not simply record the past as an historian, but he re-writes, reinterprets and even questions this past. Kourouma's vision of history relates to his creative practice as a literary artist. Although many see his vision as focused exclusively on lived reality, we contend that his vision and artistic technique derive from his belief that myths created by men have destroyed the world. This is why most of his characters are pseudo-religious. He depicts their belief systems as ugly and them as monsters who assault his readers's sensibilities and are therefore not worthy of dignity or respectability.

Just because the story abounds with myths about monstrous child soldiers whose actions are even more extreme than those of the *Ruga-ruga* does not mean that Kourouma is extremely critical of Africa. As already stated in the description of the function of the magical realist mode, the writer incorporates these myths (or indigenous knowledge) to elicit a rethinking of tradition and to herald change while simultaneously exposing the socio-economic and political circumstances of a continent gripped by civil wars created by modern man. It is important to view this novel firstly as an imaginative recreation of a society that was destroyed by political decay and social injustice and secondly as a depiction of a society with a history of violence. However, "in the same way that a psychoanalyst feels he cannot understand a form of adult behaviour unless he traces it to its infantile source" (Fornari, 1974: xvi), so Kourouma looks at African customs in order to investigate the child soldier issue. This may be because he believes these customs might have paved the way for the recent use of child soldiers despite their immediate causes stemming from the postcolonial culture of violence. It is in this manner that the past, present and future are intertwined in his novel.

In reading Kourouma, Ndiaye (2007) notes that "contradictions arise when one takes no account of the ironic tone of the novel and considers that it produces a simple portrayal of tradition" while of course, "the novel may be showing its backwardness or be illustrating the extent to which war produces 'unimaginable' transformations in social behaviour..." (104). We believe a reader should not lose sight of this in Kourouma's novels.

Allah n'est pas obligé reveals much about the child character. It is also a testimony to Kourouma's postcolonial craftmanship which is evident not only in his indigenisation of the French language, but also his skill at creating a complex fabric of magical, mythical and dreamlike elements from his native culture woven through with a narration of history and war as well as the grotesque exaggeration of some issues. Also crucial to his use of these fictional modes is letting each of these elements (whether myth, history or lament) rub against each other to reflect reality. More than that, he challenges our established conventions by inverting the role of masculinity as he offers characters such as African girl soldiers, women dating child soldiers, etc. In this regard, history, reality and unreality work as one.

3.6. Conclusion

In face of all this confusion, and of the number of attacks on this fiction and the position which critics have taken, it is easy to understand that the question of the realism in the three novels about child soldiers and the criticism of them assumes a growing importance. This chapter attempts to point this out.

SECTION B: Textual study of three novels about child soldiers

We argue that these writers use their grotesque imagery to offer a new representation of children's marginalisation as a result of war. This fresh approach is not necessarily understood. These analyses aim to reorient the issue of the child soldier by stressing the process of transformation the children undergo to become soldiers. The study thus takes into account not only the tragic, ugly or grotesque deviance and inversion through which child soldiers are portrayed but also the meaningful patterns that lie hidden in these features and make the issue of child soldiery understandable. George Eliot once stated that the novelist's prerogative as an artist is "the just representation of life in all its details", reasoning that, "art is the nearest thing to life" (Eliot in Ezeigbo, 1991: 5). Eliot's view is partly sustained by the novels in their representation of the reality of African people's suffering during civil war. From her own study on Nigerian war literature Ezeigbo argues:

> […] the degree of human suffering and the extent of the incidence of violence both during the crisis and the war itself are the major sources of the horror of war which form the most prominent theme in the literature of the civil war. Most of the artists, particularly the novelists, have recreated the various ways in which human beings were brutalised and dehumanised during the war. How well they have done it depends on the artistic competence of the individual writers. (Ezeigbo, 1991:94-95)

What Ezeigbo says about the Nigerian civil war also applies here. The child soldier who is the subject of this analysis is a complex character who is paradoxically both innocent and violent. To explore this contradiction the analysis will examine the child soldier's relations with other characters especially those who are different. Below the characters' surface representations lie deeper questions of what drives children to violence, of children's place in postcolonial society and complex postcolonial youth identities which are complicated when children are trapped in wars.

Chapter 4: *Charly en guerre* by Florent Couao-Zotti

4.1. Plot summary

Charly en guerre is a youth novel by Florent Couao-Zotti from Benin who also writes comics, plays and short stories. It was first published by Éditions Haho-ACCT-BRAO as a children's book entitled *Un enfant dans la guerre* in 1996. It was reprinted in a revised form in 1998 and 2001 by Éditions Dapper and won the Prix du Concours de l'Agence de la Francophonie de littérature africaine pour enfants. According to Marine Dormion (2002), the changes made to the original version of the book subtilly alter the child's role with regard to violence.

Although author of other novels, Couao-Zotti is best known for *Charly en guerre* though it has not yet been translated. The book is set in an unnamed country where a civil war is claiming children as its victims. Although one might expect it to be set in the author's home of Benin, a few reference points (e.g. names of military factions) lead us to argue that it is set in the Liberian and Sierra-Leonean civil wars in which children were used as combatants.

At the heart of the plot is children's' survival in conflict-torn country. Nine-year-old Charly is caught up in war: "la souffrance, il l'a connue de bonne heure, sitôt sorti des langes du berceau" (1996:10). In this country two fictional ethnic groups are at war with each other – the Batéké and the Bandungun. Charly is ethnically Batéké and his father, a police force sergeant who was killed by the Bandungun accused of collaborating with the rebels. When their small town is taken by the rebels, Charly and his mother flee to a refugee camp overseen by the Red Cross. Ultimately the Bandungun rebels invade the refugee camp, looting and also capturing Batéké women as sex slaves – one of whom is Charly's mother. The boy remains in the camp for three years with a small malnourished dog for company. It is also here that the boy gets to know reggae musician Djamba Ray who dresses in a true Rasta fashion. Though a "bit maboul" (mad), we are told, he is not bad to little Charly. Charly, however, grows tired of being there and as a result, he decides to leave before he starves to death, eventually reaching a town burnt beyond recognition except for a temple building with a tattered roof and loose door, which he thinks may provide shelter. Despite its cold, silence and weird eeriness reminiscent of a gothic chamber of horror, Charly finds it to be a perfect place to rest. The boy falls into a deep sleep and is only awakened by a group of people, one of whom looks huge. His name is Rambo. On seeing the boy, he says:

> Toi tu es aussi squelettique qu'un chiot famélique,…. Mais tu m'as l'air courageux. Avec une belle frimousse. Aujourd'hui c'est mon anniversaire. Je ne veux pas tuer des gosses. (Couao-Zotti, 2001:46)

The child survivor is spared and given a chance to become a child combatant in a rebel faction called *Les Combattants de la Liberté* whose commander in chief is Rambo. John, another child, is also introduced to us by the narrator. The two boys have a good deal in common in terms of their family backgrounds. John's town was destroyed when the government police force killed people for demanding better living conditions in their province, which is one of the poorest and the least urbanised in the country despite its natural resources. According to the custom, they burn the houses leaving the town in ruins. John escapes because he was away chasing rats in the mountains with his friends. While the rebel leaders promise to help and protect young orphans, they are instead used as combatants. John has already moved from Colonel Kroh's unit to Rambo's because of the colonel's cruelty. It is John who is charged by Rambo with training Charly and taking him to headquarters a few hundred kilometres away through the forest. John attempts to give Charly his first lessons, showing him how to operate a gun and smoke marijuana but the boy rejects these lessons. Nevertheless, they seemed destined to be companions and soon Charly finds John to be more than mentor but a trusted friend and even a brother. It is during the course of this journey that the two boys will have time to speak openly to each other about their losses and suffering and finally decide to quit the rebel movement and the country. Even though John was at first a little reluctant, he eventually agrees and together they set off to Port Harry where Charly will be reunited with his mother.

As a novel, *Charly en guerre* devotes considerable space to the hardships of children caught up in war. The writer explains every aspect of their sufferings: the long trip through the forest where they come across a ruthless group of rebels, the threat to their lives by wild beasts such as crocodiles and snakes, the wars John took part in at an early age, the hunger Charly endured in a refugee camp for close to three years, the high infant mortality rate in the camp as a result of malnutrition and malaria, the kidnapping of women including Charly's mother which results in him being separated from her for three years, and so on. All these events have psychological effects on these child protagonists.

Most importantly, however, the Benin writer explores children's sufferings through their painful memories of the past. He gives them a time of sharing their grief as they sit around the

fire in the forest. The book unfolds as a nostalgic homage to the peaceful life they once lead, a recollection of the comforts of a home shared with parents before the war. Furthermore, this technique allows the reader to enter into the mind of a child caught up in war. The wealth of these memories is shown through flashbacks to the children's past and reveals how their families were destroyed by war. In this manner, the writer encourages his readers to see these children as helpless victims of war. In doing so, he also prepares the ground for a condemnation of the rebels and warlords. Not only does the writer portray these children as victims, but he exposes the evils of those he believes instigated the war, notably, the Westerners whom he calls the Babylonians.

Charly en guerre is a story of pain, solidarity and hope in a world gone mad. Although the emphasis in this work is on the child's pain, the writer still conveys a message of hope: "Un homme est une volonté qui marche." Charly heard this from his late father and he never forgets it. It gives him the necessary strength to survive the sweeping chaos. The author's message is that a person who never gives up hope and always tries will never be defeated.

The happy epilogue of this story, in which Charly is reunited with his mother at Port-Harry occurs three years after their separation. Aside from her capture by child soldiers of the *révolutionaires du front unique*[34], very little is said about her. The mother's silence leaves the reader to assume that she endured many humiliating experiences at the hands of the rebel child soldiers, which most female African rape victims never speak about. The novel ends with their migration to an unknown destination.

Charly en guerre is an accurate and thoughtful reflection of children's traumatic experiences during civil wars in Africa. It does not dwell on the brutality and killing of war, although a number of moving extracts about Charly and John's feelings regarding the war and its disastrous effect are included. In fact, these children's positive attitude towards life is to be celebrated, unlike child soldiers in other novels who express their love of guns and violence, the children in this novel refuse to compromise.

[34] The writer refers here to the Sierra-Leonean warring party known as *The Revolutionary United Front* led by the rebel, Fonday Sankoh.

Given the children's success in escaping danger without making concessions to survival, the novel is also a story of youthful adaptability in the new and hostile environment of warfare. If agency is the result or a path to success in literature, these two boys come out on top at the end of the story. The predominant bittersweet tone in this book is created through a combination of unbearable war scenes and a beautiful style. Although the suffering of children has inspired a countless number of writers, Couao-Zotti's description of these miseries is one of the most eloquent.

4.2. Text analysis

Our premise in this chapter is that to confront the question of child soldiers in this novel is to confront the question of whether the child is a victim or perpetrator. It is above all a question of looking at ways in which the writer represents the effects of war on children. The child protagonists in *Charly en guerre* are shown to be vulnerable. Aside from a few incidents when they defend themselves against violence, the characters are presented almost exclusively as victims. The reader is conditioned by the writer not to read anything more (other) than their miserable lives.

Because children caught in war are often called child soldiers irrespective of whether they are or not, we suggest that *Charly en guerre* be read in the light of the two opposing concepts of victim and perpetrator. There is, as stated earlier, ambiguity in the concept of the child soldier. While a child is associated with innocence and peacefulness, the concept of soldier suggests use of a gun and killing in war. In this novel, however, the writer undermines his child protagonists' role of perpetrator by presenting them as victims. Consequently, he downplays the link between the grotesque and the child soldier, which is thrown into focus in much recent debate. If the writer denies the grotesque quality of a child visibly involved in war, this suggest that his perception of war differs from that of other critics on the issue of child soldiers. From a common sense point of view, a child at arms is a soldier and therefore grotesque, whereas the writer depicts simply as children in danger. In his view the child is hardly worth being condemned, he is in war (en guerre) and not at war.

4.2.1. Child abandonment

The first feature to be examined in this novel is child abandonment. One of the questions raised by the text is why a nine-year-old is asked to use a gun? The analysis of the text uses this as a departure point.

When the novel opens, the narrator asks whether the child will continue to resist or whether he will finally give in:

> L'enfant tenterait-il de résister une énième fois? Aurait-il la force de refuser la millième épreuve à laquelle son compagnon – le jeune rebelle – voulait le soumettre?
>
> Ce n'est qu'un enfant, pensa-t-il. Un simple enfant, vulnérable comme tous les gosses de son âge, peureux comme du lait frais… il fléchira, j'en suis sûr. (Couao-Zotti, 2001:7)

The child, as we shall see, refuses to do things such as operating the gun and smoking, which he is shown by his mentor, the young rebel, John. This suggests that these children would not be exposed to such a life if they were protected. The children who are the protagonists in this story are abandoned children. They are abandoned by a society, which is at war. Rambo, the rebel leader asks his corporal John to take charge of Charly and escort him through the forest to the headquarters, while Rambo and the other soldiers drive in another direction. Leaving the children behind in the forest means assigning to them responsibilities they cannot handle as children. This is clearly an act of abandonment, which is not without consequences. John wants Charly to join the rebellion. Once recruited, children undergo varying degrees of indoctrination in order to be integrated into the ranks. John's first tips or lessons to Charly consist of teaching the boy to use drugs and shoot. This type of initiation is common practice in warfare where the warlords, as P.W. Singer puts it, "reinforce the natural fearlessness by giving the children drugs and alcohol. The most common are cocaine, barbiturates, and amphetamines. Initially, the child soldiers tend to be forced to take these drugs" (Singer, 2006:81). We want to emphasise that without protection to prevent child abandonment, similar evil is expected to happen.

These children are denied their childhood and instead are given a violent and gruesome role to play in brutal conflicts. As Aimé Gomis contends, "Le voici qui déserte les sentiers ombragés

de l'école, se séparant de son 'Mamadou et Bineta', pour arpenter, arme aux poings, le chemin ténébreux des champs de bataille et dont il apprendra tout" (2011:105). Gomis underscores the harsh school of war, which teaches children to kill. His words echo Riegel's definition of war:

> La guerre est une terrible école où l'on apprend à tuer, à tuer sans volonté de mal-faire ou de se faire mal, comme le boucher tue ses bêtes à l'abattoir. On y apprend l'insensibilité envers les autres et envers soi-même. Cet apprentissage ne doit comporter aucune coloration de sadisme ou de masochisme. Il s'agit de tuer froidement, méthodiquement, 'avec efficience. (Riegel in Gomis, 2011:105)

With its focus on children's sufferings, *Charly en guerre* illustrates how at a tender age a child is trained to become a soldier. As the instructor, John finds Charly to be "un mauvais élève" (Couao-Zotti, 2001:48), yet for the boy, he didn't understand why he has to use the gun or drugs, after all the war wasn't his, "Il [l'enfant] ne savait pas pourquoi il devait se servir d'une arme. Non. Cette guerre n'était pas la sienne comprend pas cette guerre qui n'est pas la sienne"(2002:48). As punishment for his apparent stupidity, Charly becomes a victim of John's brutality. Here, distortion serves as a means by which the writer presents the grotesque behaviour of the child soldier. An appropriate grotesque technique used through this distortion is *anamorphosis*. Catharine Randall observes that Anamorphosis is a technique "in which that which one thinks one sees quickly alters, often into its opposite, something unpredictable, a mirror image critique of the first apprehension" (1999:65). Although the result makes it difficult to discern the intended message of the writer, anamorphosis is useful to writers of novels about child soldiers who reveal the undistorted presence in a distorted appearance. It's also a technique that produces plural meanings. For example, one may think of John in this novel as a grotesque figure who makes poor decisions that reflect his inner corruption. John's treatment of Charly might also be considered abusive and his behaviour construed as drug induced. But is John really the bully he appears to be? It can be argued that John's approach is actually caring and not intended as cruel. John wants to open the boy's eyes to the reality of the world they now live in. If Charly does not quickly learn to defend himself, he will not survive. John is more concerned about their survival as a team and brothers and therefore places Charly in a situation, which is probably similar to what all child soldiers go through. Even so, John understands that it is not easy for a nine-year-old – he, too, learned from hard experience. The writer considers John's understanding of the world and its cruelty so important that a didactic tone is employed to draw the reader's attention:

> Je sais que c'est difficile pour toi. Mais il faut s'habituer très vite aux coups. Nous sommes en guerre… Si tu veux continuer à vivre, cesse dès aujourd'hui de geindre. (Couao-Zotti, 2001:11)

He goes on to say:

> "Tu n'as plus ton père ou ta mère autour de toi pour te protéger. Tu n'as que toi même" (12).

Both of these comments show that he does indeed care for the child and believes the challenges this training presents for a child of that age worth the opportunity they offer for an independent life. For this reason the writer does not develop John into a true grotesque figure despite his victimisation of Charly. In other words, John is not made to appear worthless as the other rebels in this novel are. The picture in "Un enfant dans la guerre" (p.12) fits the sad tone and mood of this book. Charly, followed by John, travel a road symbolic of the child soldier's life, which many African children are unwillingly drawn into. Charly is not happy but instead of focusing on John's brutality toward him, the image highlights the way in which a country engages its children.

As already stated, the journey of most African children toward child soldiery starts with this abandonment. To an extent Rambo is responsible for John and Charly's sufferings because he is presented in a context, which reflects the author's preconceived ideas about how warlords exploit children. Rambo's neglect of the children can be understood, if not entirely excused, by the terrible experiences of war affecting everyone including himself (assuming he is not directly responsible for the war). As John explains to Charly:

> Les gens ne sont plus capables de s'apitoyer sur le malheur de leurs frères, ni même sur celui des enfants. Ils sont trop préoccupés par leur propre survie. (Couao-Zotti, 2001:11)

Accordingly, not even Rambo can be held fully accountable for abandoning the children. Like any combatant, he too is trying to survive. He gives the children a gun to kill if they are not killed first, knowing that "might is right". Later John explains this as the *Law of the jungle*: "Depuis le début de la guerre on vit comme dans la jungle. Si tu ne te défends pas, ton frère par contre ne te ratera pas" (Couao-Zotti, 2001:52). Readers may view Rambo in terms of power relations – as an adult and a commander who fails to take care of his soldiers but under the law of the jungle that prevails in these African of civil wars, he sees these children as equal to him. He empowers them by giving them those guns to defend themselves. The moral condemnation of war or the use of guns by children must therefore be reassessed in the light

of the local norms and culture of violence. In a secure, stable environment a gun is not an indispensable weapon for safety. By contrast, in times of war a gun is a tool for survival even if it comes at the cost of another's life. This should not be seen as condoning the use of guns, but simply contextualise how the notion of survival has led child soldiers to use guns unquestioningly, as John does.

The theme of abandonment is also intertwined with other symbols found in Charly's ragged life in the refugee camp whose inhabitants look like a pile of steaming garbage discarded by the world and left to burn under the sun. In short, it is the war unleashed by a certain group of people, which has taken the lives of many parents and left children prey to violence. This supports the argument that Couao-Zotti suggests a different way of looking at the child soldiers not only as perpetrators but also as victims. The above arguments raise the question of agency (agents of war), which will be addressed now through the rebels.

4.2.2. Rebels

This section examines the rebels in the narrative. As the novel unfolds, the writer introduces us to another type of character who clearly differ from the two abandoned child protagonists and victims of this war. The new characters are referred to as rebels, a concept which if taken by its strict definition seems the antithesis of what rebels are.

An electronic field-marked version of Webster's Revised Unabridged Dictionary Version published in 1913 by the Merriam Co. defines "rebellion" as:

> The act of rebelling; open and avowed renunciation of the authority of the government to which one owes obedience, and resistance to its officers and laws, either by levying war, or by aiding others to do so; an organized uprising of subjects for the purpose of coercing or overthrowing their lawful ruler or government by force; revolt; insurrection.

Or simply, "Open resistance to, or defiance of, lawful authority" (1913 [1998]). As such, rebels are expected to be a group who attempt a violent and organised overthrow of the established authority. Although the writer knows what a rebel is, he tends to use the term for any perpetrator assuming that in Africa, all lawbreaker style themselves as rebels whether their actions are ideologically motivated or not. This, however, makes it difficult to distinguish between rebels and mere criminals.

We describe three distinct types of perpetrators. The first are referred to simply as thieves because their inhuman pursuit of material objects to satisfy their physical needs has turned them into criminals. The second is a ruthless group (lynchers of souls) for whom killing has become a normal and daily duty. Warlords (supreme military leaders) who exercise civil power by force form the third category. They are the ones who abduct child soldiers and use them to seize power and wealth. If successful, they often become internationally recognised personalities with a reputation, good or bad. In *Charly en guerre* (1996), the child soldiers of the *révolutionaires du front unique* represent the first type, the forest killers who attack John and Charly belong in the second category and Alpha Kroh and Commandant Rambo illustrate the third.

Chapter 4 of this novel, to start with, introduces us to a group of 52 men who invade the refugee camp:

> Les refugiés avaient eu le temps de les compter: cinquante deux! Ils étaient une bonne cinquantaine, presque tous aussi mal fichus, les mêmes visages fermés, les mêmes yeux rouge, comme crachant des flammes. Certains portaient des treillis tachetés, d'autres des tenues bariolées. (Couao-Zotti, 2001:33).

This description or, more accurately distortion, presents two categories of people: on the one hand, we have the refugees or victims of war and, on the other, 52 men with grotesque features. The above quote describes them as sharing the same strange features: they all have distorted and inscrutable faces with red eyes that seem to spit fire. Their appearance carries with it a clear threat and recalls the devouring monster with a child in his mouth with its eyes on fire on the novel's cover. The account takes on a decidedly dramatic quality when the rebels invade the camp. A strategically planned attack sees a first wave of rebels immobilise the Red Cross staff to prevent them from protecting the people or retaliating, the second group takes the food stocks, while the third gathers captives including twelve women whose features identify them as Batéké, a rival tribe to the Bandungun rebels. Although depicted as destructive, their actions seem to be focused on physical needs such as food and women.

It is possible that there is a certain element of absurdity here. Although the methods for studying grotesque material (description, alienation, distortion, animation, etc.) help us to pinpoint the grotesque in a novel, it's difficult to characterise Charly's mother's kidnappers as monstrous or major grotesque figures. Their actions do not qualify them as completely

deplorable. Gysin reminds us that, "The intensity of the grotesque depends on the function a figure has within a specific story or sketch, because this function determines the length and the frequency of the description of the grotesque traits" (1975:129). Accordingly, a grotesque character only appears once is likely to only be a minor as opposed to a major grotesque figure driven by a passion for killing. While the frequency is low, the ferocity and strategy employed during the camp's invasion might suggest that they are tactical fighters. It should be noted that, regardless of the earlier comment that they were child soldiers of the *révolutionaires du front unique*, these men were not true rebels at all. A careful reading of the novel shows by their focus on women and food that these youngsters are looters and bandits, profiting from the chaos.

This is confirmed by the example of the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces (SLA) soldiers. The local civilians referred to these soldiers as "sobels" or "soldiers by day, rebels by night" because of their close ties to the RUF. By mid-1993, the two opposing sides became virtually indistinguishable. Despite the fact that this group cannot be clearly referred to as rebels, its members still led violent lives. While this group could well consist of street gangs or bandits whose main aim is stealing in order to survive, this does not mitigate the fact that theft involves violence and that the rebel ranks, child soldiers, militias or governmental armies are a refuge for orphans, the unemployed and many criminal elements.

The fact that the writer highlights these attackers' physical needs rather than depicting them as agents of death leads us in terms of the grotesque to classify the group as thieves. Regardless of whether the attackers are viewed as rebels or child soldiers, the nature of their actions indicate that they are an aggressive group, made thus by difficult living conditions. Poverty breeds criminals, rebels and child soldiers.

It is also important to note from the grotesque and the frequency with which the attackers are mentioned in the text that they cannot be rebels. With only one appearance, this group is not treated as major grotesque figures. Although African rebels do not adhere to the standards of conduct expected of a resistance movement, real African rebels would've done more than just taking food and kidnapping a few women. They would surely have abducted children thus forcing them to join their ranks and would have killed people.

As an interpreter of African children's experiences of war, Couao-Zotti's *Charly en guerre* is a depository of knowledge on different types of perpetrators. The writer's ideological premise

is that violence in Africa is buried deep in our poverty. Like Dongala, he represents war as cattle raiding; which implies that there is a relationship between recent wars and Africa's mythical past.

The above discussion shows how Couao-Zotti presents different ways of looking at the rebel figure in this text. Part of the identification of rebels is discovering which aspects of their experience provoke revolutionary acts or the resistance of authority for the purpose of change. What dominates the writer's novel is the children's suffering at the hands of different groups. It is as if the child in this novel can only define himself in while at the hands of a violent man who makes him a miserable. Throughout the novel Charly is the victim of a world that seems beyond his reach.

One step further brings us to the 'ruthless rebels'. "Petit Charly sursauta" says John, describing one of their deadlier moments,

> Ses yeux, encore lourds, s'ouvrirent. Il regarda autour de lui. Surprise: deux individus, deux hommes casquettés étaient penchés sur lui et le regardaient. L'un borgne avec des lunettes noires et l'autre édenté, face lépreuse d'ananas. Ils puaient l'alchool et le chanvre indien. C'étaient encore une fois des rebelles. Ils étaient une dizaine, mal habillés et mal chausses, le visage craseux des gens ayant marché pendant dix jours sous la canicule."(Couao-Zotti, 2001:61)

Like the first group of kidnappers, this group which Charly and John meet in the forest, is characterised by physically grotesque features and particularly by their laughter. In describing this group, the writer juxtaposes unattractive features made all the uglier through the use of similes and metaphors. While the description reflects the (literal) appearance of the men**,** the words also carry symbolic meaning. For example, the description of the man who is blind in one eye and wears dark glasses could represent the rebels' blurred vision of his world. It may also suggest that the rebels' view of the world is obscured because he cannot see clearly through his thick glasses and consequently cannot act appropriately. Similarly, the fact that they seem to have walked a long distance shows that they are forest dwellers who spend most of their time hunting people. This group are apparently rebels whose lives clearly depends on violence. Unlike in folktales, where children lost in the forest encounter helpers, the relationship between children and adults in the wilderness of a war-torn country is not paternal. The forest scene confirms this and shows the reader how in a war zone values are inverted or corrupted to the point of where the only law is kill or be killed.

The grotesque situation depicted by the writer is frenetic. The one-eyed rebel, for instance, taunts Charly: "Tu t'appelles bien petit Charly? C'est un nom de prince, ça. Mais il parait que les princes, ne font pas de bons soldats" (Couao-Zotti, 2001:62) at which, the narrator comments, "il explosa d'un rire d'ogre" (62). Charly who panics and feels the need to urinate and begs,"Je voudrais pisser" (63), and is intercepted by the toothless man, "pisser?"he exclaims. Again, they burst into mad laughter, unrestrained and holding their bellies which the narrator calls "rires de kangourou" (63). Violence remains the only thing in this bush. "ici", says the narrator, "les enlèvements étaient monnaie courante" (62). The rebels accuse these children for infecting their territory, "vous avez pris le parti d'y répandre vos merdes: urine, crachat, caca et ne dis le reste" (63). With their swords in their hands, they are ready to punish them at once with death, "nous allons exécuter ces deux idiots une fois pour toutes" (64). Although Couao-Zotti satirises man's fallen nature he is willing to show the absurd folly and cruelty when he gives their reasons for wanting to kill the boys. The scene is further dramatised by the executioner when he invites the boys to the ceremony of "extrême onction"(66) priests use in helping the soul to qualify for its departure. Such reference to the extreme unction is ironically a mockery of Catholics or scurrilous imposters who used a religious exterior to rob poor people. It is not misleading to argue that the writer endorses the anticlerical view exposing the complicity of the religious leaders who sometimes secretely support rebellion. For Couao-Zotti as for many other writers, war is a game. In other words, life in Africa of the 1990s has been reduced to a mere game (joke) here; the laws of games are transposed onto reality and human beings lose their normal functions. Furthermore, Couao-Zotti uses this group to draw attention to the connection between war and technology when he speaks about the weapons used to kill the boys. The killing of captives is not without techniques; some people, in the rebels' view, were killed by guns and others were killed by machetes; so the captives had the choice between the two. The executioner boasts of how one of his blows will cut off Charly and John's heads without them feeling any pain. Although it's commonly accepted that death by gunshot is quicker than by machete, the writer exaggerates the executioners' skill to the extent that their acts become a kindness to the victims, or as if the machete was a painkiller. These weapons also turn into grotesque objects. The gun is a European invention while the machete is a local tool that can also be used as a weapon of destruction. Quoting Kafka, Bernard McElroy argues that, "in former times, as in Kafka's story, … machines… were designed to prolong and intensify the death, now they are designed to shorten and mitigate it as much as possible (1989:55-56). Reflecting on this quote, it seems that one of the characteristics of modern warfare in Africa is the rebels'

willingness to see people in pain. Ironically, the machete is a reflection of those machines whose function is to make people die a slow and painful death. Taken from this perspective, the machete holds a significant place in Africa's history and wars as the most common, magical and monstrous weapon of destruction. We can easily relate this pattern to history. While Hiroshima and Nagasaki were destroyed by American bombs, it is the machete which is in fashion in Africa. Some 800,000 Tutsi and moderate Hutus were slaughtered with it during the Rwandan genocide and in other war-torn African countries. In our humble view, the writer does not only degrade the subject of killing as irrational; he seems to argue that it is often planned and thought of. What is clear, however, is that the writer gives himself the opportunity to explore both "the absurdities of human conflicts" and ultimately "the grotesque nature of human fascination with military grandeur" to borrow the words from McNeil (1990:143). These absurdities pervade Couao-Zotti's novel and reveal the extent to which things went wrong. These features make the book, not only entertaining, but also revealing human though uncanny and strange.

The absurdities of these wars receive once more sustained attention in the novel when the two rebels, under discussion, are fight over opportunities to kill; one insists that it is his turn while the other disagrees:

> Écoute toi, fit aussitôt le borgne, tu ne vas pas te payer les deux condamnés. Laisse-m'en un.
> C'est mon tour d'utiliser la machette. Tu m'avais promis, rappelle-toi.
> Non, je ne t'ai rien promis. Tu inventes toujours des choses sur mon compte. (Couao-Zotti, 2001:68)

Here again, the writer uses different methods here: distortion, description, reactions, comments, and animation, etc. in the narration of this incident in which children are once more victimised by the killers. The way that the rebels are depicted reveals distortion by the writer for a specific purpose. In Catherine Randall's words, "to recall the unreformed, perhaps unreformed nature of the world" (Randall, 1999: 57). Such acts of cruelty, as described above, take the reader past their boundaries, presenting them with previously unheard of forms of violence. We also propose that the writer uses exaggeration to dramatise the child's suffering in a society, which has no notion of childhood.

As the boys are about to be killed in the midst of a festival with much laughter, when a disagreement over who will execute them erupts,[35]John and Charly take advantage of the situation. John, clever as he always has been, gives his distracted guard two heavy punches on his shoulders so that he loses his grip on his rifle whose butt John then uses to strike Charly's guard in the crotch leaving him yelling in pain as they escape. The sadness of such a scene is well expressed in this passage:

> C'est le moment que John choisit pour agir. Derrière lui, le rebelle, la main sur la gâchette, le tenait toujours en respect. Mais il avait les yeux ailleurs, sur les deux antagonistes.
>
> S'enfuir, oui… Du moins, tenté quelque chose…
>
> D'un petit mouvement du corps, le jeune homme se leva, fit face au rebelle. Du trenchant de la main, il lui administra deux coups secs sur les épaules. L'homme, pris de court, senti ses bras s'amolir et fléchir. L'arme glissa de ses mains et roula sur le sol. Et John de s'en emparer. Et John d'en utiliser la crosse pour l'écraser dans l'entre jambe de l'autre rebelle, le 'garde du corps' de petit Charly. Ce dernier hurla de toutes ses strippes et de tout son soufflé avant de s'affaler dans l'herbe.
>
> Suis-moi, petit! Ordonna John. Suis-moi! Vite! (Couao-Zotti, 2001:69-70)

So it goes. At this point, the narrator makes a point about the bitter truth of self-defence. Glover's ideas on defensive war as elaborated by Fornari accord with John's actions. Fornari interprets Glover as regarding groups at war as mutually sadomasochistic, which puts "the aggressors and the defenders on the same level" (1974:91–92). Glover also notes that, "the attacked are sometimes even more determined to win their 'defensive' war than the 'attackers' their aggressive war" (Glover in Fornari, 1974:92). In the above scene in which John defends himself and Charly against the rebels, it's striking that the justified defence of their lives does not render them any less grotesque than the aggressors. While many readers see the senselessness of the rebels' act as reprehensible, the prevalent opinion among the soldiers, which is also taken up by Johnny in *Johnny chien méchant*, is that because children are spies, they are even more dangerous.

[35] Although they all belong to the same group, the rebels themselves respond to mutual provocation by fighting. Arguably, the writer gives his reader an idea about how the rebels behave. Instead of achieving closer relations, they find themselves in a state of war.

Couao-Zotti's story only shows the children's sufferings at the hands of others, but also how nature is hostile to them. The book includes monsters and other cosmological elements, which threaten the children. As the story unfolds, the forest is described as aberrant, exposing children to even more dangerous or unbearable realities. As the rebels open fire on the escapees, the boys' aimless running causes them to fall into a very deep ravine. At the bottom of the *ravine* is a big river. John tries to cross, a crocodile attacks him. Charly shoots to frighten the beast away. War is like a ravine, a bottomless pit or a wild beast that devours everything. At this point, let us recall that by trying to shoot the beast, Charly seems to accept his role as a deliverer (freedom fighter) even though he once found it hard to use the rifle when John first taught him. We are made aware of this by John's remark to Charly, "Tu vois pourquoi il fallait apprendre à s'en servir. C'est sûr que tu l'aurais tué, ce monstre si tu avais eu la maitrise du kalash." To which Charly replies, "Tu as raison John" (Couao-Zotti, 2001:88). The story is not told by a disinterested narrator. Through this remark we get the impression that Charly's earlier refusal to use drugs and operate the gun was perhaps due to a lack of understanding. As a 9-year-old boy, he did not immediately grasp the need for self-defence in an insecure and hostile world. Such shifts between perspectives allow the narrator to uncover what the boy had previously rejected (John's training) and his new-found appreciation of the importance of using the weapon. This scene may imply that child soldiers have turned to violence as a defence mechanism but it could equally suggest that the child soldiers, if trained, will use weapons to protect people and not to destroy them.

The ruthless rebels leave behind them signs of gruesome brutality wherever they pass. Besides Charly and John, there are a number of other figures in the novel who have been victimized by war and its ruthless rebels: a woman who is raped and her two children have had their arms and legs chopped off not before burning villages and destroying livestock as seen in chapter 13 of the novel.

> C'est lui qui m'a vue, continua-t-elle. Lui, ivre de chanvre indien et alcool. J'ai supplié, demandé qu'on me laisse mes deux enfants sais et saufs en échange de ma propre vie. Mais pour lui, c'était comme de la provocation. Alors, il s'est mis à me battre. Pendant une heure avec ses hommes. Puis ce fut sur mon sexe qu'ils se jetèrent et…
>
> Elle coucha les yeux au sol comme pour surmonter la gêne qui l'avait prise, puis reprit son récit:

> Quand ils ont d'abuser de moi, ils se tournèrent vers mes deux enfants et me demandèrent si je nourrais pour eux une petite ou grande ambition. Vous devinez ma réponse. Mais moi je ne savais pas qu'ils m'engageaient à faire mutiler mes gosses. Avoir une grande ambition équivalait à leur faire couper les bras; et en avoir une petite à leur trancher la main. Et c'est lui qui a tranché avec sa machette, oui: lui! Il a tranché dans le vif!
>
> [….] Il ne restait au garçon qu'une jambe tandis que la fille exhibait un poignet sans main. (Couao-Zotti, 2001:115-116)

The maimed bodies of children in Liberia and Sierra Leone, for instance, are the4 living proof of the impact of war on children. The brutality towards these gosses, two and three-year-old, heightens John and Charly's own sense of insecurity and partly justifies why they had to carry guns to protect themselves.

By emphasising grotesque actions and figures, such as these ruthless rebels, the author encourages his readers to see child soldiers as victims of violence. If the reader identifies with these children, Couao-Zotti's presentation of the children as victims is compelling.

The War-lords or officers are the ones of whom we read that they use children as soldiers. The writer gives two examples.

The section below looks at the fictional type of negative officers we prefer to call 'war-lords' as part of our fourth category of agents of war or perpatrators[36]. This group adheres to a 'systematic' ideology and is characterised by an irrational passion for war. It is also this group that has a particular interest in exploiting children.

Speaking of an early chief, John observes:

> Mais le colonel Kroh n'était plus ce qu'il était. Avec le contrôle total du diamant, il s'était installé dans le luxe et avait repris, en les aggravant, les méthodes dictatoriales du gouvernement de Port-Harry. Contre ceux qui contestaient ses ordres, il exigeait de ses hommes l'application de la punition à la machette, ou la crevaison des yeux. John ne savait pas pourquoi il devait tuer de paisibles gens qui ne demandaient rien d'autre qu'on les traite avec un peu plus d'humanité. (Couao-Zotti, 2001:57).

[36] It has been observed that these so-called officer,s like the children they enlist, did not study the art of war. It may look like after failing in life, they viewed with envy what they thought was an easy life. Consequently, they came to war with no other objective than to kill, rape, and steal instead of protecting people.

These words embody one of the weightest truths of the war situation, the life of orphans as fighters. The story shows how children like John and Charly became soldiers. In the first instance, John meets a gentleman who behaves like his benefactor although he later turns into some sort of abductor.

John, we are told, returns home one day from wherever he was only to find his house on fire and all the members of his family in a pool of blood. They had just paid the price for turning a deaf ear to the death threats of the police. That day the boy felt like ending his life. As he stands alone on the rubbish dump, crying to God and the fetishes of his land, the hand of a big and strong man of the area called Alpha Kroh touches him on the back. Kroh, we are told, was not an ordinary man; he belonged to the mysterious regions of the invisible. His body possessed strange capacities. It seems to be implied that it could pass at will through material objects and he could do extraordinary things such as changing into an animal, a tree or even a river, to kill and escape danger. It is Kroh who wipes John's tears, takes him to the mountain for protection and gives him hope. Although referred to by Charly as a devil, this means little to John who owes everything to Kroh. He eulogises the man, arguing that it was him who gave him his first military uniform and a grenade, which he threw at the police force's vehicle, causing it to burst into flames. He speaks of the excitement he felt at wearing his uniform, which was too big for him and how using a grenade for the first made him feel more powerful and masculine. This is a typical pre-war view, particularly for an innocent young boy who cannot see through the glorification of the rebel movement. John elevates the prospect of war into something desirable and suggests that it is a privilege to be involved. John also recalls many battles that he fought resulting in the conquest of the northern province by his faction, MALP, while he was still under-age (younger than 15)[2]:

> Avant d'avoir réuni ses quinze ans, il a été de tous les combats des rebelles du MALP (Mouvement armé pour la liberté et la prospérité). Jour après jour, cartouche après cartouche, ils avaient réussi à conquérir la province du nord. (Couao-Zotti, 2001:56-57)

Is it surprising that the child should then praise such a man? From the point of view of the outsider, praising Kroh appears misguided. But to an abandoned orphan child he appears as a benefactor. Here the writer indicates that a child's circumstances before becoming a soldier are often worse than life in a military faction. Joining the armed forces may be the only chance of survival at that point in time. The warlords are depicted here as employing

children that would otherwise suffer immediate death. Given the choice between two evils (e.g. dying or joining the armed forces), choosing the lesser evil may seem a better option for an orphan. John enjoys for a while Kroh's company, but later, he actually leaves. He sees that world as fraught with madness and inhumanity. Readers may start to wonder about Kroh whose support for orphans begins to seem more questionable than admirable. In fact, what the novel describes here does not differ from reality. Oliver Furley refers to the NRA in Uganda as a "humane guerrilla force" because it attracted "the orphans, the displaced and unaccompanied children who were the flotsam of war" (1995:38). Phares Mutibwa observes in the same book that "it was the orphaned children of those who had been butchered who in their desperation joined the freedom fighters..." (Mutibwa in Furley, 1995:38). Goodwin-Gill and Cohen corroborate this idea arguing that "the commanders… were very paternalistic to their boys, keeping a close eye on their well-being (1994:97). Like Kroh, Yoweri Museveni's NRA did not retain this good reputation. Museveni has been heavily criticised by many for the abuse of the powers he had over these children. Machel explains how vulnerable children are to rebels forces: "Deprived of physical care and emotional security, they [children] become more vulnerable to hunger, disease, violence, military recruitment and sexual assault" (Machel, 2001:27). Even though the "armed forces take in unaccompanied children to protect them from violence", Machel argues that there is "no guarantee that these children will not end up as soldiers, especially if they stay within a group long enough to identify it as their protection or 'new family'" (11).

How do we account for John's first response to Kroh as a benefactor? The child's naïve attitude toward Kroh is echoed in "Colonial violence and psychological defenses in Ferdinand Oyono's Une vie de boy" by Lilian Corti. In Oyono's *Une vie de boy* Toundi Joseph praises the colonial masters: "Everything I am I owe to Father Gilbert. He is my benefactor and I am very fond of him." It is this attitude which Gikandi describes as Toundi's "inexplicable attachment to the characters responsible for his demise" (1987:59). "Such an attitude of "reverence for the abusive Father Gilbert and his perception of the priest as his benefactor is", as Corti observes, "based on the repression of various traumatic memories in the interest of maintaining an exalted image of the protector" (2003:52). Toundi's reverence for the priest not only entails the denial of abuse, but also a projection onto Father Gilbert of the role of saintly rescuer. So the boy's need "to exalt the aggressor is inseparable from a sense of personal worthlessness which is, in turn, a

defensive reaction to his terrified intuition that those who ought to be protecting him are actually likely to kill him" (Gikandi, 1987:59). One is tempted to equate John to Joseph Toundi, but there is nothing positive about their naiveté.

Any child who at this early developmental stage regards his parents as the source of all good would respond as John initially does to Kroh, seeing him as a benefactor. Psychoanalysts would argue that this happens because "the infant does not start life with ready-made concepts of other people" (Fornari, 1974:99) instead his world consists mainly of objects (e.g. food), which attract his attention. He is driven by the desire to satisfy his needs. But as he grows up, the boy starts experiencing hate. But John is not the victim of a brutal recruiting officer, Rambo. The novel reveals how John finally saw Kroh's true callousness to the needs and miseries of his kind and he decides to leave Kroh and join the *Combatants de liberté* led by Rambo (see Couao-Zotti, 2001:57). For this reason, it is also possible to read the novel as exposing greed and false philanthropy. The writer shows how people sometimes pretend to show sympathy to orphan children while in actual fact exploiting them. Despite the fact that child soldiers are victims of this false philanthropy or the warlords' manipulation, it would be absurd to think of them as naïve. This implies that the child soldier is slowly starting to attain a level of criticism of the outside world and can make decisions independently.

Let us move to our second officer, Rambo. It is said that Rambo was a former associate of Kroh. Rambo, as we are told, finds Charly, who was running away from hunger in the refugee camp, and recruits him. Leaving the camp at midnight, the boy had intended to go to Port-Harry (the capital city), a trip that leads him to an abandoned town where he sleeps for the whole day until he is awoken by Rambo and his rebels. Rambo amuses himself by looking at the shape of the boy's head, which he associates with the Batéké. He laughs mockingly at the boy in a drunken a loss of control: "Et il éclata de rire. Un rire d'ivrognerie abattu par dix litres de vin" (Couao-Zotti, 2001:46). Rambo is also introduced as a "master of the universe" who does what he pleases. Later on, when Charly asks John why doesn't he leave the 'Freedom fighters' if he is unhappy, John simply responds by another question: "Où veux-tu que j'aille? Quand on est rebelle, survivre un jour de plus est déjà un exploit. Et puis commandant Rambo n'aime pas les déserteurs" (Couao-Zotti, 2001:58). Rambo not only kills deserters but children in general. The strongest evidence that characters such as Rambo and Kroh are not mere tropes but representations of real

people is provided by the similarity between their grotesque features and those displayed by some real life rebel leaders.

It is important to note that although Charly does not resist his recruitment, this should neither induce the reader to believe that he willingly accepts nor that a refusal to join would not be met with the threat of or actual violence by the rebel leader. This is what Goodwin-Gill refers to as "coercive or abusive recruitment whereby there is no proof of direct physical threat or intimidation, but certainly the evidence supports the inference of involuntary enlistment" (1994:28). It unsurprising that this boy who hears Rambo boasting about killing children does not resist. Clearly the insecure status of orphans is a key contributor to the vulnerability of children in war situations. Their main concerns include, food, guns for self-defence and shelter – all of which children in their helplessness think only the rebel leaders can offer.

This text explicates the spectacle of war and its connection to the war-lords. "These are the men", as McNeil (1990) puts it, "without virtue, sacrifice, are growing rich as their country is impoverished"(33); "they rejoice" he adds, "when obstinacy or ambition adds another year to slaughter and devastation, and laugh from their desk at bravery and while they are adding figure to figure,…hoping another contract from a new armament" (33).

The above analysis of different categories of rebels identified in *Charly en guerre* – each of which can be interpreted as grotesque – supports the theme of the grotesque developed throughout the book in relation to the child soldier character. The connection between the grotesque and these rebels is clear: the raiders who invade the refugee camp bear an element of the grotesque in their odd appearance and their attack on the defenceless women whom they take as captives, which is the start of Charly's troubles. The second group of forest rebels attack innocent youths (Charly and John) who also respond by mounting a defence. The third group, the warlords (Rambo and Kroh), presents features, which are highly grotesque. In a flashback, it is revealed that John was exploited by Kroh and even made to kill before turning fifteen. John and Charly are portrayed as damaged children while the other characters are cruel. As inexperienced children, the boys are the book's most uncomplicated figures. They are represented as reflective and hesitant to act. While they stay true to this characterisation, they slowly undergo a transformation as shown in our discussion of John and Kroh. By the end, as we have shown, John decides that he will no longer accept exploitation; he leaves Kroh and joins Rambo's troop. In

order to maintain the presentation of the children as victims rather than perpetrators, the writer intentionally keeps them from becoming aggressive and challenging the status quo. At the end of the novel, the image we are left with is that of the children leaving the country as the rebels to rot in their grotesqueries. What we learn from the rebels in this novel is that the moment a man takes up a weapon and holds power over others; he becomes a grotesque who lives his life by violence. Although not aggressive, the youths and children are not passive in this novel. But it is not until Charly and John meet with Djamba Ray that they are able to overcome the fears instilled in them by the rebels and dream of a better future. The section below shows how the youth Djamba Ray challenges the rebels.

4.2.3. Children at war seen through the lens of patriotism and revolutionary heroism

4.2.3.1. Djamba Ray

A common stereotype is that Africa's youth is mad. The ambiguity of such a myth is reflected in the character Djamba Ray's state of mind and action. The crucial section in this regard is Chapter 11 where the writer strives to show us through Djamba Ray, non-violent youthful resistance.

His relationship with Charly starts in the refugee camp. He is described to us as big, vigorous and like a gigantic giraffe but with the bowed legs of an ant – a small insect that threatens nobody. This makes us think that while he is outwardly huge, he maybe skinny inside. It is Djamba Ray who stops the boy who stole Charly's mother's last maize flour and orders him to return it:

> Ah, Djamba Ray! La trentaine, grand et sec, vigoureux et nerveux. Une immense girafe, toujours affublée d'un blouson de cuir râpé, d'un jean moulant qui dessinait ses jambes arquées comme les pattes de fourmi. (Couao-Zotti, 2001:28)

The writer uses animal imagery, simile and metaphor to create not only the ridiculous, but also the degree of character imbalance around which part of our discussion will evolve. As one may see, Djamba Ray is introduced in this novel not only as a voice against violence, theft and corruption, but also as one of consolation to war victims. When Charly was grieving over the kidnapping of his mother, for example, Djamba was the only person

besides Charly's small dog, Bamboo[37], to console him. Djamba Ray reminds Charly of how he had quoted his late father: "Un homme est une volonté qui marche" (Couao-Zotti, 2001:16) and adds: "Un homme avant tout, c'est celui qui sait ce qu'il veut. Et s'il le sait, il trouve les moyens pour les réaliser. Si t'es persuadé que tu verras ta mère, alors tu la verras" (37). Djamba's optimistic view of life and the explanation he gives of the present circumstances in which a child is mourning the loss of his mother, helps Charly to believe that he will be reunited with his mother one day if he keeps dreaming of it. These words serve as a prediction for the child's future. The Rasta man is the one who takes the boy to a quiet place where he sings for him King's *No woman no cry*, a song which eases the child's distress momentarily even though "il demeura inconsolable" (38) like Rachel of the Bible gave voice to her cries that refused all consolation. When he and Charly meet again, the voluble Ray pierces the air singing a song he calls *Zao revisité* (94). Zao whose full name is Casimir Zoba is a Congolese teacher and musician is known for his song *L'Ancien combatant* that describes African youths caught up in the First World War. Zao remembers the plight of *Tirailleurs Sénégalais* and the Great War which he comically dramatises in his song which is anti-militarist and discusses the effects of war in a caricatural but no less aggressive way. He is aware of the danger of the weapons of mass destruction but encourages brotherly love:

> Semez l'amour et non la guerre mes amis
> Tenons nous la main dans la main
> Jetez vos armes. (Stanza 10)

However, Zao is certainly not the only one to write a humorous text drawn from his memory of war, *Camp de Thiaroye* (1987) and *The Colonial Friend* (2004) do the same thing.[38] By revisiting Zao with his own version of *L'ancien combatant*, Djamba Ray is

---

[37] Charly's grief is eased by his small dog Bamboo, which Charly addresses as if he were human. He says, for instance, to Bamboo: "T'es-t'en sûr qu'on ne la reverra plus? Bien sûr qu'on la reverra, mon grand" (Couao-Zotti, 1996:35). Bamboo is expert at sensing emotions and is better at consoling him than people are. This shows how animals are not capable of exercising the art of warfare. We cannot look at Bamboo without learning from him loyalty, true friendship and healing.

[38] *Camp de Thiaroye* (1987) by Thierno Faty Sow and Ousmane Sembène, who was drafted into the French army in 1939, is a film evoking the same sad war memory. We are shown,"West African colonial troops (*Tirailleurs Sénégalais*) disembarking at a port in Dakar wearing donated U.S. army uniforms…, having been sent back by their military leaders with only rags to wear for the homecoming and repatriation" (see Acquarello, 2008 para 1). Again, in the same manner of Zao and Sembene, Rachid Bouchareb's *The Colonial Friend* (2004) is a "true historical account of the 1944 massacre by the French army of indigenous African soldiers who sought to collect wages for their military service" (Acquelero, 2006: para 1).

clearly protesting against war.[39] Is his music an indication of patriotism? Whether it is or not, his passion for freedom is infectious. What Djamba Ray told Charly (about the refugee camp where they first met) in the UN rescue team truck taking displaced people to Port-Harry is indicative of the mental damage caused by war:

> Au camp, mon vieux, la pourriture gagnait. Il y avait trop de règlements de comptes. Je me suis dit que le peuple devenait fou et qu'en restant là à vouloir les raisonner, je risquais d'y laisser ma foutue merde de vie. (Couao-Zotti, 2001: 93-94)

Djamba Ray argues that the refugee camp was driving people mad. Reflecting on his statement, one could deduce that war and poverty cause mental disorders. But as the story goes, it is said that Djamba and the other refugees got into a highly dangerous zone where the rebels were hiding. Djamba, however, seems indifferent, instead, he keeps on talking about his prophet, Garvey, until he is reminded by someone to stop: "Laisse tomber le prophète… tu nous emmerdes, toi" (Couao-Zotti, 2001:100). Clearly the Rastafarian embodies a variety of paradoxical attributes, which mingle the pathetic and heroic, ludicrous and regretted. For example, when the rebels' machine gun is heard, Djamba suggests that the displaced should all come out to face the rebels and declares: "Je propose qu'on les invite à se montrer. Il faut avoir le courage de lutter contre ses adversaires à visage découvert" (100). Based on this, one could say his behaviour borders on insanity. This is partly confirmed by Max, Djamba's friend who comments after his death that: "IL était un peu *maboul* (meaning mad), mains un type sympa. Un vrai Rasta" (147). Disappointed that this group is not prepared to take such a risk, he then decides to go alone: "Alors personne pour m'accompagner? Vous voyez bien pourquoi Jah a dit que nous souffrirons tant que nous ne serons pas solidaires. Tant pis, j'irai seul" (102). What is surprising, however, is that while Djamba Ray might feel left alone, he seems to be more concerned with the outcome; he puts up a fight in which he knows he will be the absolute winner. Although the risk he takes might make him appear a fool, his determination is that of a confident and profoundly patriotic man. He feels great satisfaction at challenging the rebels. He does not cry out for help, but stands there like the king of the world on the sharp ridge of the roof:

---

[39]At this point in the novel, the writer explores the role of reggae music in warning people against violence. The latter discussion will consider this in greater depth.

> Il s'imaginait roi, souverain d'un immense royaume où les gens n'avaient besoin, pour être heureux, que de le louer. Il se vit au milieu de ses sujets, des hommes, des femmes et des enfants qui l'ovationnaient et se prosternaient à ses pieds. À côté de lui, le grand rastafari Hailé Sélassié I. Couao-Zotti, 2001:104)

One could argue that what the Rasta man might have forgotten is that any revolutionary visions cannot be isolated from redemption through art; as a musician, he was already engaged in an anti-war campaign. In fact when Charly reminds him of his *Zao revisité* song and its pacifist message and points out that it contradicts his actions, his response is: "Ce Zao, il a beau vous mettre en garde contre la guerre, s'il ne s'y met pas lui-même, c'est comme qui dirait du travail bâclé" (103). While Djamba's revolutionary ideas are commendable, the way he handles them is less so. Confronting the rebels while unarmed seems foolhardy. It's questionable whether his tragic death is attributable solely to the rebels, considering how he provokes them. The reggae musician invites the rebels whom he calls animals to show themselves:

> A vous qui êtes dans l'ombre en train de nous tirer dessus, je vous parle. Pourquoi vous comportez-vous comme des animaux? Pourquoi avez vous accepté d'être utilisés par Babylone? La méchanceté, ce n'est pas africain. La mouchardise, ce n'est pas dans notre sang. (Couao-Zotti, 2001:102)

In accusing the rebels of behaving like animals, the writer uses a sarcastic variation on the stereotype of Africa as a continent of savages.[40] Furthermore, statements such as "Pourquoi avez-vous accepté d'être utilisés par Babylone. La méchanceté, ce n'est pas africain. La mouchardise, ce n'est pas dans notre sang" (103) by which he accuses the rebels for being used to kill their own people clearly offer the black perspective of war. The idea that wars in Africa are caused by outsiders (Babylonians) is a major argument that underlies the Africanist ideological perspective. At this point, we begin to see how the issue of war and corruption is thematically explored by the writer. The writer gives his

[40]According to McNeil, "we are even less than animals." One of the traditional arguments against the superiority of humans over animals is that animals do not normally fight with members of their own species. Nor are animals capable of practicing the art of warfare (McNeil 1990:58). This is an ironic reference since animals are not known for "perpetuating war against their own species, or of being led out in troops and multitudes to destroy one another" (McNeil, 1990:58).

own views on this war, views that contain the idea that wars in Africa are never an internal affair: "un homme qui tire sur son frère? C'est la main de Babylone. On les paie pour ça (Couao-Zotti, 2001:108). In his view, Africa is being raped by outsiders. Djamba speaks the truth, which is hard to swallow and which nobody else has the courage to admit. Though against the rebels, he understands the motives behind their actions. Wars, he seems to argue, come to us loaded with enigmas, some cultural, religious or political. As argued above, this revelation destroys the myth that Africa's wars are fought because of tribal tensions.

Djamba's courage or inner strength appears to be rooted in the Rastafarian political philosophy or culture. As Honwana and De Boeck observe, "The Rasta, nourished in modern Ethiopian philosophy, is a domesticated *shifta* having broken with the ancient Ethiopian martial culture" (2005:224). Djamba Ray's taste for reggae is natural to most Rastafarian men fond of music with Western influences, such as hip-hop, rock, rap etc., while his pacifist approach to war reflects the opposition to violence characteristic of a shifta. "In distinction to the *shifta*, 'Rasta' is perceived as a foreign element, deviant and dangerous" (225). Another element common to the Rastafarian is his consumption of *ganja*. This justifies why he is a little mad – he uses drugs – but this has nothing to do with the values he holds. A Rastafarian, we are told, is a freedom fighter whose task is to fight against the enemies of peace in Africa. As such, we cannot regard him as a lunatic or his actions as illogical – his culture shapes his actions. As Cabral observes: "culture is the vigorous manifestation on the ideological or idealist plane of the physical and historical reality of the society that is dominated or to be dominated" (in Gikandi 1987:165).

While the boy's action is grotesquely unreasonable, yet from another perspective not acting in this way is nothing more than cowardice, for, as *Mystery and Manners* affirms, "the face of good can be grotesque too" (cited in McElroy, 1989:142). In *Fighting for Rome,* Henderson refers to contradictory action such as Djamba's as "altruism of hatred" in which "the other becomes more important than the self" (1998:212). The Rastafarian's courage may be motivated by love for his country but also hatred of rebellion. At the same time, Djamba can also be considered what Hazel Motes calls a "grotesque saint" (Motes in McElroy, 1989:143). Like Jesus Christ, Djamba Ray sacrificed his youth. He is a symbol of a dissatisfied spirit in a decayed society.

Djamba's last words are also revealing: "Mais, il faut continuer le combat" (Couao-Zotti, 2001:108), which echo the French saying, 'l'union fait la force.' Djamba's mantle of

liberation falls to John, who the dying man asks, T'aimes le reggae? … ma guitare est faite pour ça. Prends-là, je te la donne. Et quand tu joueras du reggae, penses à nos luttes passées et à venir car c'est une musique de libération" (109). All this happens before Charly and John who fall victims of this triumphal show. Fornari makes a useful remark arguing that, "the spirit of sacrifice is usually mobilized in the young. It is the young who are easily moved by ideologies and who readily accept – much more than adults- the prospect of dying for an idea" (1974:27). This statement thus agrees with Socrates' ethical ideals. Like Socrates who felt that he must sacrifice himself in order that his ethical ideals might live on, Djamba's sacrifice is made in a process of reparation. He transformed his need to sacrifice himself for an ideal which he believed to be a supervalue. Despite his flaws, Djamba is a man of character. As the story shows, he comes to realise what really matters in his life and, most importantly, what is the nature of the freedom that people need. While he does not get exactly what he wants for them at that moment, still he is willing to sacrifice his life to advance his ideals with regard to freedom. Djamba Ray is an important character in this novel because he stands in opposition to the themes of cowardice and naïveté, which pervade the first part of the novel. When Charly and John lose sight of their vision for the future, it's Djamba Ray's moral values and struggle against violence which bring it back into perspective. As we will argue very shortly, John is a continuation of the same character. Having developed the kind of awareness, which Djamba Ray's revolt is intended to trigger, the clash between John and the journalists in the following section, is undeniably a fight for freedom, Rastafarian style. Like Ngunga in Pepetela's *Ngunga's adventures* (1979), Djamba Ray "educates us, blows away the misconceptions we may have which hide from us the determination and energy of the new Africa" (Searle in Pepetela, 1979:4).

The writer's description of this character is one of the most eloquent. Those who read of this war at distance might say it was just written for entertainment, but the story shows how the lives of many youths were wasted in these wars.

4.2.3.2. A former child soldier as a future revolutionary

This section will show how the writer uses character development in the novel. As a teenager on the cusp of adulthood, John's attitudes and personality change, as he grows wiser.

A key scene is the dialogue between John and the two German journalists or photographers (Rita and Ken) who want to use Charly as a model to represent the horrors of wars in Africa. John opposes this: "Vous n'avez pas honte? Vous voulez abuser de l'innocence d'un gamin sans protection?" (Couao-Zotti, 2001:134). For John, putting the war child's image on television is abusing this child. The narration in *Charly en guerre* is mimetic in nature, exploiting the scenes in which we witness a fight between John and Ken. While John is still speaking, Ken punches his nose making it bleed. Little does Ken know that this young rebel groomed as a soldier is able to put up a serious fight – he pushes the man back and raining blows on him thus forcing him to surrender (138).

Rita's comments to Charly: "C'est une chance pour toi d'être photographié par une blanche. Tu verras, ta grosse tête fera le tour du monde" (129) and "j'offre une chance inouïe à cet enfant pour qu'il soit connu dans le monde entier" (135) are humiliating, dehumanising and lack sensitivity. More detail is provided in John's observation that: "Ces journalistes, quand ils débarquent ici, c'est pour nous photographier ou nous décrire comme de petits insectes velus. Je suis d'accord qu'ils se fassent de l'argent, mais pas en nous présentant ainsi" (Couao-Zotti, 2001: 139). The writer gets John to highlight all the stereotypes held by Europeans and Africans respectively. A distortion that reduces men to insects is not only ludicrous but it is also insensitive. The mature boy is aware of the fact that such photos of war zones "reveal emaciated children with gaunt features and sticking out ribs, children with swollen bellies and shrivelled buttocks which often fill the screens of television" (Ezeigbo, 1991:64). John's refusal to let the media people use Charly in photos is echoed in Monénembo's *L'Ainé des orphelins* when the child protagonist, Faustin, refuses to show the Western journalists the sites of the massacres in Rwanda. In fact, the boy seems to asks, what is the point of coming now when all that is left is painted red crosses on mass graves? This is even better expressed in Dongala's *Johnny chien méchant* where Laokolé refuses to have her crippled mother's body filmed. Instead her pain is dealt with privately – it is not a matter for public consumption. She argues, "Non, ai-je dit fermement, l'infirmité de Maman n'est pas un spectacle" (Dongala, 2002:171). It is another modern myth that because African people fight, they are less human. John challenges such stereotypes. It is through such attitudes and language that colonial culture "inscribes its presumed superiority over the African culture" (Gikandi, 1987:162). This "favourite mode of speech is the cliché which confirms stereotypes that [were] taken for granted by the colonial set" (162). John endures this kind of humiliation which you are

susceptible to when people discover your weaknesses. One could argue that John's achievement in *Charly en guerre* can be contrasted with Birahima's unwillingness to openly criticise racism in *Allah n'est pas obligé*.[41] However, both John and Birahima in *Allah n'est pas obligé* rely on the benefits of previous experiences. John draws on his experiences with Kroh and Rambo who undermined the rights of children. He is enriched by his meeting with Djamba Ray and his revolt against the rebels. What is even more important is that he does not want his identity to be formed by others. If anything, the boy is learning to be critical and independent.

John's reaction is shared by many critics. Bernard-Henry Lévy, for instance, writes:

> […] of those involved in humanitarian tasks such as fighting against hunger or trying to rescue people one can surely feel and smell in their behaviour or way of taking care of the bodies they hope to rescue that voyeurism as if these desolate places in the world were to them laboratories of humanity. It is easy to read in the eyes of those great humanitarians the will to save, but also the will to observe. (Lévy, 2008: 175)

Phrases such as "cette guerre devient intéressante pour tout le monde. Même pour les de pauvres nègres habitués à être tués ou vendus pour un mégot de cigarette" (Couao-Zotti, 2001: 135) point to the issue of human dignity, which is also highlighted here: "ceux qui aiment les Noirs sont aussi malades que ceux qui les détestent. Je ne sais pas dans quelle catégorie vous vous trouvez vous. Mais nous autres, nous ne voulons être ni aimés, ni détestés. Nous ne voulons qu'être respectés" (136). These words show that the boy has matured and is ready to fight not only for his right as a youth but also for those of black people in general who he sees as being equally victimised both by those who show them charity and those who hate them. He makes his objections known and is even able to propose a solution: he wants to be treated with dignity. Bakhtin observes, "[T]he speaking person in the novel is always, to one degree or another, an *ideologue*, and his words are always *ideologemes*. A particular language in a novel is always a particular way of

[41] Susan Arndt's article, "Boundless whiteness?" in *Body, sexuality and gender* quotes Nobel prize winner, Toni Morrison who admits "a good deal of time and intelligence has been invested in the exposure of racism and the horrific results on its objects" with the caveat that an examination of racism and cultural identity remains limited when "the impact of racism on those who perpetuate it" and "the effect of racist inflection on the subject" remain avoided and unanalysed (2005:157).

viewing the world, one that strives for a social significance" (in Gikandi 1991:140). To quote Searle "the child in Africa has often had his dignity torn from him by European myths" (Searle in Pepetela, 1979:3). Like Ngunga, Charly and more particularly John "is not the child of OXFAM or the face which stares out despairingly from the poster with caption: *Save the children*. [He is] the personification of childhood dignity and perseverance…" (1979: 3).

While Charly is attracted by the sweets and biscuits that Rita offers, he does not understand the humiliation that they entail. His childish immaturity is also evident when he mistakes Rita and Ken's sexual liaison sexual for murder, "…couchés l'un sur l'autre presque soudés…" (Couao-Zotti, 2001:125). It should be noted that sex is mentioned but not treated in detail in this particular novel. In contrast, John grows wiser and addresses questions of responsibility. He argues that there is a difference between him and other criminals who claim to be rebels and yet are not averse to evil. Couao-Zotti does not want a young adult to assume such a role or he will make his art sound racist. But he also knows that innocent children do not speak like this; the compromise is achieved by John's gradual loss of his childhood innocence as he begins to reach adulthood.

If we look back, we will notice that the author introduces both John and Charly as innocent boys far from adulthood. Like Charly, John's immaturity is implied through his inability to find a way out of his situation, which he complains about: "J'ai trop souffert, petit. Trop. Je ne sais pas si un jour on va s'en sortir. Plus la guerre dure, plus je sens que l'impasse devient totale" (Couao-Zotti, 2001:57). At this point his thinking is simplistic. It's hard to believe that this same character killed innocent people under Kroh's influence of. When Charly asks him how many people he has killed, "combien de gens as-tu déjà tué, toi?", he simply avoids the question saying: "je ne voudrais jamais le savoir" (Couao-Zotti, 2001:52). And when asked why he decided to become a freedom fighter, he says: "Souvent je me le suis demandé, répondit-il. Et souvent je n'ai pas de réponse. Peut-être parce que je ne veux pas être tué" (Couao-Zotti, 2001:51). Yet it is John who is the voice of reason at the end. This is Couao-Zotti's way of showing the journey undertaken by a child soldier in fighting against evil to achieve a return to normality. What strikes the most in his depiction of the small war between John and the journalists is the writer's frankness and boldness to defy evil. The novel reiterates its message of resisting violence.

In this section, we have seen that the writer uses different techniques in the grotesque representation of his characters. Men are compared to animals or given animal traits or simply reduced to animals: "c'est pour nous photographier ou nous décrire comme de petits insectes velus" (139); "fils de chien" (138) or mere objects "tonneau vide" (138); there is caricature or exaggeration of physical traits "des doigts longs", "presque transparent à force d'être fins" (128). In the African context, long fingers may be associated with theft. Female sex organs and bodily secretions are exposed: "les femmes iront se laver le sexe" (132), "ceux qui avaient envie de faire caca' (132), and so on. There is also the distortion and alienation of black people as seen in "pauvres nègres habitués à être tués ou vendus pour un mégot de cigarette" (135) and the confusion of the sexual act with murder "…couchés l'un sur l'autre presque soudés…". Physical torture is represented in "les coups de points commencèrent à pleuvoir" (138). An important element in this text is the comedy. The text is bittersweet. Bitter because there is something harmful about it in the way it exposes truth and sweet because there is something positive about its comic tone. For example, John may expose the black people who exchange their dignity for a cigarette butt – "les nègres habitués à être tués ou vendus pour un mégot de cigarette" (135) – but when he sees an actual cigarette butt on the ground, he picks it up bringing it to his lips: "un mégot de cigarette trainait par terre, le jeune home le ramassa, l'épousseta et le cala au coin des lèvres" (134). Thus, although talking about sensitive issues, the writer throws in some humour.

Couao-Zotti's *Charly en guerre* emphasises what most of us do not realise – that human dignity is perhaps the most important thing. The book shows society how imperative it is to treat children with dignity, especially those in difficult situations such as war. The writer achieves this by developing John as a youth who defends the rights of other children. For these reasons, we partly agree with Fulgence Swai's on-line article "The child soldier to a small politician" (2001) in which the critic suggests that child soldiers could build a power base by using critical thinking to move from unfavourable, unknown, awkward positions to levels of charismatic leadership. Although his position is not entirely clear, the writer implies that a child soldier must at least be trained if he is to be used. While ambiguity persists with regard to the problem of child soldier, the text gives us hope that child soldiers can change**.** Despite his nationalistic overtones, Couao-Zotti succeeds in creating agency by attaching the power of African literature to the dreams he has for the future of African children.

To sum up this section, let us assume for a moment that the exploration of the child soldier issue has not destroyed our stereotypes, but has increased them. Moreover, it has made us incapable of determining who deserves our sympathy and who does not. We all feel threatened by others at times of war and projecting our hate onto them. Money Kyrle writes, "The normal individual only distorts his concepts of those parts of the world with which he is unfamiliar." We concur with Kyrle who adds that "Reality may be distorted either by imagining inexistent dangers or enemies or by denying real dangers" (Money Kyrle in Fornari, 1974: 109). Perhaps the most important thing to note here is the writer's ability to make us realise that the concept of perpetrator is multifarious. In some way, we are all perpetrators through our direct or indirect complicity in wars–our indifference or unresponsiveness to them prevents us from accurately judging responsibility.

If the processes that produce these distortions or stereotypes were understood, these distortions would disappear. Our picture of the child in/at war is partly determined by what we project onto him, ignoring our role in their behaviour. We contend that looking at the reality of war critically as opposed to passing moral judgement could prevent our distortions of reality from exaggerating real dangers. While the effect of the climax is heightened by the writer's description of the dangers encountered by children, especially in the many scenes in which Charly and John escape death by the ruthless rebels. The happy moment comes in the last chapters (15-17) when Charly and his mother meet by the sea. This serves as our last point in the novel's analysis.

4.2.4. Reunion, the gossiping waters: outsiders

Couao-Zotti ends the novel with the family reunion in Port-Harry where Charly meets with his mother before their emigration.

If the scene of this encounter appears to be the most important in this novel, it is because of the years of pain, loneliness, hopes and worries are now rewarded. The spectacle grows out of another grotesque situation. Charly and John board a ship which is overcrowded. When it splits and the passengers fall into the sea, Charly clings to a woman's dress to save his life. John insists that Charly should let go of her if he wants to save his own life. When he doesn't, John rescues them both. It turns out that the woman is Charly's own mother. After the incident, the two escapees observe each other, and Charly recognises in the woman his own mother's features, "Charly mon petit!" she cries out. Not only does

this bring a sense of relief to the story, but it also helps to qualify it as an apocalyptic event. Through it, we imagine that war in Africa, too, can be put to an end.

Warner argues that, "the more tragic and disturbing a story is, the greater the sadness, the greater the fall from the possible happiness at the end" (1993:42). Despite getting to Port Harry alive, Charly, his mother and John have to leave their native land. The trope of journey around which the story is built is significant for the novel's structure as a whole. The writer posits the child at the end of the novel as a sort of outsider or perpetual wanderer through whose experiences offer the world insights into the misery, pain, sorrow and alienation of a refugee. Like the crocodile in folktales, the ship carries the victims of African war to distant lands. As such, it ushers in new life, saving the lives of people nearly extinguished by the fighters. These ships recount adventures of wars to the foreign lands through the mouth of the gossiping waters.

> Et le destin en a décidé ainsi, mon frère
> Va, va aussi loin que l'autorise l'espoir
> Va rechercher là-bas la nouvelle sève
> Qui redonne à nos cœurs
> La force de rebâtir nos rêves
> Où a-t-on vu un peuple mourir?
> Je t'attends ici ma sœur
> Va rechercher là-bas la force
> Qui cicatrise nos plaies
> Et reféconde nos terres (Couao-Zotti, 2001:156)

Whether this outsider status will become a source of strength for Africa as Max (Djamba Ray's friend) expresses in the words quoted above, is uncertain. In the unsung song composed by Max and Djamba Ray before the latter's death, however, it seems as if we are given a glimpse at the writer's disillusionment in this solution which condemns Africans to be forever strangers in this world:

> Je n'ai plus de terre. Je n'ai plus de mère
> Je ne sais plus où poser mes angoisses
> J'ai perdu le chemin de ma paroisse
> Etrangère dans mon corps
> J'erre à travers tous les ports
> (Couao-Zotti, 2001:148)

As we draw towards the novel's end, let us focus once more on how the writer has created literary agency in the novel. Weiss asks, "Can child soldiers be real agents?" (in Honwana and De Boeck, 2005). Instead of merely being agents of violence, the child soldiers in this

novel become agents of change. The concept of human agency is defined by Giddens as "the capability of doing something rather than the intention of doing something" (in Honwana 1984:9). Agency, he argues, is an individual's ability to act differently at any point in a given sequence of events, thereby altering the course of those events. For Giddens, an agent is therefore a human being with the power to transform occurrences through the capacity to intervene or refrain from intervention. Agency is fundamentally connected to power. To be able to act otherwise, the individual must be able to exercise some sort of power. While the power of the individual may be constrained by a set of circumstances, to have no choice (as many former child soldiers claim) doesn't mean in Gidden's terms the dissolution of agency as such. All forms of dependence offer resources, which empower subordinates to influence the actions of their superiors. This view of agency and power gives these young combatants agency in their own right. They can, for example, pretend to be ill to avoid certain tasks, plan an escape or not perform their duties properly. This constitutes what Giddens calls "dialectic of control" (in Honwana, 1984:48). While Honwana accepts Giddens reasoning to a certain extent, he reminds us that choosing to escape, for example, is costly as runaway child soldiers caught by the warlords are often killed. The process of military initiation is meant to brainwash the soldiers. In some instances as, Singer (20060 shows, children were forced to kill their own parents so that they have no home to go back to. Nonetheless, the protagonists in *Charly en guerre,* as already argued, are a good example of child soldiers who show the desire to change their lives. In contrast, the title character in *Johnny chien méchant* and Birahima enjoy destroying their lives and those of others. Though associated with violence, John and Charly manage to leave the army and migrate, embracing new places and lives.

4.2.5. Conclusion: perpetrators or heroes?

Our aim has been to show how children transformed by wars from a state of innocence to cruelty. John's metamorphosis into a killer reveals a boy whose circumstances force him to play a role in society over which he has little control. His new life of violence contrasts with his gentle nature as a boy with parents. But far from being a bad boy, the series of events he undergoes redeem him. There are early signs that John is good: he protects Charly and is open and frank with him even if a little bit shy. For his part, Charly never surrenders to a life of violence. His transformation serves a different purpose, to awaken John to his future and to teach him to hope and not despair. Charly closely observes his friend in tears and comforts him saying, "Si tu es malheureux, pourquoi ne quittes-tu pas le

Combattants de la liberté? Pourquoi? Ce serait si simple" (Couao-Zotti, 2001:58). John's lamentation is central to the novel:

> Parfois j'ai envie de tout laisser et de partir loin, très loin de ce pays… Quand j'étais gosse, je rêvais de devenir médecin pour sauver les enfants qui meurent de maladie. Je l'ai souvent dit à mon père, lui qui n'a jamais pu se remettre de la mort de ma jeune sœur fauchée par le tétanos. Aujourd'hui, mes parents ont été tués et je ne pourrais jamais devenir médecin. Cette guerre m'a tout pris. Même mon avenir. (Couao-Zotti, 2001:52)

Through these words, John expresses feelings common to most grieving children – notably bitterness, anger and confusion – but he reminds us that not only does he mourn the loss of his loved ones but also all his unfulfilled dreams. In other words, death causes more than just physical loss it also puts an end to less tangible things. Charly is the one John needed in his life. Thanks to his advice we see John slowly but surely returning to his old self. And what would have become of nine-year-old Charly without John? With just a little bit of support, it's possible that many African child soldiers could return to a normal life. It would be misleading to think that because this story is told from the perspective of wandering orphan children, it is written from the standpoint of weakness. Surviving war takes more than luck, it calls for courage, determination, wits and imagination to escape danger. The novel shows the children's ability to cope under the stress of war. If we look closely at *Charly en guerre*, we might deduce that what makes it a war novel is not necessarily the violence or suffering the child is engaged in or exposed to, but rather the courage to say no in the face of death.

Obiang's statement that "mais si l'orphelin n'a plus d'avenir, c'est parce qu'il aura oublié que son avenir est d'abord celui des autres, l'avenir de la majorité, de la communauté des vivants…"(2006:2) is worth considering here. The Gabonese critic adds to our understanding of violence in this novel by pointing out that Africa has lost its sense of solidarity. But, Borgomano (2002) asks, "Has the orphan in current novels ceased to be, beyond appearances, a sign of hope?" (para 10). Obiang seems to show that it is nothing of the kind. Borgomano reminds us that "at the centre of Boubacar Boris Diop's novel *Le cavalier et son ombre*, the mythical character of Tunde, the child-saviour, whose name means "the one who keeps hope intact", is an allegory of this (2002, para 10). Child soldiers, Obiang argues, should come together in the name of solidarity and fight against

the enemy of the African continent. While many view the child soldier crisis as a by-product of the post-colonial economic situation, Obiang claims that its source is religious. While we agree fully with Obiang, it must be remembered that concepts can also be defeated leaving their proponents equally defeated. The concept we refer to here is African communal life, which is on the decline against capitalism and is continuously retreating before tribalism, individualism, and other *isms*. Nevertheless it remains for African child soldiers, suggested by Obiang, to come together and fight against these evils (individualism and tribalism). What they need is to show their solidarity as an expression of African humanism or *ubuntu,* following the example of Charly and John.

While the child characters exposed to the rebels' violence help us to see how it is possible for children to go beyond their youthful limitations and survive violence, but the writer does not emphasize much their confrontation with the rebels. The major weakness of *Charly en guerre* is arguably its refusal to bring us into the "the belly of the beast and force us to live" (Gikandi, 1987:134) by having the children fight not only for their lives against hunger, cold, grief and the loss of their parents, but also against the rebels rather than always running away. However, taking the children's sufferings as the primary subject of the novel, we can only appreciate Couao-Zotti's desire to maintain social realism.

Chapter 5: *Johnny chien méchant* by Emmanuel Dongala

5.1. Plot Summary

Johnny chien méchant chronicles events in an unnamed country – presumably Dongala's native Republic of Congo – during the civil wars when the former military ruler Dennis Sassou Nguesso seized power from Pascale Lissouba in October 1997. A distinguishing feature of the book is its two teenage narrators: The eponymous 16-year-old Johnny and a girl of the same age, Laokolé, a war victim. In alternating chapters, Johnny and Laokolé tell their own stories in the first person. The book is divided into 31 chapters which are in turn subdivided into two parts.

Johnny chien méchant gives an account of a government which is overthrown by insurgents who are moving into the capital of a country where tribal tensions are fanned. Johnny belongs to the party which won the elections, the MFDLP, while the party formerly in power, the MFTLP refuses to accept the results and wants to stay in office to loot the national treasury. People from Johnny's province are called to take up arms and fight against the rival tribe. As the government forces and the militia men who support them advance toward the capital city, Laokolé puts her legless mother in a wheelbarrow and takes her 11-year-old younger brother, Fofo to flee along with everyone else. The displaced – including women with enormous bundles on their heads, children forced to walk and old people struggling along with walking sticks – move almost without destination. They hope to find sanctuary on the premises of the embassies and the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), but this is shortlived as the Westerners are forced to escape from the violence.

At the same time, Johnny and his commandos rape and kill adults and children on the premises of UNHCR, seize cars and other property. Families are separated – Laokolé's brother Fofo is lost and never found again. Although the UN soldiers rescue the Westerners, Mélanie, Laokolé's best friend, is smashed by their truck as she pleads to be taken with them. After the Westerners left the city, the local people are left without any protection. They run aimlessly toward the nearby suburb of Kandahar where Laokolé's mother is killed in a bombardment. Much of the rest of the book is concerned with different views of the lives of people who wander their own country as refugees.

People flee to the villages as war intensifies in the city. Soon after her mother's death, Laokolé is encouraged by people to leave the city and go to the remote villages, which she does, but finally changes her mind and stops at a nearby village refusing to go farther into the countryside. When the rebels attack the village, she runs away to hide in the forest. There she meets a wildlife rescue team which she asks to save her. The conservationists refuse saying that they work with the animals which are being killed in the war and are not involved with rescuing human beings. Laokolé finally gets out of the forest and joins others in a refugee camp for those escaping the violence and devastation caused by the soldiers. Here, Laokolé enthusiastically participates in community life, helping to teach the children who cannot go to school.

While the president and the first lady come to offer help in the refugee camp, Johnny strikes an abandoned baby girl for eating biscuit crumbs. Laokolé who witnesses this, follows him and despite being an unarmed girl, fights to avenge the child and kills Johnny the soldier and molester of women and children. The Bible that she uses as a weapon is also a promise of better things to come for Africa. In ending the book with this murderous act, the writer appears to embrace Wole Soyinka's view, as found in his *Season of Anomy* that "when occasion demands it, violence is a valid instrument of social change" (Ezeigbo, 1991:108).

Laokolé's role in the novel is underpinned by her feminine vulnerability which she rises above, doing things not usually expected of a girl of her age, such as caring for her mother. The novel's plot draws strength from the girl's willingness to carry her disabled mother as advocated in a Chewa (Malawian) proverb: "Your mother is still your mother, though her legs be small." Perhaps her generous heart is what makes the readers feel more sympathetic towards her than they do toward Johnny. Readers can easily make her past reality of sympathy their own. She is capable of finding solutions to problems, which we see her doing throughout the whole story. When Johnny strikes the abandoned girl, her desire for revenge is inspired by a deep sense of empathy for this childand other people. In contrast, Johnny is a disturbing character who dreams only about murder, rape and looting. He treats people like objects and lives up to his name, Mad Dog. For instance, he kills a boy who sells bananas, accusing him of being an informer, despite the boy's pleas and claims of innocence. Presented as insane and so consumed by his passions that he will stop at no crime, Johnny eventually falls victim to his own machinations. It's therefore unsurpring that readers are unlikely to be sympathetic to this character. His disdain for others, especially the women he

rapes and humiliates further alienates him from the audience. Nevertheless, it should be rememebered that the boy has a traumatic past and was forced to became a child soldier by politicians.

The heart of Dongala's *Johnny chien méchant* concerns the ordinary people's trauma in the face of civil wars and their outlook for the future. The primary theme of the book involves an exploration of the suffering caused by war and the brief experiences of human contact that give hope for transcending that suffering.

Dongala writes from firsthand experience, having witnessed such violence himself. In *Otago Bulletin* by the University of Otago de Carle, McKerracher reports that when asked about his research methods for his novel, Dongala replied: "I was in the thick of that war and I have seen those kids with AK47s bigger than they are," adding, "I have seen the suffering and people running away. I did that myself – I ran through the forests. That is enough research to write the novel" (McKerracher, 2005:7). The author, however, distances himself from the word that he depicts so convincingly, leaving his readers in the hands of the two narrators. The book was an immediate success in the United States, France and Africa and has garnered a number of awards and been adapted into films.

5.2.Text Analysis

5.2.1. Historical background of the novel: child soldiers

Denis Sassou Nguesso seized power in the Republic of Congo in October 1997, putting an end to the 28-year rule of Pascal Lissouba. Under the pressure from Sassou Nguesso's Cobra militia backed by Angolan troops, the government and forces loyal to President Lissouba were crushed. Following Sassou Nguesso's ascent to power, his Cobra militia killed dozens in house-to-house searches in the capital intended to root out members of the defeated government security forces, private militias and Lissouba's political followers. After the war, the victorious Sassou Nguesso's government militias continued to apprehend and kill many of his political opponents. In August 1998, militiamen loyal to the former government launched a guerrilla war against President Nguesso. The civil war left approximately 10,000 people dead in Brazzaville alone. These conflicts have sometimes been characterised as pitting northerners, who support President Sassou, against southerners who support former president Lissouba. There are four major ethnic groups in Congo, including the Bakongo

(meaning "hunter"), Sangha, Teke, and the M'Bochi. The Bakongo constitute the largest ethnic group in the southern and richer part of the country. In 1999, the victims of the 10-month old civil war included thousands of homeless people who were starving to death.[42]

The novel covers the historical events of this period with its militiamen, looting, refugee camps, rapes and, above all, the use of child soldiers. Dongala's offers vivid descriptions of their way of life – their brutality, immorality and grotesque language. He shows their madness, wickedness and senseless adoration of guns. The war affects and destroys lives of many of the characters depicted in this novel. People lose their belongings, others are killed or maimed, children get lost and schools become dysfunctional. The writer himself was, as already mentioned, one of the many victims of this war.

One striking aspect of Dongala's book and his description of the war is that he not only portrays masculine power, but also shows strong women who although victims of the war demonstrate courage in defending their people. The portrayal of Laokolé is a case in point. Just as men and women feature equally, so do young and old alike. An elderly man is shot while reading the Bible and praying for God to end the war. Clearly, Dongala is interested in how war as a social phenomenon impacts political and private life.

5.2.2. Child soldiers and waging war

The novel begins in dramatic style. In a country already fraught with political tensions between its two leaders, General Giap, the leader of the Mata Mata militia group, declares a 48-hour period of looting. The unexpected 48 hours of pillage is best summoned up, in the quote below:

> Ici c'est moi, Général Giap. Nos vaillants combattants de la liberté se sont battus comme des lions et comme des buffles. Ils ont terrorisé l'ennemi qui a fui la queue basse. Victoire, la luta continua! Nous n'avons pas peur de rien. Nous les poursuivons jusqu'au fond de la mer. Nous allons leur coller au derrière comme des morpions. Pour fêter cette victoire du peuple libéré, moi, général Giap, avec l'accord de notre nouveau président, je vous donne l'autorisation de vous servir pendant quarante-huit heures. Servez-vous, prenez tout ce que vous voulez, cela fait partie de la victoire, c'est la prime de guerre. Servez-vous jusqu'à lundi. (Dongala, 2002:16)

[42] See GlobalSecurity.org for more detail (http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/war/congo-b.htm)

Giap – a *nom de guerre* used by the militia members – is introduced as a 25 year old who was a chief before he promoted himself to the rank of general. Like his ignorant comrades, Giap is so uneducated that he cannot even distinguish between "p" and "q": "Mais qu'attendre de Giap, un homme qui ne pouvait faire la différence entre les lettres p et q car sa scolarité se résumait à six mois de CPI" (Dongala, 2002:53). Giap is shown to be extremely insensitive and opposed to peace. He and his group support the new president, a Dogo-Mayi as opposed to the former president, a Mayi-Dogo. This event plunges the country into war between the two fictional tribes. The Mata Mata band, in which Giap is leader, appears to be a private, non-government force, which is neither supported nor sanctioned by the government.

Laokolé hears this news on the radio and knows what to expect from the coming free-for-all. Her father was killed the last time that the government troops had gone on a rampage. Laokolé's young brother, Fofo, is petrified by the announcement. Even though only 10 years old, Fofo understands the implications of the broadcast and is reminded of the day he lost his father:

> Je lui ai dit qu'un nouveau pillage allait commencer dans quelques heures et qu'il fallait que nous nous dépêchions, il ne fallait pas se laisser surprendre comme la dernière fois. Une lueur de panique dans les yeux, il s'est mis à pleurer et à trembler de tout son corps. J'ai compris qu'il était terrifié parce qu'il pensait qu'il allait revivre les événements de ce jour-là, quand les premières milices – celles qui combattaient alors ceux qui aujourd'hui se préparaient au pillage – avaient abattu papa sous ses yeux. Ce serait la catastrophe s'il piquait une de ses crises périodiques … (Dongala, 2002:14)

This passage offers an insight into 10-year-old boy's view of war and what his sister feels for her brother and mother. She prepares to move her family away from the influence of Giap and his men who reject all prospect of peace. This immediately presents the reader with a vignette of life in a region where violence is not confined to the remote past but endemic to society.

Like the other child soldiers forming the Mata Mata militia group, Johnny is a ruthless killer and heroic only in the loosest sense of the word. Giap, chief commander of this group, leads by violent example. The bloody incidents of the opening pages already introduce the reader to the images of pain, wounds, fear, blood and death as well as the concept of the grotesque. The wound trope is exemplified by Lakolé's legless mother but common to most victims of

conflict and indicative of trauma. Such a vivid and immediate depiction of war is bound to trigger an emotional response in the readers.

While the opening pages provide background information, many of the characters motivations remain unclear. Although the writer uses indirect characterisation describing the individuals' physical appearance, speech, thoughts, feelings and actions or sometimes allowing other characters to speak about them, we still do not feel we really have a grip on these characters. The writer delays until page 100 before offering a flashback tying the narrative directly to the immediate issue of child soldiers. The child protagonist claims that the beginning of his journey began when the politicians came to his city intent on inciting people to revenge against the rival tribe contesting the elections. The propaganda machine is set forth recruiting men and children to the military cause:

> …un homme que je n'avais pas remarqué jusque-là s'était avancé. Il était plus âgé que la plupart des membres du commando, sérieux, cravaté, vesté et tout le reste. Il devait être leur chef car dès qu'il avait fait un signe de la main, on lui avait tendu une serviette bien bourrée. Il en avait sorti des photos en couleurs qu'il avait brandies vers nous: j'avais vu des coups de machettes, des peaux purulentes de brûlure… Insoutenable. J'avais fermé les yeux, je n'avais plus voulu regarder. Le system s'était alors mis à parler.
>
> Ces photos étaient celles des gens de notre ethnie et de notre région attaqués par ces bandits de Mayi-Dogos à la solde du président actuel: ils dépeçaient vivantes nos femmes enceintes, ils pillaient des bébés dans des mortiers, ils passaient des fers à repasser sur le dos de nos hommes, ils coupaient des nez, des oreilles et des bras, toute une galerie d'atrocités. Je ne sais pas comment ils avaient fait pour photographier tout cela mais nous avions frémi d'horreur. "Il nous faut venger notre région, avait-il martelé, car si nous ne faisons rien, ces rats puants de Mayi-Dogos nous tueront tous, nos femmes, nos enfants, nos poules et nos cabris." (Dongala, 2002: 103)

A major tool of the government propaganda assault is the bizarre and horrifying pictures of violence by one tribe against another. But the people are not as gullible as hoped. They try to resist, refusing to make sense of where the pictures come from and when conflict between their tribes began. When the propagandists, however, realise that this method of recruitment is failing and they are not winning over the local people over, as is often the case in Africa, youths are coerced at gunpoint to join the ranks. George Szanto cited by Ezeigbo distinguishes between two types of propaganda: "agitation" on the one hand and "integration

propaganda" on the other (1991:45). According to Ellul, agitation propaganda "could be used to attempt an overthrow of a government or it could be used by a government, especially when there is war, to destroy and restructure a people's psychological barriers of habit, belief and judgment" (Ellul in Ezeigbo, 1991:45). We consider this technique to have the more profound effect on most African societies.

After being forced to join, the children realise that the complete lack of law – as a result of the civil war – provides a unique opportunity for self-empowerment through violence and thus continue to support the rebel cause. Seeing that other children even younger – "ils avaient fait un raid sur l'école et ramené les malheureux gamins dont certains étaient en pleurs" (Dongala, 2002:101) – were already fighters, Johnny feels his only option is to remain loyal and make a name for himself. Johnny, who always claims to be an intellectual and an admirer of scholars, saying "croyez-moi, entre la parole d'un militaire, d'un homme d'affaires, d'un magician et d'un intellectual, je choisirais sans hésiter celle de l'intellectuel" (106), soon identifies with the university professor who is among the politicians. Propagandists like the university professor here, have the power not only to cultivate and justify animosity between tribes, but to inculcate such hatred in children. As a result, Johnny is seduced. The prospect of war increases his confidence and he makes no effort to hide his ambition to become a colonel in the official army one day. He becomes a true convert to the cause, even recruiting his friends. It is through him that Giap, formerly called Pili Pili (pepper) joins the militia. Giap is at first reluctant; he is nervous and asks Johnny many questions because he is confused as to why they should fight against their own people. But once he gets involved in looting shops and brings home goods, he never turns back. Giap, however, is the only mature member of the group. After he kills Rambo, the chief officer together with Caiman and Johnny, he acts as the Mata Mata leader. He gives orders to launch the first attack on the broadcasting station. Before long, the Mata Mata has grown into a large fighting force and Giap divides it into small units known as commandos, placing some of his gang members in leadership positions and assigning them new tasks. Johnny calls his unit *Tigres Rugissants*. It is grevious to think that these small children shared the fate of many tyrants: killing and destroying their own cities. The writer does not exaggerate when he puts into the mouth of Johnny these words: "On nous avait dit que le pouvoir est au bout du fusil et c'était vrai," (Dongala, 2002:36). The ruins of the country which, even today, stand facing people in many African countries, are eloquent witnesses of that ugly past. The pain of the Congolese people was unspeakable as demonstrated by this 16-year-old young girl, Laokolé,

who pushes her mother in a wheel barrow on a mud road as fleeing the fury of the militia men. She says:

> Tout le monde avait eu la même idée que nous, fuir, et fuir avec ses biens les plus précieux. Les gens transportaient leurs richesses sur la tête, au dos, dans des brouettes, dans des cuvettes, des hottes. On voyait se balancer au rythme de la marche des dames-jeannes, des nattes, des bidons en plastiques. Je ne comprenais pas tout à fait pourquoi cette population pauvre et démunie jetée sur les routes transportait tant d'objets hétéroclites. (Dongala, 2002:38)

and

> J'ai saisi les manches de la brouette et j'ai commencé à pousser dans la poussière, dans la cohue et parmi les cris. Au loin, nous avons entendu les premiers coups de feu. Les militaires et miliciens victorieux avaient commencé à faire main basse sur la ville. (Dongala, 2002: 50)

5.2.3. The blurred categories of victim and perpetrator

Dongala's use of two narrators indicates that his text is a site of contestation between conflicting perspectives deployed in the writer's perception of this war. This analysis seeks to show the way in which these competing perspectives can be explained through language. As in the previous chapter, this section also seeks to understand who a child soldier is in this text through the interaction between language and contextual factors.

Since these children are involved in war, the most immediate question this novel raises is the same as for the preceding novel. We want to determine whether the child soldiers in *Johnny chien méchant* are perpetrators or victims? The ambiguity and conflicting emotions with regard to the nature of child soldiers or child combatants highlights the difficulties inherent to such concepts. In this section, the focus is on the way the central character Johnny is perceived by Laokolé as opposed to the way he perceives himself.

> En tout cas je n'avais jamais vu façon plus bizarre de se fagoter que celle de ce Chien Méchant. Affublé d'une casquette à visière retournée et d'un T-shirt sans manches, il avait autour du cou un collier formé de cauris enfilés et sur lesquels étaient accrochés deux ou trois petits sachets. En plus, un tissu rouge était noué autour de son biceps droit. Il n'était pas costaud ni même très grand et son pantalon vert olive semblait trop grand pour lui. Par contre, la double ceinture de munitions qu'il portait en écharpe sur chacune de ses épaules se croisait sur sa poitrine tel Zapata, lui conférant une allure franchement prétorienne. Une arme automatique dans la main et un long couteau pendant sur une des hanches complétait son arsenal guerrier. Des lunettes sombres

> camouflaient son regard et, plus étrange encore, de temps en temps son T-shirt émettait des éclaires de lumière. (Dongala, 2002: 64)

The above passage helps us to draw conclusions and propose a number of suggestions regarding the modes in which the grotesque is manifested in this text and the methods by which it is produced.

There is no doubt that we are provided with a set of features which we can employ to assess the child soldier in terms of his physical appearance, personality and intellectual ability. The speaker Laokolé provides the grotesque qualities that underpin the portrait of Johnny. The reader should easily recognise Johnny as a killer and therefore grotesque character. His outfit presages his cruelty and madness. Johnny uses his body as a mask. The attire or armour he wears not only identifies him as a warrior but testifies to his psychology. The things he wears both organic (*cauris*) and inorganic or man-made items, e.g. munitions, little bags and bits of mirror. As his nickname implies, Johnny is a mad dog – a creature part human and part animal. As such, he is the most radical example of a grotesque figure and child soldier.

Gysin defines the grotesque figure in following terms: "a human figure which is dehumanised by distortion to the point where it appears at the same time real and fantastic, beautiful and ugly, tragic and comic, human and inhuman, living a dead or demonic and ludicrous" (1975:46-7).

The figure of Johnny in the above passage reveals the child soldier as extraordinary and also provides a basis for his abnormal behaviour. His apparel is indicative of his bossy and proud nature but he also shares certain traits with animals and vegetables. These non-human elements are clearly used to distort the figure of the child soldier. Through expressions such as "je n'ai jamais vu" and "plus étrange", Laokolé immediately identifies him as a grotesque figure. The emotional dimension of this reaction is also strongly foregrounded and shaped by fears of the threat Johnny poses. This raises the question of whether Laokolé's view is reliable or not, especially as there is a marked difference in her attitude towards the girl soldier, Lovelita, presented to us as Johnny's fiancée.

> Une jeune fille en pantalon, avec des cheveux courts et un bandana orange autour de la tête. Je ne savais pas qu'il y avait une femme parmi eux. Son seul accoutrement militaire était les brodequins qu'elle avait aux pieds, mis à part le ceinturon qui lui ceignait la taille. Elle a glissé la

> bretelle de son AK entre les deux buts de ses seins puis s'est dirigée à grands pas vers ses acolytes. (Dongala, 2002:67)

Lovelita appears to be more female than warrior; in short, more of a "normal" girl. Despite being rather shocked at the company Lovelita keeps, Laokolé reveals a certain admiration for her. There are some reasons to support this view. Lovelita is Johnny's fiancée who was fleeing when he invited her to join them although she comes from a rival tribe. Consequently, she is not as deeply implicated in violence as the others are. So, Laokolé's observation matches the facts. In contrast, her description of Johnny is emotional and superficial because the nature and intensity of Johnny's grotesqueries derive from inherent complexities which she has not yet confronted. It would seem reasonable to assume that this is the first time she has seen child soldiers or that she is prejudiced against them.

Along these lines one could also argue that Laokolé's reaction is largely contingent on the crime that she just witnessed – Johnny's killing of the innocent boy selling bananas and Lovelita's apparent indifference to his death despite apparently knowing him, render both the situation and the characters grotesque. However, when she comments on Johnny's attire, she makes it appear strange, raising the general question of Johnny's alienation. Johnny's own perception of his appearance and the explanation he gives make one realise that Laokolé is not far from the mark.

> J'avais donc choisi le plus puissant de tous mes T-shirts, celui qui avait une image de Tupac Shakur et que j'avais traité de façon spécial: j'y avais collé et cousu des petits morceaux de miroir non seulement pour aveugler l'adversaire par les rayons du soleil qu'ils renverraient dans leurs yeux mais aussi parce que les miroirs dévient la trajectoire des balles. Autour de mon cou, j'avais enfilé mon collier de coquilles sur lequel j'avais attaché trois petits sachets de gris-gris différents dont l'un avait le pouvoir de me rendre invisible. Je regrette de ne pas posséder comme Giap celui qui transforme les balles en gouttes d'eau mais ça viendra un jour, on ne peut pas avoir tout à la fois. Oh, j'avais aussi attaché une ficelle rouge autour de mon biceps droit. J'ai complété tout cela avec un poignard, un PA et deux grenades bien accrochées au ceinturon qui retenait mon gros pantalon en treillis vert. (Dongala, 2000: 91)

Johnny wears the small pieces of mirror in the belief that they will protect him against bullets while one of the little bags attached to his necklace is intended to make him invisible. He imagines himself able to pass by others unseen as if he were a ghost. Johnny is one of hundreds of thousands of child soldiers in Africa who are made to believe in the protective

power of the fetishes in war. Laokolé apparently does not know why Johnny wears these things. This point was addressed in Chapter 3 above when discussing the question of magical realism. Johnny choice of adornments is not motivated solely by appearance but by his belief in magical forces. A closer look shows the combination of the old and the new, the traditional and the modern. While Laokolé's perspective is emotional, Johnny's is honest, connected with the real world of magic in which he believes and of which Laokolé has no idea.

Let us look briefly at the outcome of the scene where Johnny murders the boy because he threw the gun and is therefore an informant:

> "C'est toi qui a jeté cette Uzi pour fuir, n'est-ce pas?
> - Non, je vous jure… je…
> - Et qu'est-ce que tu fais ici? Pourquoi tu te caches hein? C'est pour nous canarder?
> - Non, je me cachais à cause des oranges et des bananes; maman m'a dit de ne pas me les faire voler comme la dernière fois.
> - Où est-elle? Montre-nous où elle se cache.
> - Je ne sais pas. Nous avons tous fui et je l'ai perdue dans la fuite.
> - Menteur, a dit Chien Méchant, avec un coup de crosse au visage pour accompagner ses paroles. On ne fuit pas pour des bananes, tu me prends pour un con?"
>
> L'enfant a hurlé de douleur. Il a lâché son pantalon pour porter ses deux mains à la hauteur de son visage; il n'avait pas de slip. Du sang coulait de l'une de ses arcades sourcilière.
> [….]
> Chien Méchant l'a regardé un instant et, tenant l'Uzi d'une main, il a tiré. Le gosse s'est effondré mais son corps n'est pas tombé par terre; il est resté sur les genoux lorsque sa tête a violement heurté le sol, dans une position de prière à Allah. J'ai étouffé avec ma main le cri qui allait s'échapper de ma gorge. Je ne savais pas qu'on pouvait tuer un enfant. (Dongala, 2002: 66-67)

For Laokolé's this scene probably serves as a reminder of her own father's death. Speaking from the victim's point of view, Laokolé's treatment and description of Johnny infused with trauma and therefore exaggerated.

This does not, however, mean that Johnny is less violent; it simply means that he is not understood. Laokolé provides information about Johnny without understanding him. We contend that any judgements of child soldiers should be based on a firm grasp of the reasons behind their behaviour. Although the descriptions above are realistic, they are still not free of distortion.

The contrast between the two perspectives is further developed throughout the novel so that the reader is presented with both sides of the story. From the above discussion we might conclude that readers traditionally associate pain and distress with the victim's experience of war and acts of violence with the perpetrator's. Given what we know of Laokolé's background, it may be suggested that her perception of war and child soldiers is bound up with resentment or rejection – a source of hate and anger.

The killing of the boy is by itself the subject of different interpretations by the two narrators. At first, the child victim appears to be in the wrong place at the wrong time when the Israeli gun (Uzi) is dropped by an unknown person. Laokolé sees the boy as the kind of child who hangs around in the streets selling loose cigarettes and fruit to earn a few coins in order to survive. This raises the question as to why Johnny kills the boy when he has no gun in his hands. The novel indicates that Johnny acts out of fear. Johnny assumes that this is the kind of boy who is used as an informant and sees him as a spy, an assumption that derives from the movies he often watches such as *Raid on Entebbe*. The film portrays a hostage rescue mission carried out by the Israeli Defence Forces at Entebbe Airport in Uganda in 1976. An Air France plane with 248 passengers (a third of which were Jewish) was hijacked by Palestinian terrorists and flown to Entebbe, near Kampala. We are told that the Israeli assault on Entebbe achieved its goals with stunning success. Within fifteen minutes of the first C-130 landing, the hostages had been freed and the area secured. It is even argued by Tracey White on the *Worldwide directory of special forces and government agencies* website that "any study of successful counter-terror operations would be remiss in not including this operation" (White, 1999). In Johnny's mind such operations are part and parcel of war. He therefore believes an example must be made of the boy so that his unit knows to be wary of enemy informers. The boy's misfortune is to be in the wrong place when Johnny and his friends are passing.

For her part, however, Laokolé is moved by disgust and pity, but also fear at the prospect that not even children are spared in the conflict. This is intended to shock the reader but hopefully to also make them enquire into what makes a child like Johnny murder another child. Such violence implies familiarity with killing – an attitude which heightens the grotesque effects in a lawless society.

The difference between the two narrators' responses to the event is again associated with differences in points of view. There is a distinction between what we refer to respectively as

victim/perpetrator perspectives on war. This binary is also reflected in the relationship between the two grotesque figures themselves, notably between those in the position of command and those under their command who regard themselves as victims. This issue is taken further in the next section dealing with Giap and Johnny.

5.2.4. Breaking the last remaining taboo in francophone African literature – sex

In his chapter on "Heroic ethnocentrism" in *The postcolonial studies reader,* Charles Larson writes, "Romantic love, seduction, sex – these are not the subjects of African fiction" (1995: 78). Writings on gender in Africa have tended to focus overwhelmingly on marriage, the status of women, and the social construction of female identity rather than on the graphic description of erotic love or sex. In his *African Cinema and Representations of (Homo)Sexuality* (2005), Tcheuyap cites Kuoh-Moukouryn who argues that "the explosion of sex consumption, discourse, and representation is quite unprecedent in Africa" (144). Tcheuyap clains that this critic attaches the discourse on sex to two major writers, namely, Labou Tansi and Beyala whose latest novel, *Une femme nue, femme noire* (2003) is an eloquent example. While this has been regarded as a taboo in African culture, this very culture now, as Tcheuyap contends, offers more: "sex is not only being put into words" meaning novels, "but also into images" i.e. cinema. While many African writers denounce sex as sinful and are reluctant to address it directly, Dongala departs from this tradition. This departure has not however occurred in isolation. In Sonny Labou Tanis's *La vie et demie* (1979) the girl, Chaïdana is victim of gang rape by 363 soldiers who use her for three nights. Beyala's work, too, engages with sexuality: "Her texts, along with those of Simon Njami, and Sami Tchak, show an increasing eroticization of the African text in ways that previous authors had largely shied away from" (Irele, 2009: 137). Irele also highlights Togolese writer Tchak's *Place des fêtes* (1999) as exemplary in this respect. Sexuality dominates this depiction of a dysfunctional migrant family. The mother is a prostitute, the father impotent and the adolescent children are victims or perpetrators of rape and incest. Beyala's appearance on the literary scene has, as already argued, heralded a closer examination of sexuality. Her style is regarded as "explicitly pornographic" (Irele, 2009: 138). All these authors can be seen to be "breaking taboos surrounding sexuality that have haunted much of francophone African writing since its origin" (Irele, 2009: 138).

What sets Dongala's novel apart is its consideration of sexuality within the context of war that represents a new take on war literature. *Johnny chien méchant* must therefore not be read

in terms of how faithfully it represents war and Africa or adheres to the literary conventions of the genre but how it breaks all sorts of taboos. Since the work is produced in diaspora, it is also not a reflection of an individual's society but rather global experience.

In this book, Dongala paints disturbing pictures of child soldiers raping women and children and others who delighted in rubbing pepper in the eyes of women and then laughing as they watched their asses twitch as they writhed in pain. It is true that *Johnny chien méchant* is extremely shocking in places. As we have argued, nearly all the young characters are perverted in some way. Their thoughts often turn toward sex in a way that appears shocking to a conservative society. Not only is the age of 16 years a problem in an African novel, but the way sexual behaviour is portrayed is very disturbing for some readers[43].

Consequently, one of the major criticisms of Dongala's characters is that they are sexual perverts. Is sex used by the writer as a pornographic device? Is sex used here to make the book more salacious in an attempt to boost sales? Or does the writer use sex only to shatter taboos and myths around sex in the African novel? Although questions of this nature are likely to continue to dog the novel, we contend that such criticisms of *Johnny chien méchant* show a failure in part not to pay closer attention to the social context in which the text is produced. Similar questions arises when we seek to explain how this trope distinguishes Dongala as one of the few African writers to bring sex into francophone African literature. So, we ask,'Why is the writer of *Johnny chien méchant* so preoccupied with the representation of sexuality?' and 'What other themes are associated sex in the novel?' We will try to find a different meaning behind the use of sex in this novel, for as Musilaargues, "narration is a search for and expression of meanings and truths" (Musila, 2009:22). We will demonstrate that the sexual body function as a trope that illuminates the social realities of war in the novel.

A superficial reading of *Johnny chien méchant* may reduce it to a mere pornographic work. We find it more enlightening to reflect on the characters and their actions (i.e. child soldiers'

[43] Although in some cultures a sexually active 15-year-old boys is not unusual, in the African context, a 15-year-old is considered a minor and too young to engage in such activities. "The possibility that minors or even adolescents might willingly involve themselves in criminal sexual behaviour with adults was progressively abandoned with the development in the late 20th century of a general concept of childhood innocence, especially regarding eroticism" (Angelides in Malón, 2009:180).

perverted sexual acts) in the light of the child soldier issue and war. In other words, this section is concerned with the strategy used by the writer to critique war, childhood and postcolonial political decay that continue to haunt Africa. While writing this book, the writer developed a sexual theory of war with reference to Freud, Bouthoul, Kyrle, Fornari, and others. Dongala's depiction of violent sex accords with Fornari's assumption that war allows individuals in society to experience a destructive orgasm (Fornari, 1974:93). By inscribing children's sexual experiences into his country's memories of war, the writer makes the link between the tropes of sex and war as well as sex and politics explicit. It is these connections between sex and war which justify our view that the text is not just about perverse physical pleasures. Instead, sex can also be used as a mirror in assessing and addressing issues related to globalisation, the formation of new identities, post-independence politics and what it means to be a child in Africa today. As a writer, Dongala engages with the socio-political dynamics of violence and focuses specifically on female subjectivity. He speaks of gendered violence and how masculinity in war-torn countries has come to be associated with multiple complex meanings. Violence in his narrative is meted out by the child soldiers mainly to women and depicted in vivid rape and/or the torture scenes. Violence and eroticism are intertwined in this book showing the female body, which was once symbolised the site of African colonial conquest and now represents occupied rebel territory. His writing's obsession with sexuality is perhaps indicative of the internal gender politics of African society which has not yet been sufficiently addressed by postcolonial scholars. This clearly shows that there is a link between political excess and sexual acts. In this respect, *Johnny chien méchant* offers the space in which the problems of the postcolonial state can be examined and questions of gender raised. The child soldier's immoral behaviour provides the writer with an adequate framework for representing the reality of a nation at war. The child soldier's perversion is a reflection of the postcolonial crisis itself.

In the intriguing opening to *Johnny chien méchant,* 16-year-old Johnny changes his name from Lufua Liwa to Matiti Mabé (Dongala, 2002: 21). It's not long before he once again casts off this name in favour of another – *Chien Méchant*: "Oubliez Gazon ou Matiti Mabé. Maintenant, je m'appelle CHIEN MÉCHANT" (Dongala, 2000:117). The boy claims to be mad and intends to live up to his name. While dogs are assigned positive attributes in European literature, Africans regard them negatively and associate them with glutonny and perverted sex, as Therese Zhang-Kai Ying points out: "L'image même du chien, si elle revêt souvent des connotations positives dans la littérature occidentale, se trouve souvent

stigmatisée par les auteurs africains dans son animalité cruelle" (2009:207). Acts of violence as in the description of a woman's rape by seven soldiers in front of about fifty people including the woman's daughter are not only chronicled in terms of disgust, but are also viewed as mad because the perpetrators, allegedly child soldiers, show no sign of sympathy.

Our discussion below concentrates on three main scenes of sexual abuse which exemplify how the discourse used link the act of rape with that of war. Fornari suggests in asserting that war appears "to constitute a collective destructive orgasm" (1974: 93) conflict is easily equated with the act of sexual intercourse. According to Achille Mbembe, Georges Bataille "establishes a correlation between death, sovereignty, and sexuality" (Bataille in Mbembe, 2003: 15). Furthermore, Bataille describes sexuality as "inextricably linked to violence and to the dissolution of the boundaries of the body and self by way of orgiastic and excremental impulses. As such, sexuality concerns two major forms of polarized human impulses – excretion and appropriation – as well as the regime of the taboos surrounding them" (15). This argument hinges on the superabundance or excess of sexual violence demonstrated by Johnny's appropriation of the female bodies in this novel. This boy's perverted sexual acts emanate from the vicissitudes of an Africa continent taken hostage by its postcolonial leaders who are holed up in the citadel of their sovereignty. What's more, Dongala pulls Johnny's actions back from the realm of meaning by making him mad or drunk at times. As Mbembe writes, "The truth of sex and its deadly attributes reside in the experience of loss of the boundaries separating reality, events, and fantasized objects" (15).

5.2.4.1. First sex scene: Desire for revenge and enemy conquest

Johnny shamelessly recounts his sexual adventures, including how he rapes a presenter of a national TV show called Tanya Toyo or TT in her office when his Mata Mata rebel takes control of the broadcasting station. One thing must be emphasised here: TT is no ordinary woman, she is a famous star known both nationally and internationally as a result of her profession and beauty[44], which turns even the head of the state president:

[44]In exploring the ideological underpinnings that shape the novel's narration of sexuality, it's essential that the places where these scenes of violence occur and social rank of the sexually abused women be taken into consideration. Broadly speaking, the violent scenes unfold at the workplaces and in the safety of the female victims' homes. This contrasts with the fact that most cases of rape take place outdoors. The novel shows how powerless adolescent soldiers humiliate the country's women of high social standing despite their power and wealth. This could as well mean that the text critiques officialdom, African bourgeoisie and the body politic these women represent.

> On disait même que le président de la République – celui qui venait de perdre le pouvoir il y a quelques minutes, depuis notre entrée dans la ville – dont la braguette était célèbre parce qu'elle s'ouvrait toute seule devant toute belle créature qui dandinait des fesses et portait un soutien-gorge, l'invitait souvent dans sa palais en inventant de fausses interviews, rien que pour le plaisir de la regarder. (Dongala, 2002:33)

Let us consider, first of all, that the child narrator's reference to the Congolese head of state's suspected affair with TT implicates the government in the sexual abuse of women and shows the dual abuse of Congolese women in the private and public spheres. Because sexual crimes committed by ordinary individuals like child soldiers are more visible than those committed by the local authorities, they become a matter of "class" and operate through the "politics of invisibility" (Francis, 2004: 78). The writer is highlighting a moral crisis both at the individual and state levels.

For Johnny, as we shall see, this rape has two primary motivations. First, it is the fulfilment of his childhood dream of being comforted by an elder sister: "mon bonheur céleste était qu'elle me prenne dans ses bras et me conforte comme un grande soeur" (35); second, the rape is also an expression of the boy's manhood and above all, the way his gun empowers him to do anything he likes.

The anger, shame, disgrace and embarrassment inspired by this drama are described in the passage below:

> Je lui ai dit d'enlever son grand boubou, son pagne et son soutien car je voulais voir ses seins. Elle m'a regardé sans réagir. Alors, j'ai perdu patience. J'ai arraché le grand boubou et déchiré son soutien gorge. Elle ne résistait plus, elle se laissait faire. C'est cela qui est magnifique avec un fusil et c'était vrai. J'ai enfin fait sauter son slip et j'y suis allé, là, dans le studio, sous les yeux du technicien toujours paralysé, la bouche et les yeux béants, à côté du corps de son copain. J'ai pompé, pompé la belle TT. Je crois même qu'elle aimait cela puisqu'elle pleurait de plaisir, ne s'agitait plus et me regardait froidement, les yeux ouverts comme si elle était dans un autre monde, froide comme un poisson, dissimulant bien le paradis de plaisir où la force de mes reins l'avait transportée. Je l'ai retournée et l'ai chevauchée par derrière. Avec elle, c'était pas pareille qu'avec les autres. Elle, c'était la classe, je la respectais, jamais j'avais rêvé qu'un jour je ferais ça avec elle. J'aurais aimé que les caméras de la télé soient en marche pour que tous mes copains et même Giap voient que j'avais vraiment fait la chose avec TT. Ils mourraient de jalousie, peut-être même allaient-ils me tuer. (Dongala, 2002: 36-37)

The 15-year-old boy believes that this act is proof of his manhood: "…à quinze ans, presque seize ans, j'étais un homme; je savais ce qu'on pouvait faire avec une nana, même une nana deux ans ou trois ans plus âgée que soi comme TT" (Dongala, 2000: 35). This is a violation of taboo indeed. The only chance TT has to survive is to offer herself like a lamb destined for sacrifice. She can neither defend herself nor escape, for she knows that if she does she will be killed. In fact, she has witnessed the death of one of her colleagues shot dead and laying at her side while the other frozen like a cold fish as a result of a panic attack.

The brief background preceding Johnny's perverted acts of sexual violence reveals a difficult childhood and repressed anger as the possible cause of his later behaviour.

A few years before becoming a child soldier, the boy worked in a Malian shop where he saw TT who asked him to carry her bag of rice and put it in the boot of her car, which he describes as "une de ces grosses 4 x 4 japonaises qu'on ne pouvait pas acheter même avec dix ans de salaire mais que les politiciens et gros militaires de notre pays possédaient" (Dongala, 2002: 34). The encounter is recalled in detail: "Je tremblais à cause de sa beauté… à cause de cette blouse en soie qui lui moulait sa poitrine, je tremblais à cause de son pantalon bien moulé qui faisait honte à ma culotte couverte de la boue, à cause de sa peur de chaussures hauts talons qui se moquaient de mes pieds nus, à cause de son parfum que mon odeur de fange asphyxiait..." (34). And when she gives him a tip given, the boy hurriedly withdraws his hands for fear of soiling her fingers: "...elle avait jeté trois pièces de cent francs dans ma paume ouverte que j'avais retirée aussitôt, de peur de souiller ses doigts aux ongles vernissés de rouge" (34). The encounter is indicative of the child's sense of inferiority; his trembling is a marker of cultural difference and characteristic of a poor child in a world where he feels lost. The contrasting ugliness and beauty reflects difference in class rather than gender. It is this social conflict that is revisted in the individuals' clash later on. This clearly shows how poverty has imprinted his consciousness to the extent that he has lost his sense of self-worth. This episode reveals Johnny's feelings of marginalisation and violent of exclusion from society. The violence he inflicts on this woman one or two years later, therefore stems from the earlier encounter and could be read as revenge or could simply be an act of self-affirmation. The child soldier's memory of his past, lost privilege, lust and pride is encapsulated in his question: "Tu te souviens de moi, TT?" (2002:35). The flashback to Johnny's past places the rape of TT within the context of power. As already mentioned

somewhere,"unlike women whose anger for killing derives from specific moments in their adult's life (e.g. having been abandonment by men), men's anger", fot killing,"is", Donald argues, "deeply rooted in their childhood experience" (1989:100).

Similarly, it is the gun that is the cornerstone of the boy's masculine identify. Johnny's gun serves as a powerful symbol of authority. Abuse of power by children like Johnny who were once ignored appears as a means to demand respect from other people, especially women. We also note that Johnny's initial reaction to TT is framed as that of child and parent. TT is a woman whose beauty arouses adoration and as a child he always wanted to be caressed by her. Taking these dreams into account in the context of the rape lays bare how his "repressed infantile sexual impulses are responsible for an ordinarily ineradicable confusion between, on the one hand, adult fighting and its real dangers, and on the other, infantile loving and its dangers both real and unconsciously imagined" (Glover in Fornari, 1974:87). This rape can be viewed in a sense like a fulfilment of his childhood dreams, since he had long had the need of being in her arms.

In addition to these psychological factors, there are other social factors associated with child sexual perversion which result from the reality of war. Studies on war show that rape is a common phenomenon during war. It could even be argued that "the military commitment to force, so basic to the military's *raison d'être*, naturally carries over individual behavior; hence rape and pluder can become natural to a man of arms for whom unrestrained violence and ruthless are the norm" (McNeil, 1990:220 emphasis in original). In the recent African civil wars, sex abuse or rape was regarded as a sort of trophy of war or reward to child soldiers[45]. This remains unconvincing as an argument because it suggests that "the desire would have been the result of brainwashing" (Malón, 2009:180) rather than real desire. Child soldiers' must bear a degree of responsibility for these violations. Taken to its natural conclusion, the appropriation of the female body by child soldiers must ultimately be regarded as territorial occupation and highlights the parallels between weapons and sexual organs. The gun which Johnny uses to terrify women is a symbolic penis while land represents the vagina. As such women are viewed as a territory for conquest and rebel

[45] One RUF operation in Sierra Leone was even called "Operation Fine Girl" whose aim "was to find and abduct pretty girls, especially virgins, the younger the better" as sex slaves (Singer, 2006: 104).

occupation. Just as the fear of the gun causes TT to lose control over her body, the same fear results in relinquishing control over territory in wartime. Not surprisingly, the gun is a free pass to do as you please, especially when people have lost their humanity and culture. Fornari suggests that "the problem of the sexual symbolism of weapons seems to confirm the thesis that fantasies of war, closely interwoven with infantile sexual symbols, are to be considered a sort of pandemic phenomenon, an almost daily event, in the preconscious of every man even in a time of peace" (1974:89).

When comments on the rape, "Je crois même qu'elle aimait cela puisqu'elle pleurait de plaisir" (Dongala, 2002:36) the silence which veils TT's inability to react or defend herself is interpreted as masochism, an enjoyment of punishment (i.e. sexual torture). The implication is that the silence maintained by most African women who suffer traumatic effects of rape, condemns them to complicity in their misery and also encourages the perpetrators to continue raping women. Another example of this in the novel is the hyperbolic description of the child soldier, Male-Lourd's oversized penis which women help him carry:

> Sa chose-là fonctionnait très bien. Il paraît même que quand elle était excitée, elle atteignait la grosseur d'une trompe d'éléphant; elle devenait alors si lourde qu'il avait de la peine à la soulever tout seul, d'où le surnom de Mâle-Lourd que lui aurait donné les femmes qui l'aidaient dans cette besogne. (Dongala, 2002: 115)

Not only is the reality of women's sexual abuse clouded by fantasy in this passage. This caricature of women helping Mâle-Lourd to lift up his large penis is not just artistic; it denounces women complicity manifested by their willing participation. Women's victimisation is, to some extent, an outgrowth of their passivity. Until they learn how to defend their rights, they will continue to be helpless victims. One may even go as far as to argue that if rebellion has escalated in Africa, it is because we have allowed it.

5.2.4.2. Second sex scene: Why has the country become like this?

The scene below is recounted by Johnny once more exposes the folly of this youth. The use of this dirty joke by the 16-year-old gives the book its grotesque context that of the immoral life lived by child soldiers. In this way, Dongala shows how violence becomes part of conversational practice and everyday life. However, the language in use here functions as a metaphore.

> Ma chose était devenue débout-debout et le "debout-debout", comme une tête de fusée, a d'abord exploré la bouche de ma Lovelita que j'ai ensuite retournée; elle s'est mise à quatre pattes, j'ai laissé son jeans et sa culotte qui sont tombés sur ses brodequins. Arc-bouté sur mes jambes, j'ai glissé mes mains le long de ses flancs pour saisir à pleines paumes les deux oranges de sa poitrine que je suçais un instant auparavant, tandis qu'une décharge électrique a couru le long de ma colonne vertébrale avant de s'irradier à travers tout mon être lorsque enfin la tête de ma fusée chercheuse de son long corps a pénétré dans le tunnel soyeux et humide que sa croupe cabrée, légèrement surélevée et projetée en arrière m'offrait. Avec des violents coups de boutoir, je l'ai prise encore et encore jusqu'au moment où, soudainement maboule sous le choc de la giclée de lave fumante éjectée du Nyiragongo de mes entrailles, elle a planté ses dents dans la chair de mon avant-bras immédiatement après le cri de plaisir qu'elle a lâché, un hurlement plus déchirant que celui du cochon de Piston. J'ai crié à mon tour, mais de douleur. La vache. Elle m'avait probablement arraché un morceau de chair dans la houle de son orgasme cannibale. K.O.nous sommes tombés dans l'herbe tous les deux.
>
> J'avais l'impression de sortir d'un brouillard quand j'ai vu Lovelita étalée dans l'herbe sous la lueur blafarde et sournoise de la lune. Pourquoi son sexe était-il à découvert, sa culotte beige et son pantalon jeans repoussé à hauteur de ses chevilles ? Ah, je me souviens, je pense que nous avons fait l'amour…(Dongala. 2002:194-195)

The above quote is, in our view, Dongala's finest composition, and perhaps the most precious metaphoric language which he ascribes to love and romance in this book. It is a piece of speech, full of choice language and deep philosophic thought. To start with, Lovelita's naked breasts which Johnny compares to oranges have a psychological significance. In psychoanalytic theory, the breast is associated with loss (Donald, 1989: 162). In fact, the object of the infant's "primal hallucination" in which he seeks to reproduce the experience of satisfaction in the absence of the real object (e.g. milk) is not the real object but the "hallucinated object linked with the very earliest experiences of the rise and resolution of desire" (162). Like Donald, Lacan views desire as the pursuit of an eternally lost object. Donald argues that "the work of fantasy is to try to cover the moment of separateness between before and after… between the two stages represented by real experience and its hallucinatory revival, between the object that satisfies and the sign which describes the object and its absence..."(Lacan in Donald, 1989:162). Johnny and the child soldiers' obsession with women is not driven by a need to satisfy their uncontrolled passions but by their desire to regain what is lost. Seen from this psychoanalytic perspective, Lovelita's naked body

represents the country's past (i.e. before things got out of control).[46]While it is true that Johnny enjoyed sex with this girl, however, he later expresses his regret at seeing her exposed just like most men lose interest in women after sex. He sadly observes: "j'ai vu Lovelita étalée dans l'herbe sous la lueur blafarde et sournoise de la lune. Pourquoi son sexe était-il à découvert…?" (Dongala, 2002:195). The use of orgasm in a war novel often announces, not body satisfaction, but destruction. By these words, "soudainement maboule sous le choc de la giclée de lave fumante éjectée du Nyiragongo de mes entrailles" Johnny explains how he and Lovelita reached their secret world of orgasm. Although Johnny mounted on wings of love and joy to his heavenly blue like a conqueror, however, he descends this scale like someone who has lost interest in the act. Nowhere else is this better articulated than in this sentence: "Pourquoi son sexe était-il à découvert…?" The boy seems confounded in the realisation that she shouldn't be where she is - in the grass. By this statement, Johnny seems to be making a conscious effort to understand his fault. It is as if he asks, 'Why has our country become like this?' If a character like Johnny can come to such a realisation, this is the greatest confession, which makes all his other monstrous acts, amount to only little, if not excusable. Boy, girl, sex and love, etc. are elements in this novel symbolism. Although the country was devastated by war and many of its inhabitants dead, wounded, child soldiers leave us with this unsuspected message that they tooare not happy to see their country where it is now.

5.2.4.3. Third sex scene: The classical body in disgrace

The third scene occurs in the house of Mr. and Mrs. Ibara in Kandahar district. The people who live here are mainly bureaucrats on the government payroll who steal large sums of money from the state treasury or are active party members. The boys break into the villa belonging to the customs inspector, Mr. Ibara, a man who gets a ten percent commission on all imported goods and has skimmed off more money from the nation's customs revenues than the president did from oil revenues. He is reported as enjoying life while others were dying of hunger. Mrs. Ibara is not an ordinary woman either. She comes from a rich family; her father was the ambassador to Senegal and she herself is a teacher. Her beauty is admired by the child soldiers who refer to the husband as "l'homme à la belle femme" (Dongala, 2002:261). Clearly, this couple belongs to the elites or higher class. We will argue that the encounter between the child soldiers and this couple illuminates sexuality as a point where

[46]Using traditional values as a departure point, Lovelita is typically unfeminine. The girl acts in a typically masculine way. This has been described by Angela McRobbie as a kind of "phallic girlhood" (McRobbie, 2007:7).

the grotesque body of the poor comes into contact with the apparently untouchable classic body of the rich, the intellectual and politically empowered.

The rape of the intellectual and rich man's wife Mrs Ibara opens the text to its overt economic and political themes and mockery of the power of the rich. In the passage below, Johnny embarks on a sadistic attack on the rich man and his wife which he recounts in gruesome detail:

> […] Et puis, en regardant la femme de M. Ibara étalée par terre, j'ai eu envie de baiser la femme d'un grand.
> Je me suis précipité sur elle, comme ça, soudainement. Très vite, il ne me restait plus que son slip à arracher. M. Ibara, qui voulait venir à sa défense, a reçu un coup de crosse et est tombé dans son sofa en cuir, fermement retenu par Piston et Petit Piment qui ricanaient. Il ne cessait de crier "Tuez-moi! Après ce que vous m'avez fait, il vaut mieux me tuer." La femme se débattait comme une furie, essayant de me donner des coups de pied ou de me mordre. Je l'ai frappée et au bout d'un moment elle était épuisée et ne résistait plus.
> J'ai cavalé, j'ai pompé, pompé. Je baisais la femme d'un grand. Je me suis senti comme un grand. Je baisais aussi une intellectuelle pour la première fois de ma vie. Je me suis senti plus intelligent. Enfin j'ai lâché ma décharge. "C'est mon tour", a crié Petit Piment dès qu'il m'a vu me relever. (Dongala, 2002: 269-270)

The scene caricatures a king and queen reduced to clowns. With their reign over, Mr. and Mrs Ibara are abused and beaten just like the king in Rabelais' time was mocked. Bakhtin asserts that "abuse reveals the other, true face of the abused; it tears off his disguise and mask. It is the king's uncrowning" (1968:197). As Johnny is aware, nothing humiliates a man more than seeing his wife violated before his eyes while he is unable to do anything about it. Again, this act of gang rape is carried out in front of the man claims his wife's body but loses control over it. The power of a rich man is shown to have limits; his money cannot always save him. The central aim of humiliating Mr. Ibara who begs to be killed rather than endure it is evident when the child soldiers compel him to make love to his wife while they are watching. While the woman was on the floor, one of the child soldiers pressed a gun against her private parts and threatens to kill her if the husband fails to cooperate. Mr. Ibara finally obeys just to save his wife's life, an act which pleases Johnny who is very excited to see a rich man humiliated:

> […] M. Ibara, Mayi-dogo, a regardé Mme. Ibara, sa femme Dogo-mayi. Elle était allongée par terre, dans un pitieux état, serrant ses cuisses ensanglantées et sanglotant. Petit Piment a pointé le canon de son

> kalach sur le sexe de Mme Ibara, prêt à "rafaler". Chialant, M. Ibara s'est levé tout doucement, a déboutonné lentement son pantalon qu'il a laissé tomber à ses pieds; ça faisait plaisir de voir l'humiliation d'un grand. Il s'est avancé lentement, péniblement, hagard comme l'ombre d'un zombi et, debout au-dessus de son épouse, a baissé son slip. Son sexe pendant mollement, misérablement. (Dongala, 2002:272)

Mr. Ibara is even considered lucky because his daughters were not around, or he would have been forced him to have sex with them, too. Such incidents where women suffered severe physical and mental pain along with public humiliation are repeated throughout the novel. Johnny recalls a time when Giap forced a boy to rape his grandmother while they stood around and laughed.

From the above scenes we have seen how Johnny has made women slaves and unable to own their personalities. A closer examination of these scenes offers reasons as to why this happens. These outrages against personal dignity or sexual integrity are first and foremost meant to humiliate the rich and not necessarily a symptom of sexual appetite. As such, the child soldiers' behaviour is sadistic. Sadism is defined as "a behaviour in which someone gets pleasure from hurting other people or making them suffer" (Longman Dictionaries, 1978). Although such actions should not be condoned, they convey, as argued before, economic, social and political truths. Arguably, the humiliation of the rich by the poor is inevitable in a world where they are separated by a huge gulf. The opposition between these two worlds – the world of the rich as opposed to that of the poor (or child soldiers) – is a manifestation of the class struggle in its most acute form. The case of Mrs. Ibara reminds one of the art and beauty in the old system of rule, which she symbolises. When the boys come into the house, they ask Mr. Ibara questions related to school subjects to test him. While he was unable to answer them, his wife, a school teacher, was able to answer all of them. This shows that the first regime was not just made of stupid people as one might think, some of them were highly educated despite the lacking leadership. If Mr. Ibara is equated with the first dictatorial regime that Johnny and his friends helped to overthrow, his wife simultaneously symbolises the decay of that authority and the regeneration of Africa through female fertility.

Dongala's description of the body in this text is analogous to Bakhtin's grotesque body. From a Bakhtin perspective, *Johnny chien méchant* foregrounds the difference between the grotesque body (as represented by child soldiers) and the privileged and protected body of

the rich (as represented by the rich) and which we equate here with the classical body. When Bakhtin described the distinction between bodies he was writing about the classical body of the renaissance period and comparing it to the grotesque body of carnival. The classical body is represented in statues and classical iconography and is usually elevated on a pedestal, to be viewed from below. It is closed, "with no openings or orifices", distant from and seemingly indifferent to the viewer, frozen in time, and therefore unengaged and "disembodied" (Stallybrass & White, 1986:21-22). "The opaque surface and the body's 'valleys' acquire an essential meaning as the border of a closed individuality that does not merge with other bodies and with the world" (Bakhtin, 1965:317). While the classical body presents an impenetrable surface, the grotesque body "protrudes, bulges, sprouts and branches off" (Bakhtin, 1965:320). According to Bakhtin, the grotesque body represents the point at which the individual body penetrates and intersects with the outside world and with other bodies. While the rich refuse to mingle with the poor, the latter are often eager to penetrate the closed environment of the rich. The constant reiteration of the trope of bodies gives the story a grotesque quality, and represents the forces of attraction and repulsion between the two types of bodies or worlds. The child soldiers seem to challenge the concept of the classical body which is rich, protected and undesirous of contact. Perhaps the coupling of these bodies, the beautiful, perfumed body of the elite and politically connected of Mrs. Ibara or TT, on the one hand, and the odorous, muddy body of the lower class child soldiers, on the other, could be interpreted as the fusing of binary opposites. The discourses surrounding the grotesque and the classical bodies evoke notions such as orifices, filth – tropes which, in turn, refute closness, purity as they appeal multiplicity and heterogeneity. That is why after raping Mrs. Ibara, Johnny is heard saying, "Je baisais la femme d'un grand. Je me suis senti comme un grand" (Dongala, 2002:269).

While Mr. and Mrs. Ibara's excessive wealth turns them into insensitive people, the violence that their class is exposed to threatens to become both permanent and sanctioned because the rich finds it difficult to share with the poor and the poor will always see violence as the only means to make themselves heard. Under the title "Murderous parents, trustful Children" (2009), Tamás Juhász's book *Comparative Literatue Studies* (2009) cites Georges Bataille on the perpetuation of violence through sadism: "the sadist does not care about the continued existence of the world… in the world of torture man exists only by ruining the other person who stands before him" (2009:659). This is partly reflected in this novel through Mr. Ibara who is accused by child soldiers of ignoring the welfare of others. Sartre's concept of sadism

is also relevant in this regard. Upon this, he argues that what is needed to reassure the narcissistic and cruel individual is not just the suffering of the other but also a degree of resistance, a condition of relative wellbeing from which the victim may be reduced to a condition of pain. Dongala's story portrays Johnny and his acolytes as just such characters who aim to drag Mr. and Mrs. Ibara down into disgrace – although they don't kill him as they have others. As Juhász says elsewhere, "the Other is not simply exterminated, rather the victim as a tortured dying Other must first be identified in his life and struggle for survival, because only the proof of his existence can guarantee the satisfaction that stems from his elimination" (699). Consequently, "to inflict pain and death, a torturer must encourage a belief in the victim that he or she will continue to exist and must induce trust in him or her" (699). Johnny's words, "Messieurs les grands de ce monde, sachez que les petits existent aussi et chaque fois qu'ils le pourront, ils ne vous rateront pas. Ouais, vous avez intérêt à le savoir" (Dongala, 2002: 270) are a strong statement that should not be taken lightly.

By bringing Johnny's acts of rape into the capitalist context, it becomes apparent that Johnny's problem is that his 'Eros' is not satisfied. He wants to possess all the beautiful women and his striving for this through sexual relations is symbolic of the private ownership which defines the bourgeoisie (e.g. Mr. Ibara). In this regard, Mr. Ibara and Johnny and his friends are not very different – they are all crave wealth. How can Johnny expect to be different from Mr. Ibara if they both share the same principles of acquisition to the detriment of others? Raping women is paralleled by the rape of the country. Just as theft and embezzlement fulfil the desires for capitalists such as Mr. Ibara, war allows rebels like Johnny to loot the country in the name of democracy.

5.2.4.4 Trauma and Healing

By allowing female characters to speak about their abuse, he moves sex into the public realm, a dimension which we said is new to this fiction. Emphasis will be put on two testimonies that illustrate the writer's use of grotesque language.

During their coverage of the war, the journalists meet the women and children in the refugee camp and challenge them to open up about their traumatic experiences. One woman admits that although she would like to keep her rape a secret, she cannot because it occurred in public: "je n'ai pas été violée dans l'anonymat, cela s'est passé en public" (Dongala, 2002: 342). Shame looks to what ppeople would say, or might be conceived of as saying if they

knew. Shame is not a motive which we can expect to find in this novel. It is this feeling which is repudiated by this woman who shouts:

> Sept soldats m'ont brutalement violentée devant une cinquantaine d'autres et devant ma fille. Je ne peux plus cacher cela. Regardez ma fille, elle a douze ans, quel homme voudra encore d'elle après ceci? Quelles maladies lui ont-ils communiquées? Qui peut me dire si elle n'a pas attrapée une grossesse aussi puisque nous sommes abandonnées à nous mêmes, sans aucun médecin ni personne pour nous aider, nous parler, nous soigner? Il faut que le monde extérieur sache ce qui se passe ici. Dites au monde entier que les autorités de notre pays sont des criminelles car elles sont responsables de ces soldats. (Dongala, 2002:343)

As already pointed out, while African culture allows that women must suffer in silence, Dongala's female characters dismiss the idea of discussing it behind closed doors to save their honour and suggest that it should dealt with in public. This woman makes it clear that both the act of rape and the rapists must be exposed.

While the violence in the first testimony was inflicted by the soldiers, in the following testimony it is self-inflicted as a result of wartime suffering. The second woman therefore condemns the conditions which expose women and children to such risks of being sexually abused. She admits that she was not raped but offered her body because. she was in desperate need of some tablets to save her child who was dying from malaria:

> Moi, je n'ai pas été violée, mais c'est d'une autre honte que je veux vous parler. Je me suis vendue, oui, regardez-moi bien, entendez-moi clairement, j'ai vendu mon corps pour quatre comprimés de chloroquine afin de sauver la vie de mon enfant qui allait mourir d'une crise de paludisme. (Dongala, 2002:344)

Such painful memories far from being experiences of personal traumas, they also depict a process of cultural breakdown intensified by wars. It is possible that Dongala by this portrayal has in view the social evils of his people as well as the general lack of morality. So, it would appear that reading rape and sexuality in the context of war is very challenging, it blurs the boundaries between rape and consensual sex. Sexuality, in this context, becomes almost enigmatic, especially to non-Africans. And in that bold and daring confession, the adulterer had words for her disgrace: " Cet enfant est encore vivant aujourd'hui parce que j'ai donné mes fesses" (Dongala, 2002:344). Laokolé, as if giving a confirmatory comment on her words says, "J'ai regardé Katelijine comme pour la juger, me demandant si cette Européenne

pouvait aussi comprendre les souffrances de ces femmes..." (345). She likes to think that it is hard for many people to understand what African women went through during wartime. We cannot help ourselves to burry such memories if we are to avoid this in the future. Reading such memories is equally found to be essential to make the perpetrators see the impact of their inhumane acts on women who live traumatised and without a sense of self-worth despite their attempts to forget.

Throughout Dongala's treatment of this subject, he makes statements of universal application rather than just giving his opinions which can be disputed. His message could also be interpreted as laying a new foundation rather than simply challenging the ethical beliefs of his countrymen. The writer is indeed a good example of African writers who deal with issues that constitute danger to social welfare. To this end, the observation that a novel can be regarded as opening new ground by the way it shocks both the readers and the culture in which it is produced, succinctly frames this book's interest in the deployment of sexuality, not only as taboo-breaking, but also as bringing a new form of writing to francophone fiction.

This novel can read as a story of a nation whose fate is articulated or narrated through the metaphor of the woman's body flesh subjected to violence. Like the act of raping, the country crumbles under the weight of war. And like the violated woman, the country is scarified to thieves. Before concluding, let us come back to Vincent Sherry (2005) whose suggestion that "emphasis on gender and sexuality would help to widen the definition of war literature" (102) is convincing. And with this in mind, Johnny becomes even a believable character[47].

5.2.5 The banquet imagery and the myth of cattle raiding

Military service is usually subject to a moral and values as well as strict discipline, although this is depicted in most war novels as deteriorating in the face of the enormous loss of life, the

[47] In *Pornography and sexual representation,* Joseph W. Slade (2001) cites Strother Purdy who, in turn, argues that "literary eroticism often seems unreal precisely because censorship denies sex a place in a normal life". Purdy, Slade notes, "laments the lack of scholarly attention devoted to sexual behaviour" (837-838). Not doing so, we deprive ourselves from uncovering certain hidden aspects which only the in-depth study on sexuality could do. *Johnny chien méchant* appears shocking in its portrayal of sex, but the truly shocking in art "occurs", as Fraser argues, "when the artist's gaze has been turned as firmly and in a sense disinterestedly as possible on concrete human behaviour and when he himself has been shocked by the capacity of people and events to pass violently beyond limits to which he himself has assented (1974:116). The uneasy reading of this novel comes when one reads it without realising what sexuality points to in this text and gets lost in the characters' fascination with sexuality.

difficulty of coping with poor conditions and insufficient food. In contrast, *Johnny chien méchant* offers carnivalesque feasts in which child combatants eat, drink and dance. They allow themselves to enjoy the spoils of war in ways that contradict the strict codes of conduct applicable to most armies in the world. The world of the heroes is said not to be enjoyed by the villain; it is the world of suffering, fasting and faith before translating itself into victory. The truly consecrated soldier, as we said, carries only what he needs for the warfare laying aside pleasure afraid of entangling himself with such things as one specially set apart by the government for his service. Yet the child soldiers offer just the opposite. The war in which they are involved is flooded with feasts, singing and dancing, as Johnny himself remarks, "nous nous sommes tellement régales qu'un moment nous avons oublié que nous étions en mission de combat. Quelques fois la guerre c'était vraiment chouette" (Dongala, 2002:192). In this manner, Africa's civil war shares a lot in common with war in ancient culture which was often accompanied with collective festivity. According to Fornari such "dancing stresses the relation of war to feast" (1974:24). Once more the writer's description of armed forces in conflict also accords with Bouthoul's view that war shares all the characteristics of war as a feast of which the principal function is to unify the group. The most typical psychological senses of the word, are: 1) it brings about a meeting of the members of a group; 2) it is a rite of expenditure and dissipation; 3) it is accompanied by a modification of certain moral laws; 4) it is a rite of collective exaltation; 5) it brings about a state of physical insensitivity; 6) it is accompanied by sacrificial rites (Bouthoul in Fornari, 1974: 23). By undermining war's very *raison d'être,* Dongala clearly highlights its absurdity.

Johnny and his companions are on the rampage when they notice a man transporting a pig on his bike. Piston who cannot resist pork shouts and gesticulates to Johnny as he warnted him to stop. In Piston's village, we are told, not only was pork the favourite dish of the men folk but most importantly a suitor who wanted to marry had to prove his worth to his girl's family by bringing them a stolen pig: "avant d'épouser une gonzesse, un prétendant devait démontrer sa valeur à sa belle-famille en lui ramenant un cochon, pas n'importe quel cochon, mais un cochon volé" (Dongala, 2002: 129). The man pleads in vain as Piston hoists the animal onto his shoulders and walks back to the car with a triumphant air which won him a "Bravo!" from Lovelita. A large-scale feast is organised by child soldiers as a banquet, the meals consist of the pork, some cassava roots, roast chicken, tins of sardines, corned beef, several baguettes of bread and the bottles of beer they had looted to celebrate their victory. The celebration is accompanied by the music of Congolese Papa Wemba. Johnny grabs Lovelita by the waist

and they dance while the others applaud. As Andrew Murray says, "Sorrow and anxiety cannot eat, joy celebrates its feasts with eating and drinking" (2001:49). Considering that many of these children were starving in the past, the excessive food and drink found at their banquet is a way of compensating for their sorrowful past. Clearly, Johnny and his group have entered the conflict largely for what they can gain through looting. Children's amusement, as we may see, suggests their playful attitude toward war. However, this is not the only meaning behind their actions. The banquet imagery are also found in Rabelais' novels. "Through the act of eating," Bakhtin notes, "there is an encounter of man and the world; here man tastes the world, introduces it in his body; man swallows, devours, rends the world apart, is enriched and grows at the world's expense (1968:281). Here, as elsewhere the pig as a metaphor has a rich history of symbolic use. Stealing a pig meant that a man had to risk his own life if he wished to marry. In other words, he had to pass a test of maturity through which he proves that he is able to provide for his spouse and household. Bakhtin observes that tere is a long history associated with "the image of food related to work" (181). For Bakhtin, "If food is separated from work then nothing remains of the old images" (1968: 281). The Apostle Paul's told the Thessalonians that "if anyone will not work, neither shall he eat" (Thess. 3:9-10). In this manner, war is connected to material resources although "it is wrong to reduce the meaning of violence to mere economics" (Mbembe, 1992:12). Significantly, the concept of food as a fundamental right motivates these children's looting as is well illustrated by the extortion of the pig.

Pork is not eaten in all cultures, as some consider pigs unclean. Pigs, however, have inspired frequent references in many literatures. As described above, they can represent blessing (or fertility) in marriage. In "I have Been a Perfect Pig: A Semiosis of Swine in 'Circe'", Eric D. Smith, sees pigs as closely aligned with forces of regeneration and over abundant sexuality (2002: 133). Upon this, Claudine Fabre-Vassus argues that "before the Renaissance, the pig was seen as a symbolic representation of fertility due to the frequency and profligacy with which it produced offspring and was often sought out by sterile women for its restorative power of fecundity (Fabre Vassus in Smith, 2002: 133). On the other hand, the image of the stolen pig is not without significance in *Johnny chien méchant*. It reminds us of the acquisition of wealth in this war by child soldiers through plunder or extortion. Furthermore, it may be related to the ancient practice of cattle raiding. *Charly en guerre* and *Johnny chien méchant* reappropriate the myth of cattle raiding as a useful tool for investigating the nature of war and the phenomenon of child soldiery in postcolonial Africa. These writers seem to

claim that the practice of looting is derived from such ancient practices. In this sense, child soldiers are new raiders who perpetuate the old practices. The writers attribute this to the practice of warfare which grapples daily with lingering primitive customs despite an apparently modern world. Is Dongala trying to say that this practice legitimises pillage, rape and extortion? Child soldiers administer violent deaths in order to expropriate goods. In this respect, the novel reads as an allegorical interpretation of war as a phenomenon which sees the resurgence to some extent of archaic customs in modern warfare. With reference to the Embu people, Ali A. Mazrui, for one, comments in his *Soldiers as traditionalizers: Military rule and the Africanization of Africa* that:

> The experience of warriorhood during adolescence helped in transforming an Embu boy into an Embu man... The tradition of raiding for livestock was strong in the cluster of societies in the area, and the Embu trained their young men both to protect their own herds from enemies and also to raid the neighbouring peoples'... Raiding enemy tribes for live-stock (and women) and in the process achieving fame in fighting were dominant concerns of warriorhood in Embuland. The first raid was important for a young man, contributing to the legitimisation of his new role. (Mazrui, 1977: 252)

This quote indicates that a warrior "was not simply a person who waited until his cattle or his women were attacked before using his military skills for defensive purposes." Instead, he considered economic competition as being *not primarily a rivalry* between individuals or sub-groups within the same society, as competition is taken to be in Western capitalist countries, but more a continuing dialectic of rivalry with alien or semi-alien societies nearby" (252, emphasis ours). It may as well be stated that war is triggered primarily by rivalry but also as a means of achieving fame.

The role of the pig in this novel has all the ingredients of myth within both the European and African traditions, making it truly universal. Some may find it difficult to appreciate pigs to the same extent as the ancient African tribes that the writer through the mouth of the child soldier, Piston, ironically references in his remarks to Johnny: "on ne tue pas un cochon comme un homme, c'est-à-dire n'importe comment… il faut le tuer proprement, avec respect" (Dongala, 2002: 191). The ironic implication is that a pig is more valuable than a human being, this is an important insight into child soldiers's thinking.

The value of the pig considered by some as ugly and unclean as already mentioned is worth some attention here. Harpham refers to Mary Douglas who in her study *Purity and Danger*

discusses the religious logic of "that which is rejected is ploughed back for a renewal of life" (1982: 56). Tribes expect the bride to be as fertile as a pig. Arguably, fertility can come out of dirt.[48] The sacrificial pig to be offered to the in-laws in exchange for the bride is a symbol of life given in return for the new life of offspring. Bearing this in mind, the image of the pig serves as a key to unlocking the identities of rebels and child soldiers who "cross boundaries and defy conventions, run against our mental habits" (Harpham, 1982: 56). Such a way of thinking contrasts with binary categories of good and bad. For the post-structuralists, good can come out of evil. Who says that tomorrow Africa will not emerge out of the ruins of her wars? In short, Dongala's book is concerned with the "future body" – those not yet born (Bakhtin, 1968) "and each organ of this body sends down the most valuable part of its nourishment in the procreative region" (379). It is this downward movement in which the sex, rape and killing take place. Dongala uses the stolen pig as a symbol that highlights figures of speech and images as narrative devices that draw attention to historical and social circumstances. Furthermore, the feast on the spoils of war portrays conflict and current ideologies as monstrous systems of consumption.

As we have seen, the pig is not regarded in an exclusively positive light. According to Smith it also "retains its ambivalent, conflictual status" (2002: 143) such as "its simultaneous banality and fearsomeness, its provision of food on the one hand and destruction, on the other,... its position... as creator and destroyer of the universe, and its association of both good and evil" (142-143). Thus, the pig becomes a site of discursive conflict where multiple perspectives converge. In this respect, the theme of pig is tied to the grotesque as much as the child soldier is to it. For the child soldier, as stated in Chapter 1, represents a contradictory blend of good and evil as the pig does for us here. The ambiguous identity of the child soldier in the novel underscores the "book's refusal of a monologic modern economy of representation" (144). As a postcolonial writer, Dongala cultivates the same ambiguity and complex views in his novel as are prevalent in society today regarding child soldiers.

[48]The same logic is found among the Lele people of western Kasai through their mystification of the pangolin recorded by Geoffrey Galt Harpham (1982). According to him, the Lele have created an inner cult around this animal, which apparently defies categorisation – it has scales like a fish, climbs trees and although it suckles its young, it is more like an egg-laying lizard. Instead of being abhorred and utterly anomalous, the pangolin is eaten in solemn ceremony by its initiates who are thereby enabled to minister fertility to their kind. For this reason, consequently, Harpham regards the Lele as modern poststructuralists who refuse to see things in binary terms, instead embracing syncretism, a concept others often refer to as perversion due to lack of an appropriate word. Essentially, it is believed that something creative can come out of this perversion; a phenomenon Harpham refers to as "sacred uncleanness" (57).

To conclude this section, we concur with Glover that "theft, at one time regarded as a form of behaviour determined by economic motivations, is today considered a form of psychological behaviour" (Glover in Fornari, 1974: 20). For Glover, the tendency to view war as a possibility of economic gain is a distortion of reality, which he compares to a pathology such as gambling. As he explains, "games of chance also offer a possibility of economic gain, and in the same manner as a gambler incurs the risk of losing, the nation starting a war exposes itself to defeat" (20). Interestingly, "both the gambler and the nation starting a war are generally incapable of looking objectively at the loss or defeat to which they expose themselves" (20). The role of economic motivation in war seems to be masked by the potential winnings. This is the basis of Dongala's representation of the economic aspect of war through feasting, cattle raiding, child soldiers' lootings, loss of goods by the civilians, etc. The myth of cattle raiding recalls another – that "if we have enough to eat it is because someone else has too little [or nothing]" (Fornari, 1974:117), in other words, we have deprived someone else of their meal.

5.2.6 The ambivalence and irony of violence

Many critics of *Johnny chien méchant* only look at the subversive role played by Johnny in this novel. Johnny's importance in mirroring a decadent society – the key message if the novel – is not always appreciated. We argue that although the writer makes Johnny as grotesque a figure as one expects a child soldier to be, he also shows him to be a victim. Johnny undergoes a major transformation from the boy working at the shop to the unstoppable rapist, looter and killer that he becomes. While the writer does not elaborate on the child soldiers' background in the same manner that Kourouma does with his child protagonist, there is no sure evidence that Johnny, Giap, Mâle-Lourd, Piston, Caïman, etc, were previously involved in violence and not just odd jobs like Johnny's work as a doorkeeper and Giap's sales of rotten fish in the market place.

The book offers some reasons why Johnny should also be considered as a victim. The plot also raises questions about capitalism, dictatorship, and social class discrimination, which are found in contemporary styles of leadership. Johnny accuses the leaders of behaving like con men:

> Nous on s'enfoutait parce que nous connaissions la nature des hommes politiques de chez nous. Tous des sorciers. Ils arrivaient à vous soûler avec des paroles plus sucrées que du vin de palme fraîchement récolté et pendant que vous vous laissiez bercer par le ronron de ces belles paroles,

> ils avaient vite fait de grimper sur votre dos pour atteindre le mât de cocagne qu'ils convoitaient et une fois là-haut, riches et bien gavés, ils vous pétaient dessus. (Dongala, 2002: 101)

This reveals that Johnny is simply another victim of the system in which the authorities fart on the public's heads. Farting and shitting are potent symbols. Harpham goes so far as to suggest that "the belching and farting in Rabelais is accorded a spiritual value because of its connection with the mediating and unifying air" (1982:108). His reasoning being that because we all breathe the same air, there is no way of escaping the smell created by one rotten apple. The rich and powerful have polluted the political realm and left the poor (children in this context) to suffer the consequences. However, in contrast to the title character in *Charly en guerre* and Mâle-Lourd in *Johnny chien méchant*, Johnny makes no attempt to escape his descent into corruption. He naïvely clings to his dreams of becoming a colonel and does not once question this choice. But it is also true that with no one to advise him otherwise, he appears abandoned in this world. This abandonment is a common feature of the child soldiers in all three novels. Beti's *Mission to Kala* (1964) poignantly describes this fate when the child protagonist Medza and his cousin Zambo leave Kala or Africa for a life of wandering, but not before discovering that:

> … the tragedy which our nation is suffering today is that of a man left to his own devices in a world which does not belong to him, which he has not made and does not understand. It is the tragedy of a man bereft of any intellectual compass, a man walking blindly thorough the dark in some hostile city like New York. Who will tell him that he can only cross Fifth Avenue by the pedestrian crossing, or teach him how to interpret the traffic sign? (Beti in Gérard, 1986:518)

The abandoned child is condemned to a life on the margins. Most francophone postcolonial novels of the past six decades inscribe themselves with a marginal space.

The grotesque practice of looting, we are told, has its origins source in politics, not in child soldiery. Johnny offers a dramatic description of the African rulers:

> Je ne sais pas pourquoi je racontais cela à une bande de gens qui n'avaient rien à apprendre dans l'art de piller puisqu'ils l'avaient déjà fait mille fois et puisque c'était la raison majeure pour laquelle nous combattions. Pour nous enrichir. Pour faire ramper un adulte. Pour avoir toutes les nanas qu'on voulait. Pour la puissance que donnait un fusil. Pour être maître du monde. Ouais, tout ça à la fois. Mais nos chefs et notre président nous ont ordonné de ne pas dire cela. Ils nous ont enjoint de dire à ceux qui nous poseraient des questions que nous combattions

> pour la liberté et la démocratie et cela pour nous attire les sympathies du monde extérieur. (Dongala, 2002:80)

The writer evokes the current situation to show that the motives behind this war and its lootings are symptomatic of a people and a culture with a blind spot. In ther words, the child soldiers' violence and looting is surprisingly sanctioned by the local political authorities. This means that these children are doing what they were told to do. The text does not show that Johnny and his friends have completely failed to live up to expectations, quite the contrary. This gives us an opportunity to question the postcolonial ideologies of the 1990s, which we believe have played a negative role in the lives of these children. What begins to emerge from this discussion is that the writer forces us to question the legacy of colonial systems whose substance survives in current African governments.

The consistent use of ambivalence and irony throughout the novel accentuates the multiple perspectives on the war. This strategy is central to understanding the child soldier characters and their violence. While caricaturing Johnny is unusual, any attempt to depict a perpetrator positively would seem a betrayal by the writer of his people who have suffered rape, looting, and extortion and death at the hands of child soldiers. All this is captured in Laokolé's lament below:

> Par contre je n'arrivais pas à lier l'exploitation du diamant avec la cruauté de ce milicien qui se faisait appeler Chien Méchant et avait abattu à bout portant un gosse qui le suppliait à genoux de ne pas le tuer, ni le pillage de nos ressources minières avec la violence de ce militaire qui avait abattu Papa et fracturé les jambes de Maman et encore moins en quoi le silence des médias occidentaux était responsable de la chasse meurtrière aux Mayi-Dogos. Il fallait que j'y réfléchisse. (Dongala, 2000:169)

Clearly, such words by Laokolé are designed to create a sensational effect through the evocation of distressing scenes. The writer's "intention is that the macabre details will make the reader see the artist's point of view" (Ezeigbo, 1991:95). This, she adds, "brings out lucidity in the artist's antiwar position" (95).

Despite Johnny's quirks of character, his case is not exceptional. His unreasonable expectations of himself and his destructive sense of inferiority compounded by his poor family background have conspired to turn him the youth he has become. While Johnny, Giap and their associates were initially compelled to take up arms, their corruption starts with the realisation that rebellion provides advantages – free sex, money, stolen goods, etc. Johnny

may remain foolish to earn any sympathy from the reader. But it is apparent that "for the poor unconnected youth struggling to make his way , enlistment serves as an initiation into the low, picaresque world of violence and corruption" (McNeil, 1990:136). In this regard, most African children had no choice, but to espouse the opportunity offered by the military. In addition, the psychological problems created in a 16-year-old exposed to all kinds of crises of personality have contributed to his behaviour. In Johnny these problems are more acute than in someone older like Giap who is better equipped to handle the pressure and anxieties imposed on him. Clearly, many factors are involved in the formation of these characters. As a formative process, child soldiery is a site of interaction between a number of features or factors, which engender a single response – violence.

As a grotesque character, Johnny forces the reader look more deeply to discern the reasons behind child soldiery. We have already seen in the previous sections that what begins as a mere act of madness in a novel may slowly break away from its grotesque context and take on a justifiable meaning or reality. In this way, Dongala contrives to make his readers experience similar confusion or experience as the lost children.

The ambivalent nature of the violence in the novel is a clue to the postcolonial tradition which Dongala writes in. Postcolonial theory "works against colonial thinking and offers other ways of seeing the world" and "is a rethinking of the very terms by which knowledge has been constructed" (Bhabha in Mongia, 1996:5). Dongala's *Johnny chien méchant* calls for a rethinking of dualities such as civilised/uncivilised**,** rich/poor**,** easy/difficult, white/black, and so on.

The perpetrator, it should be admitted, gives us a better view of the nature of violence. There are aspects of violence which we cannot access until we explore the life of the perpetrator. Only after studying all of the key components or features of violence can an informed decision be made about who a child soldier really is.

5.2.7 Laokolé: The final girl

We conclude our analysis of this novel by looking at Johnny's death at the hands of Laokolé who we call the "final girl". The writer's chosen conclusion appears to be inspired by the debate about whether criminal charges should be brought against child soldiers or not. While Laokolé is clearly a victim, it is questionable as to whether or not she understands Johnny.

Indeed, does Johnny need to be understood? Is Johnny not as much a victim of this war as she is? Is the novel's ending a triumph of good over evil and what is good if violence still triumphs? In short, this section of the book features two dominant themes: overthrown oppressor and the fleeting nature of his false glory. At this point in the story, Laokolé's role will also be reversed. Rather than being a captive, she becomes the captor. And rather than living in refugee camp, she resides safely in her homeland despite of the loss of her mother, brother and best friend in this war.

The first time Johnny sees Laokolé, she is pushing her mother in a wheelbarrow as he drives past in a stolen car:

> Soudain, une apparition incroyable: une jeune fille poussant une brouette dans laquelle se trouvait une femme plus âgée. La connasse. Au lieu de rester sagement sur le trottoir gauche où elle se tenait, elle décide de couper la route à ma voiture de commandement juste au moment où celle-ci déboulait. Tu crois que je vais freiner pour toi, idiote? (Dongala, 2002: 93)

The second time Johnny sees her, she is beside the dead body of her mother, who has been killed in a bombardment, crying and Johnny says,

> […] sauf une fille hystérique, sac en bandoulière, qui ne cessait de crier 'Maman, Maman!' et qu'on essayait de retenir (259).

These first two flashbackscenes are enough to alert the reader to the possibility of a final face-to-face confrontation, which will occur. Of course it does occur at the refugee camp where Johnny hits a small hungry orphan baby girl for picking up pieces of biscuits and Laokolé seeks revenge (Dongala, 2002:349). This, however, does not come as a surprise to her; she had already witnessed enough evidence of the boy'sdestructive genius: the scene in which Johnny killed the innocent boy, her best friend Mélanie's parents whose car Johnny he drives. It could be assumed that "the more [s]he suffered now the greater would be the joy of revenge" a phrase borrowed from Gikandi (1991:73).

To give his novel such a tragic end, the author adopts the Western device of the "final girl" which features in American horror films.[49]In such films, Donald (1989), cited above, explains

[49] As a scholar who has been trained in America (as a scientist) and where he supposedly read many works of fiction, Dongala apparently cannot free himself from the unconscious influences of the representation of violence in American art.

why the final girl does not die, she survives, which is why she is referred to that way: "[she] is the one who encounters the mutilated bodies of her friends, and perceives the full extent of the past horror and of her own peril, who is chased, scorned, wounded, whom we see scream, stagger, fall, rise, and scream again" (106). Donald adds that"She alone looks death in the face, but she alone also finds the strength either to stay the killer long enough to be rescued or to kill him herself" (106). Laokolé has had, as we already know, a painful journey for a girl of her age, sixteen. She carries the heavy load of her screaming, moaning legless mother on a wheelbarrow, loses her brother Fofo, watches in horror as people's bodies, including her mother's and Aunt Tamila's, are torn apart by shells and her best friend Mélanie is crushed beneath the heavy truck tyres of the UN troops. She shares food with wild pigs while hiding in the forest when the wildlife preservation group refuse to rescue her saying that they only care for animals because humans. The writer emphasises all that the girl has endured and for which her past life as a schoolgirl in a stable home had hardly prepared her. Despite all this, her femininity and weak body sharply contrasts with the act of bravery she shows at the last moment. The decisive moment in the novel finnaly occurs when she is forcibly taken by Johnny who thinks he is still in control of people's destinies, only to discover how quickly the tables can turn. While Johnny looks to his gun and physical strength, Laokolé looks to defend the baby girl's right to food – a few biscuit crumbs – at any cost. But soon, Johnny who was an instrument of destruction, is turned into the object of it.

In this spectacular closing scene, Lakolé stands as a symbol of confidence and of determination. Johnny, who still wants to prove to the girl that he is not only a killer but also an intellectual, throws her a book, which she grabs with both hands. He then takes a step toward her, not expecting to be struck with the book, which strikes him squarely in the face. He falls, struggles to get up and smashes the back of his neck against the edge of the table, making him bleed both from the nose and the neck. As he tries to reach the gun at his hip, Laokolé stands up, and picks up the full whisky bottle with which she begins to smash his fingers, and his genitals which had humiliated so many women. His testicles burst. The pain is unbearable, he cries out: "Je saignais abondament du nez et de la nuque. J'étais mort, tué par la Bible. On m'avait toujours dit de me méfier des femmes et des livres!" (Dongala 2002:357). Considering himself an intellectual, Johnny enjoyed collecting books as spoils of war and this Bible was the first in his collection. He took it from a peaceful old man in Kandahar whom he killed despite knowing that he was a man of God. The Bible makes a plea

for a moral and spiritual life, which the young rebel used to mock. In the end, it is the very same book that is used to kill him.

Johnny's death by the Bible in the final scene is filled with irony – such as the use of a holy book as a physical object of torture. What is also at stake here is the stress the writer places on the physical brutality highlighted by recourse to everyday items that are detached from and then decentred in relation to their normal context. Such is the case with a kitchen knife that is transformed into a weapon of torture. In Pascale Perraudin's article "'From a large morsel of meat' to 'passwords-in-flesh': Resistance through representation of the tortured body in Labou Tansi's *La vie et demie*" (2005), Elaine Scarry is cited on how the torture weapon may be an insignificant object of daily or domestic life. This is exactly the case in Johnny's torture by Laokolé who makes use of the book and the bottle to take his life. According to Perraudin, "the weapon evokes the civilised world; however, this object is used to assure the collapse of the victim's universe" (77). The question that arises is: How does violence enter a civilized world? For some of us, there is no room in life for such a thing as holy war, or any form of war and violence at all. It should be remembered that "in becoming an agent of torture, the objects that participate in the torture can no longer be easily associated with the victim's daily or domestic world" (77). In this context, one could suggest that the Bible used by Laokolé can no longer be called the Bible. For some, Laokolé's use of the Bible may be the fulfilment of the biblical prophecy that "whoever sheds man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed" (Genesis, 9:6). Wilful termination of another's life calls for retribution by fellowmen – God's agents. Perraudin comments, "The universe that is henceforth called to the victim's mind is a universe that collapses under the weight of the inflicted pain. Thus, this universe can do nothing but betray the victim's former point of reference, since what was an unthreatening object in normal life is now perceived as a source of destruction" (77). This leads us to argue that Laokolé's act is perhaps the most brutal one. She sends Johnny to his grave as if she reflects that even the God of the Bible is violent and cruel. This is a belief held among many people when they expect no evil from those who claim to be civilised and well-educated Christians.

By using the Bible as metaphor there is no reason not to think that perhaps the writer meant it to be understood that only God can put an end to war. The rebel soldiers are boastful; they make boisterous threats to frighten people into submission but God has the last word to say. This section of the novel spells out the consequences for those who plunder innocent people.

God (whom the Bible represents here) can in a moment break the power of the tyrants, even when it appears most formidable.

It is important to know how the final girl managed to control the situation. In films such as *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* and *Halloween*, we are told, by this most cited film scholar, Donald, that, "the final girls are presented as fighting back, which they do with ferocity, killing the killer without outside help (1989:107). Dongala portrays his female character in very much the same way as in these movies, going from passivity to active resistance. Laokolé is in this context a final girl whose image lingers in our minds, not only because she does not die but because she alone has the courage to kill the killer.

Women who were always excluded from history are rising up. Such a reversal of roles gives this character a particular authority in a novel that critiques militarism and politics, which always marginalises women. Like French sixteen-year-old Jeanne d'Arc, known in English as Joan of Arc, Laokolé fights for freedom. But in fighting for freedom, she also turns into a grotesque figure or perpetrator. Is this an act of revenge to compensate for the loss of her family and relatives? Donald, in the aforementioned quote, states that "female killers are few and the reasons for killing significantly different from men's. Their anger derives not from childhood experience but from specific moments in their (adult) life in which they have been abandoned or cheated on by men" (Donald 1989: 100). Laokolé therefore sees the corruption of men through Johnny's ill treatment of the small girl whom she is prepared to defend. In this respect, she may not be severely condemned for this murder given that the motives behind it could be pure. Laokolé appears more as a representative of her people whom she feels an obligation to protect.

However, returning to Donald's quote, the word "anger" should be noted. This leads us to argue that the difference between Laokolé's violence and Johnny's violence should not be interpreted as a binary opposition in which one character is celebrated and the other denigrated. Although Laokolé's pride is partly based on her social class and family values, she consistently fails in her attempts to understand others throughout the novel. The way she looks at Johnny in his room is emblematic of her attitude toward her fellow humans. By highlighting her failure to engage the moral crisis her peers are facing, the novel seems to emphasise the importance of understanding a community as a mixed bag of good and evil. In our view, what is at stake here is the Biblical principle of forgiveness: God sets an example by not passing judgment on Cain despite his murder of his brother, Abel (Genesis 4:15). The

Bible gives no support to the tendency so often reflected in our practice to treat others with disrespect (disparagement) even when they are wrong. We need a community where perpetrators are given a chance to live and learn from their mistakes and be made to feel ashamed of their own folly. God's justice to sin is at once retributive, educative and protective. It could also be argued that while rebels like Johnny's *Tigres rugissants*, they are just as much under the sovereignty of God as real tigers that threaten people. The book ends darkly with impending judgement of the tyrant. True warfare is in the hands of God. "He [God] does not keep the wicked alive but gives the afflicted their rights" (Job 36:6).

That the end of *Johnny chien méchant* is ambiguous is, however, telling. Laokolé's redemptive role is unquestionable. Her decision to kill Johnny is a decisive movement away from mere contemplation. One could even go further and claim that the idea of saving the life of the child in the hands of such a criminal is an indication of her awareness of human rights and the values of democracy. The conventional wisdom is that we should resist violence but there is a catch – anybody who kills another on the grounds that he or she is a perpetrator confirms their own madness, no matter how reasonable the claim might be. Dongala not only alludes to Friedrich Nietzsche but echoes his admonition, in *Beyond good and evil*, "Whoever fights monsters should see to it that in the process he does not become a monster. And when you look long into an abyss, the abyss also looks into you" (1989: 89). One could take things a step further and argue that Dongala warns those who severely condemn perpetrators of violence to be aware of the need to identify the perpetrator within each of us, rather than seeing them as only existing in a demonised other. There is liitle ground for the idea of Nietzsche (*Beyond good and evil*) revived by Dongala (*Johnny chien méchant*) that a good person can become grotesque. Rather, there is a sense in which Johnny dies to free the country. Although not morally acceptable, the murder could be legally understood as a sign of Laokolé's active involvement in the fight against the prevailing political and social evil.

The meeting of the two protagonists seems to have tragic consequences but a closer examination suggests that it operates as a redemptive event. Perhaps, the writer intended to introduce a vision of a new society as well. In siding with Laokolé, then, we become, if not the killer of the killer, the agent of his expulsion from our vision for a peaceful future. It may be claimed that author's own views in opposing violence while simultaneously supporting national defence are conveyed through Laokolé. As with most postmodern thinkers, Dongala's message is "to save men's lives, to stop the war against women [and children] and

to give future generations of boys a chance to be free in a world where the sexes work as equals" (Abbot, 1990:2). Laokole's worries about "un pays où on [tue] des enfants" (Dongala, 2002:170) reflects the author's fears that this dream is slipping away. There is a sense in which one, through Laokolé, could easily see how Dongala is committed to restoring the disfigured image of African woman. If this novel has produced a character, it is a character of this girl. And what a character she is, so strong, so decisive. She is determined to change things.

Laokolé reminds us of the child Djamba Nene in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Djamba Nene's pistol* who challenges the imperialists by quoting his mother's words: "A hero is not judged by his large build. A thin body may as well carry the strength of a giant" (1989:36).

The writer opens a window on a post-war Africa in Katelijne's question to Laokolé: "Il y a quand même quelque chose que tu souhaiterais voir arriver? Une lueur d'espoir?" (Dongala, 2002:170). Laokolé's last words echo this apocalyptic new community where joy and new humanism reign. After killing Johnny, she takes her adopted child and realising she did not have a name, she decides to name her as she says:

> J'ai plongé ma mémoire dans le riche patrimoine de la langue de mon grand-père et j'en suis revenue avec le mot le plus pur de la tribu, le mot le plus beau reflétant parfaitement ce moment: Kiessé! La joie! Mon enfant, je te nomme Kiessé! Et J'ai regardé vers le ciel: elles étaient là, diamants brillants, couronnant nos têtes. Que ferions nous sans les étoiles? (361).

This passage reads like a song sung by people freed from the clutches of a tyrant who is now cast down. The naming of the child in the same passage has special significance. In Achebe's *Anthills of the savannah*, Eliwa's baby is named by a woman called Bea who according to Gikandi is "a narrative resolution to the paradoxes and problems of an alienated history, it is a symbolic gesture to appease an embittered history" (1991:148). It is as if women in a new role have taken on the traditionally masculine task of naming children. Like Bea, Laokolé in *Johnny chien méchant* does not wait for adults to name the child but remembers the rich heritage of her grandfather's language and comes up with the name 'Kiessé. Gikandi cautions that "history is not appeased by any return to a mythical tradition, but by a radical questioning of tradition itself" (148). Thus he concludes that "the new dispensation includes the licence to name and rename differently" (148). Out of the midst of sufferings, another rule unlike that of violence and dread will arise. This unnamed child whose rights Laokolé defends is a symbol

of future reign of hope. What needs to be emphasised here is the fact that like Achebe, Dongala's female character's naming of the child expresses his wish to see Africa come out of wars and "step into the new century with dignity and a rekindled optimism" (148).

5.2.8 Conclusion

The detailed and multi-focal approach taken in the above analysis allows the reader to understand the extent to which a perpetrator can be perceived as both victim and perpetrator. In contextualising child soldiery as an avenue through which different factors intersect or interact, one can begin to understand the functions of violence and all those who are involved in or exposed to it.

A number of grotesque actions unequivocally assign Johnny an agentive role. However, Johnny's involvement in this war, as shown above, is a direct result of war propaganda. For example, the pictures of the mutilated people he and his friends were shown by the politicians were psychologically geared to fuel hatred of the rival tribal. The movies[50] Johnny watches are also important. He is more affected by the films whose details he believes to be realistic. David Lee emphasises that the meaning, especially of a concept as complex as child soldier "is not an inherent property of words but is strongly influenced by contexts of use" (1992:18). With the rich narrations of the lived experiences of individuals subjected to, engaged in or responsible for causing violence, *Johnny chien méchant* affords readers a detailed analysis of the meanings and situations in which violence transpires within a war context, giving the reader the possibility of viewing child soldiers from both sides i.e. as perpetrators but mostly as victims.

The conclusion of the novel also shows the story coming full circle. What Laokolé is doing at the end of the novel is the same thing she was doing at the start. In the beginning, she buries some of the family's valuables in the back yard after Giap announced the looting: "À coups de pelle et de houe, nous avons enterré notre trésor, ce que nous avions de plus précieux au

[50] Johnny recounts that during the attack by Operation Green Gorilla to evacuate the Europeans trapped by the war and which resulted in the deaths of thousands of African soldiers within seconds, he and Lovelita are forced to hide in the trenches. But on seeing his looted car go up flames, he wants to attack the Europeans. He recalls a Chinese man who stops a military tank all by himself in a movie. Lovelita succeeds in stopping him. As Lefort argues, proponents of totalitarian ideology have found a new way disseminating violence – through media (Lefort in Thompson, 1984: 30). Brutal films enter our homes unimpeded exposing our little ones knowledge to sex and violence. It is these fictional murderers who Johnny aims to emulate and whose techniques he applies in learning to kill. He admires Giap for being such a quick study in this regard.

monde après nos vies" (Dongala, 2002:27). Later in the novel, Laokolé wishes to go back to the scene where her mother was killed and give her a proper burial: "je voulais repartir au plus vite offrir une sépulture digne à ma mere" (Dongala, 2002: 301). The writer through all these examples as well as Johnny's death communicates an important message – that myths need to be buried. The problem in Africa is that its "myths are dead but not buried and their remains contaminate the environment, poisoning those who try still to live by them" (McElroy, 1989:135). This implies that if we do not make an effort to put our myths such as cattle raiding, fetishism, and tribalism to rest, Africa's calamities will continue.

Chapter 6: Kourouma's *Allah n'est pas obligé*

6.1 Plot summary

From 1989–1996 and 1999–2003 Liberia was swept by two civil wars while the civil war in Sierra Leone lasted from 1991 until 2000. The violence escalated as the war-lords began using children as combatants. *Allah n'est pas obligé* is a war novel by Ahamadou Kourouma chronicling events as they happened in these wars in which child soldiers were used by the war-lords to commit all kinds of atrocities. *Allah n'est pas obligé* has many characters, the majority of whom are introduced to us throughout the book as war-lords and heads of state such as Charles Taylor and Samuel Doe of Liberia, former army corporal Foday Sankoh and President Joseph Momoh of Sierra-Leone. The plot and the interactions of the characters take place in the events which took place during these wars with which, we assume, most readers are familiar. As Birahima narrates his story forward and backward in time, he relives historical (real) events in West Africa through his account. He recalls, for example, the life of the former Liberian president, Samuel Doe, as he chronicles his reign of violence during which he killed people arbitrarily before Taylor rose against him and was captured and murdered by Prince Johnson and his soldiers. As some of these events the narrator claims having witnessed occurred when he was not yet born, we might with the reader, understand why this is called fiction.[51]

The novel opens when Birahima, the child protagonist, has just lost his mother, a once beautiful woman in the village, who dies as a result of a large flesh-eating tumour. He is ten years old, lives on the street, and sleeps and eats anywhere although he does have a grandmother. He also lives with the guilt of having offended his mother before she died because of his treatment of her as a soul-devouring sorceress. After her death, Birahima leaves his native village in Côte d'Ivoire, and is entrusted into the care of a false Muslim, a self-proclaimed sorcerer or gigriman called Yacouba who encourages the boy and agrees to accompany him to Liberia in search of his aunt, Mahan, who lives there. They finally arrive at Niangbo where she lived, but not before joining the army. Interestingly, Birahima and

[51] If Birahima joined the army when he was ten years old in 2000 that means he was not yet born when this war started in 1989.

Yacouba belong to a faction that took the city and killed many people and Mahan flees to Sierra- Leonne while her husband was killed.

But Birahima does not become a soldier by accident. Before leaving his country, Yacouba prepares the boy's mind in terms of what to expect in Liberia and promises to take him to a place where children are made into soldiers and given a lot of money. Crossing the border into Liberia, they are arrested by a rebel force at the roadblock. After child soldiers stop them and other passengers, they are robbed on the grounds that one of the passengers killed a child soldier, Captain Kid. Without being forced into military service, Birahima willingly offers to become a small soldier, as does Yacouba the grigriman, in order to survive. Birahima is given a Kalashnikov (AK-47) by the rebel ruler of the NPFL military faction, Colonel Papa le bon. He hopes that this duty will help him forget his misery while searching for his aunt in Liberia. After joining the NPFL, Birahima has his first taste of battle. Birahima, alongside many other boys, sees death, torture, amputation and madness, but somehow manages to survive. He meets another child soldier named Tête Brulée, who had already served as a child soldier in a military faction called ULMO and who tries to corrupt the minds of other child soldiers and get them to rebel against Colonel Papa le bon accusing him of not looking after them well. Colonel Papa le bon is eventually killed by Tête Brulée who takes weapons and a group of child soldiers back to the ULMO led by a female soldier called Générale Onika Baclay.

Their trip back to ULMO is not without danger. A girl-soldier, Sarah is heavily involved in drugs which make her mad. She is a girl friend to Tête Brulée to whom she is sexually attracted and at one stage in their journey wants to have sex with him in public. In an argument she suddenly shoots at Tête Brulée who is not hurt, but who loses his temper and shoots back, leaving her alone in a pool of her own blood. A child soldier called Kik unexpectedly steps on a mine which explodes. His leg is hurt and a male nurse suggests that it should be amputated. He too is left to die alone in the bush even though it is clear that he could survive this injury if taken to hospital or taken care of. Birahima feels some emotion about these characters and narrates their obituaries allowing the reader to know their past.[52] Much of this section of the book concerns child soldiers' struggles as they move from one military faction to another.

[52] Kourouma's use of obituaries brings a new aspect the war novel in the way the obituaries portray child soldiers' lives and deaths and gives dramatic interest to battles as well as the children's past lives. Such a device, while not exclusive to Kourouma, is important for giving us a perspective on child violence.

When Birahima and the others join the ULMO, they are forced to fight to protect the mining areas controlled by Générale Onika. Générale Onika has a son, Baclay, who is the army officer, and four daughters-in-law. One of them, Rita, is in charge of child soldiers and deeply attracted by Birahima. When Baclay goes to war and leaves his wife, Rita, with the child soldiers, she makes loves with the child Birahima whom she says she loves very much.

General Onika is the one, we are told, who fought the Niangbo battle. Here at the front in Niangbo, Birahima experiences firsthand the death and destruction of war. The battle becomes a hideous slaughter of both Onika's armies and her enemies and ends in her defeat(s). For strategic reasons and after having suffered grievous losses, Onika's army withdraws, leaving Onika to search for the cause of her defeats and to beg for the blessings of her ancestors. With the help of her child soldiers, especially Tête Brulée, and the use of magic, Onika subsequently succeeds in defeating her enemies.

But realising that they have no future with Onika and that Sierra-Leone offers more opportunities for those who survive through war, Birahima and Yacouba decide to go there, especially as they know that aunt Mahan had moved there. When they arrive, they are picked up by the soldiers of the RUF faction and sent to a camp in Mile Thirty Eight where they encounter a certain Tieffi. Tieffi normally kills people from other tribes but receives them because they are Ivorians as opposed to the Guineans he hates most for interfering in Sierra Leonean internal affairs. Here there is a division of child soldiers called the *lycaons* which Birahima wants to join, but Tieffi will not allow him to do so because in order to qualify for this division the child must be ready to kill or consume his (its) own parents. Also described here are the soldiers in Foday Sankoh's RUF who cut off citizens' hands and arms (including those of small babies) so that they will be unable to vote in any democratic elections.

It is in this manner that Birahima and other child soldiers switch allegiances as circumstances dictate, witnessing atrocity upon atrocity, but surviving and, at times, succeeding, thanks to Yacouba's tricks. In essence, the boy fights for whichever faction can supply them with food, weapons, and so on.

As the novel draws to a close, Birahima and Yacouba reach the refugee camp at Worosso where Aunt Mahan is reported as having died from malaria a few weeks before their arrival. Birahima is reunited with one of his cousin, Seydou who was also in search of the same aunt.

They are joined by the deceased's son, Doctor Mamadou. The mourning family is aware of a growing bond between them in their bereavement. After years of search and tribulation Birahima is finally freed from his burden realising that his journey was useless except that it made him find out at firsthand how Africa was being destroyed by its absurd wars. Birahima and Yacouba decide to return home to Côte d'Ivoire. But as Doctor Mamadou refuses to give Seydou the money he promised to give him if he brings his mother back home, who unfortunately had passed away. Seydou resolves to stay and fight. Birhima's return home is the end of the story.

The novel therefore is the narrative of Birahima's three year journey in West Africa in search of his aunt and as a child soldier. The title of the book contains the writer's critique of all that the child experienced in a war-torn Africa. The boy, now 13 years of age, attempts to show that the people he met possessed the same kind of sovereign powers as God (Allah). The view is well expressed by Jean Marie Domenach in his book, *Le Retour du tragique* (1967) quoted by Youcef M. Kadim (2008) arguing that:

> On découvre que ce n'est pas les dieux qui suscitent l'inconciliable, l'inexplicable et l'incompréhensible, mais l'homme simplement dès qu'il entreprend d'aimer, de créer, d'organiser et d'être heureux, dès qu'il convoite la personne des autres et la sienne, (Domenach in Kadim, 2008:89)

Like Domenach, Kourouma invites us to abandon the old perception that the gods were solely responsible for the irreconcilable, the inexplicable and incomprehensible. In fact, the misery of man starts when another man starts to act and organise things. Considering that most of Kourouma's characters are false religious people (mixture of animism, Christianity and Islam), Allah becomes the word Kourouma uses ironically. Where many ask: "Where is God in this world of tragedy and pain?" the child seems to answer by asking another question, "Why blame God for the decisions of Men?"

6.2. Text Analysis

6.2.1. The novel and its contextual features

In this study, this particular novel is read as a dramatisation of a story in which the child protagonist is the spokesperson for alienated people. It is also read as a novel offering two voices. It is a critique of African traditions which the writer is depicting while, at the same time, it seeks to expose the vanity of modernity. This is significant in that it allows us to see how the writer brings out paratextual issues regarding war involving the whole book.

Written in the immediate post-war period, *Allah n'est pas obligé* is governed by the assumption that the tragic context of war provides a space for looking at the child soldier mostly as a victim. However, the novel is permeated by the tragic reality of cultural and historical violence which has nothing to do with the immediate context of civil wars. Looked at from this angle, these two aspects of the novel (immediate war and culture) would probably assume that the child protagonist stands on the border of two worlds which calls for greater dramatisation by the writer than if dealing purely with the issue of the child soldier. We argue here that *Allah n'est pas obligé* is a war novel, but one in which war as a context is the metaphor of a world which has been at war with itself for a long time. In this respect, the writer offers us a war novel in which a child protagonist is damaged by life even before becoming a soldier. This is the reason why the novel starts with the child protagonist degrading and describing himself as a person from whom nothing good can come out. He does so to the point of making us realise that he is serious about his own condition: (i) he describes himself as speaking bad French ("je parle mal le français"(Kourouma, 2000:9), (ii) he also acknowledges to be rude as a goat's beard and swearing like a bastard ("suis insolent, incorrect comme barbe d'un bouc et parle comme un salopard" (10), and (iii) fearless, blame-free kid who slept anywhere ("un enfant sans peur ni reproche. Je dormais partout" (13), and so on.

Like Kourouma's characters in other novels, Birahima is a griot and as a griot he stands as a spokesperson for other child soldiers. Such a role where the narrator has a sense of direction or is a guide for his readers "demands" as Gikandi argues "that the narrator adopts a dual character: he is both the author of this narrative, with *a prior knowledge of the events* about to be recreated and a key character in the drama itself, influencing, or being influenced by, other characters and events" (1987:21 emphasis ours). In this respect, the child soldier as a narrator in this novel should not be regarded as ignorant or innocent. He is certainly aware of what is going on in his community. This is why he is depicted in this novel as knowing too much, more than his age requires. It is in the same way that Birahima offers his readers a description of not only the events he witnessed in the three years of his journey, but of childhood events going back even before his birth. Unlike *Charly en guerre* where children are faced with unexpected experiences, *Allah n'est pas obligé* is "marked by a set of absolutes which remain unshakeable throughout the novel" (Gikandi 1987:21). In a sense, the writer presents his child narrator from the beginning, not as an innocent person, but as guilty of something (offending

his mother). The child is at the crossroad of violence: past, present and future, on the one hand, and cultural, social, religious and political, on the other hand. In other words, what to expect of his present life is already affected by the past

The following quote drawn from the novel, which has already been referred to in previous pages, provides us with the most accurate details of self-description by Birahima:

> Avant de débarquer au Liberia, j'étais un enfant sans peur ni reproche. Je dormais partout, chapardais tout et partout pour manger. Grand mère me cherchait des jours et des jours: c'est ce qu'on appelle un enfant de la rue. J'étais un enfant de la rue. Avant d'être un enfant de la rue, j'étais à l'école. Avant ça, j'étais un bilakoro au village de Togobala. (Bilakoro signifie, d'après l'inventaire des particularités lexicales, garçon non circoncis). Je courais dans les rigoles, j'allais aux champs, je chassais, les souris et les oiseaux dans la brousse… Avant tout ça, j'ai marché à quatre pattes dans la case de maman. Avant de marcher à quatre pattes, j'étais dans le ventre de ma mère. Avant ça, j'étais peut-être dans le vent, peut-être un serpent, peut-être dans l'eau. On est toujours quelque chose comme serpent, arbre, bétail ou homme ou femme avant d'entrer dans le ventre de sa maman. On appelle la vie avant la vie. Gnamokolé (bâtardise)! (Kourouma, 2000:13)

The use of the preposition 'avant' or the prepositional phrase 'avant ça' used to refer the reader to the past should be noted. It is a first step in refocusing our attention away from the future, from the assumption that child soldiery is solely a result of our recent history. This seems to confirm that contextual characteristics (the child's stubbornness and swearing) are not only reproduced but fit in such a novel which represents war both in the real world and at the rhetorical level.

The opening of this novel sets the tone of the whole narrative. Birahima evokes his past not merely by showing that he too has a past to identify with, but to point to the fact that his past is crippled; it was rotten and without significance before it was worsened by the intense civil wars affecting his community. It is in this context that the boy reminds us, for example, of his misshapen mother who has been stricken for years by cancer. The writer puts these characters at the beginning of the novel and on closer examination they help us to understand this child protagonist better. As such, the image Birahima has of the world is that of a sick world for which nothing can be done to heal it. It is, in this respect, important to note that what the child promises to offer in his account is his life in a fallen world. As a result, he does not care about anybody, anything, not even himself.

The figure of the child soldier is used in *Allah n'est pas obligé* as a reflection of reality and also as a metaphor through which the writer expresses the tension between tradition and society's change. So, in reading a character like the child soldier we must acknowledge this character's duality or complexity which our recent history is meant to reflect.

Birahima's whole existence is shaped by his negative perception of being cursed and walking in the belief that nothing good can come of him. Perhaps the best way to start analysing this novel is to argue that Kourouma's vision in writing it lies in his ability to look at the wars in Africa as providing him with a possibility, not only to look at the child soldier as a marginalised person, but to look at what it means to be an African today. Kourouma seems to write from the assumption that we cannot address the issue of the child soldier by dramatising the folly of postcolonial society without also revisiting the past. It can be also argued that Kourouma often writes in reaction to Negritude's[53] claim of precolonial goodness putting the blame on its own traditions rather than shifting the blame onto others, and understandably so. But there is a sense in which the writer surfaces the mythical past in this novel as a twist to modernity which has provided a space even for the youngest to play a role in war.

In short, the child soldier as a protagonist is not only used in this novel as a marginalised and grotesque socio-cultural figure, but also as a "representative of the unfinished (grotesque) body of the post colonialism" (Smith, 2002:131), the site at which conflicting discourses of dominance and exploitation, modernity and tradition, child and adult features meet. In this respect, Kourouma might be assuming "a position" which Smith describes as "suspiciously close to the liberal humanist notion that variety is inherently good and that good things will automatically happen when *multiple voices* are allowed to sound" (2002:129, emphasis in original).

6.2.2. The novel's political and historical background: fusion between fact and fiction

Allah n'est pas obligé can be placed alongside Oliver Furley's *Conflict in Africa* (1995) and many other works of non-fiction. However, it will be found to differ from them in its narration

[53]Negritude is according to (Merriam-Webster's Dictionary) defined as "a consciousness of and pride in the cultural and physical aspects of the African heritage".

as might be expected of a work of fiction, with a greater emphasis on myth and serious attention toward the use of language and the characters' inner motives.

Kourouma's fascination with reality has already been discussed in Chapter 3. The action in the novel takes place at the beginning of the 1990s, during the civil wars in Liberia and Sierra Leone. The novel gives a vivid description of the political leaders and the war-lords, their pride and tyranny, their hypocrisy and vanity, their selfishness and violation of human rights. The novel depicts a world where there seem to be no rights and where authority seems arbitrary. By describing characters and society in this light, Kourouma reminds us that the child soldier issue is not ahistorical, but one influenced by the past and present history of violence.

While the book is commendable for its collection of political and ethnographic themes, it also reveals the writer's interest in popular culture. Kourouma uses historical and political figures whose lives are known to us and who used children as combatants: "Il y avait au Liberia quatre bandits de grand chemin: Doe, Taylor, Johnson, El Hadji Koroma, et d'autres fretins de petits bandits" (Kourouma, 2000:53). This in itself can be regarded as a strategy by means of which the writer divides society into two: the 'rulers' and the 'ruled'. Child soldiers are portrayed as violent, but their fates have been made to depend on war. They are victims of a society in which evil rules the world.

Although Kourouma feels that he should ensure factual accuracy in his work, he still dramatises and expands the war scenes into fictional spheres. He also makes extensive use of literary techniques by blending the past and present while dwelling on the 'grotesque body' of the child soldier to give the work its literary flavour. In doing so, he wrote a story in which the contemporary reader, accustomed to war fiction, will find, not only entertainment, but also information on history and politics with regard to the social struggles of people in West Africa. One finds a particularly telling example of the cruelty of these war-lords in Charles Taylor, the leader of the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL. Taylor is described to us as a highly educated man who, unfortunately, was transformed into a grotesque figure. Who is Taylor, Kourouma asks: "Qui était le bandit de grand chemin Taylor?" (2000:69) In 1983, we are told, "quand il a réussi le fameux coup de gangestérisme qui mit le trésor public libérian à genoux" (69), Taylor fled to the USA to avoid being tried for embezzlement. Here he attempted to use a false identity, but was arrested although he subsequently escaped after

bribing the jailers: “il a réussi à corrompre avec l’argent volé ses geôliers” (70) and returned to Libya (Africa).[54] Here, the Libyan president, Kadaffi, referred to by Kourouma as “le dictateur de Libye” (70) sent him to a camp where, in Kourouma’s words, “la Libye fabrique des terroristes” (70). The Libyan dictator sends Taylor off to Campaoré who, in turn, commends Taylor to Houphouët-Boigny “le dictateur de la Côte d’Ivoire”(70) who also hated Doe for murdering his son-in-law, a prince from the former regime overthrown by Doe. He too was happy to meet Taylor.

This war that crippled Liberia as a result of the children’s armies mobilised by Taylor is what the writer wants his reader to see. Kourouma is able to transform a people viewed as honourable in the eyes of the public into terrifying terrorists. With anxiety raised by his comments, descriptions and distortion, and the disgust expressed toward them, a rejection of their futile ideologies is possible. This is one example:

> Comparé à Taylor, Compaoré le dictateur du Burkina, Houphouët-Boigny le dictateur de Côte d’Ivoire, et Kadhafi le dictateur de Libye sont des gens bien, des gens apparemment bien. Pourquoi apportent-ils des aides importantes à un fieffé menteur, à un fieffé voleur, à un bandit de grand chemin comme Taylor pour que Taylor devienne le chef d’un État? Pourquoi? Pourquoi ? De deux choses l’une: ou ils son malhonnêtes comme Taylor, ou c’est ce qu’on appelle la grande politique dans l’Afrique des dictatures barbares et liberticides des pères des nations (Liberticide, qui tue la liberté d’après mon Larousse.) (Kourouma, 2000:71)

While the NPFL rules in Liberia, “a twin group, the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) led by Sierra-Leoneans who earlier fought with the NPFL, also assisted by Burkinabe mercenaries and NPFL military personnel, crossed the eastern border of Sierra-Leone from the territory occupied by the NPEFL on 23 March 1991” (Furley, 1995:137). “These two dissident groups”, as Furley suggests, “sought to establish a mass base by recruiting large numbers of local youths under the flag of ethnic allegiance” (137).

Many scenes deal with the description of these characters’ personalities which the story, in many instances, reduces to the absence of human qualities. Chapter 3 of the novel describes

[54] It is in Ghana, according to Furley (1995) that Taylor approached the embassy of Burkina Faso in 1987 and requested assistance from Captain Blaise Compaoré who introduced him to Muhammed Kadafi (also spelt as Qaddafi),

the shocking historical scene of the dismembered body of Samuel Doe. On 24 December 1989, Taylor's NPF begins an insurgency in Liberia from Taylor's base in neighbouring Côte d'Ivoire against the regime of Master-Sergeant Samuel Doe who himself had seized political power through a bloody coup in April 1980 in which President Williams Tolbert of the True Whig Party who ruled from 1971 to 1980 was assassinated. This coup represented revenge of the rural Liberians for the long-entrenched rule of an Americo-Liberian elite opposed according to most critics' views, to the interests of the indigenous peoples (the Mano, the Gio and the Krahn) regarded as inferior. These people who had had enough of being humiliated by the Americo-Liberians were forced, as the novel shows, to revolt: "ces descendants des esclaves appelés aussi Congos se comportaient en colons dans la société libérienne" (103). However, the killing of the Americo-Liberians planted the seed of Taylor's rebellion which led to the country being crippled for decades. Doe decides later on to kill his Gio associate in the 1980 coup against the Americo-Liberians, Thomas Quionkpa: "il tortura affreusement Thomas Quionkpa avant de le fusiller" (108). As might be expected, this death created animosity between Doe and his Gio-Mano allies from Nimba and Taylor seized on this hatred between tribes as a tool to play his political card.

The political scenes in the novel alternate with the military ones. The United Liberian Movement for Democracy (ULIMO) was formed in May 1991 by Krahn refugees and soldiers who had fought in the Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) fighters. ULIMO is described by Kourouma as led by women.[55] Although women might not have necessarily played an active role in West Africa's war (Liberia and Sierra-Leone) in real life, they have, however, been extensively used by the writer as an essential part of this text's structure. Some researchers, as indicated in the footnote, have argued that ULIMO was "beset with internal divisions" (i.e. it was poorly ruled), which is probably why Kourouma depicts it ironically by making it ruled by a woman, General Onika who is assisted by her daughters in-law. These divisions are also reminiscent of poor leadership.

[55]"ULIMO is formed in Sierra-Leone among Krahn and Madingo refugees from NPFL ethnocide. Fighting alongside the Sierra-Leonean army against RUF rebels in 1991, ULIMO crossed back to Liberia in 1992 and made significant gains at the expense of the NPFL" (Furley 1995:146), It is said that the group scored significant gains in areas held by another rebel group – the NPFL, notably around the diamond areas of Lofa and Bomi counties. From its outset, ULIMO was beset with internal divisions and the group effectively broke into two separate militias in 1994: ULIMO, an ethnic Krah faction led by General Roosevelt Johnson and ULIMO –K, a Mandingo-based faction led by Alhaji G.V. Kromah.

Kourouma's female characters combine the masculine traits of competence and assertiveness with the feminine traits of caring mothers and selfless workers although he does also give them some humorous characteristics in a manner only possible in fiction. Unlike women in *Johnny chien méchant* such as Laokolé, who recognises the path to peace, in *Allah n'est pas obligé* both males and females are concerned with questions of power, dominion and violence. Kourouma's preoccupation with the creation of women characters is not surprising.

Perhaps the most pervasive strategies in fiction are in our view the tendency to portray women simply as sexual objects whose only job is to meet men's needs. In fact, such abused women are the opposite of those we find in Kourouma's work who are troublesome and even unreliable. In *The Mind at War: Images of Women in Vietnam War Novels by Combat Veterans*, Kali Tal (1990) compares the writer to God saying, "in fiction, the novelist is both God and creation" (89). Like Kourouma in *Allah n'est pas obligé*, "he is free to imagine what he likes - bound only by the restrictions he himself devises" (89). By writing this war fiction, Kourouma was probably trying to reconstruct the world shattered by the war. One of the things often violated in war-time are gender roles. If we view this novel as a fiction that is written as reviewing how war affected characters and changed their behaviour, it becomes possible to see Kourouma's characterisation of women as a major success in this novel.

Chapter 3 of the novel gives a flashback to the death or killing of Samuel Doe. He was depicted as an honourable person as the author comments: "Le voilà bon president bon teint respectable et respecté" (107) but he dies like a dog killed by Prince Yomi Johnson[56]. Doe was tied and dragged off to Johnson's headquarters on the outskirts of Monrovia where his body was tortured to death. Doe's body is mutilated part by part and left to birds of prey and predator animals to feast on. The inhumanity around the Liberia's former head of state's death was so intended by Prince Johnson for him to feel the full might of pain in slow death. The trope of body parts connects very well with the country's ruins.

[56] Yomi Johnson Prince is described by Furley (1995) as a "choleric, unstable former army officer who broke with Taylor in February 1990 after being accused of executing his own men" (145). Following According to Furley, Doe ventured in ECOMOG headquarters on 10 September 1990 to meet Johnson fooled by the idea that he was contesting the civil war that he could meet him without being scared. "The meeting" with a man who, we are told, was able to fuse the criminal mind with the mind of a loyalist, as he always claimed to be, "turned into a shootout, with 60 of Doe's men killed while ECOMOG troops looked on (Furley,1995:145) observes.

The war in Sierra-Leone is featured in Chapter 5 and 6 of the novel. The use of child soldiers is even taken to the climax by rebel leaders such as Fonday Sankoh (Kourouma, 2000:182-190). The social background of the novel is society at large and characters depicted include political leaders, war-lords, children and women.

This section was intended to disprove a belief that referring to historical real facts does not make good fiction or fiction at all. We also hoped to show that the (real) actions of people such as Doe, Taylor, Johnson, and so on, are far more violent, grotesque and terrifying than this fiction. It is, therefore, assumed that Kourouma does not make them more grotesque than they already are. In other words, looking at the way the war events are depicted in this novel, the conclusion must be that Africa no longer lives in a real world, but one of fantasy (if judged from these unspeakable actions) that means that there is no problem in the writing representing it at once as fantasy and reality. The above section shows how fact and fiction all play a part in the structuring of this story.

6.3 Analysis of characters

The next section examines three main issues related to the themes of war-lords, child soldiers and the involvement of African women in war. Kourouma tackles these issues, which are all reflected in the three novels, in an unfamiliar way. His description of child soldiers, like that of the other writers, is based in part on their 'perpetratorhood' and part on their 'victimhood'. The concept of killing as a trope is a reference point for the child soldiers' engagement in war while 'death' is closely associated with what they are exposed to in war.

The fact that the child soldier tries to justify himself by giving reasons for children becoming child soldiers derives from what he perceives as 'push' as opposed to 'pull' factors. By 'push', we mean that there are those factors which give children no choice but to get involved in violence while 'pull' refers to those which slowly attract children and encourage them into violence. Traumatisation, brutalisation, deprivation and other socio-cultural related issues are among those push factors which drive children into violence (e.g. killing children who resist being used in conflicts, children from economically and socially deprived families or marginalised groups are those who most likely become child soldiers).[57]

[57] The variables that 'pull' children towards violence are parallel to the above push factors. Because of their age, immaturity, curiosity, and love for adventure children are susceptible to temptation of becoming combatants. They are frequently deceived to join armed groups with the promise of substantial financial

The focus in this section is causality. Who is represented as causing children to be pulled into violence? Both the agent and the cause are unspecified although we know, for instance, that Kik's parents and relatives have been killed resulting in the child joining the armed groups for survival. The power being exercised here is hidden. We presume, however, that the same people who killed Kik's parents are also responsible for using him as a fighter to kill other people. These people are nothing but cold-blooded killers.

What is particularly interesting in the narrative is the rationale that appears to underlie children's inclination to violence and the way in which this illuminates the relationship that exists between child soldiers and the world they live in. Children could be seen as assuming a new status 'into' and 'out of' the process of violence. 'Into' violence because children are drawn into violence while they are, at the same time, 'out of' violence simply because they are victims of it. It is this dynamic relation between war-lords, child soldiers and violence that is the object of the discussion below.

6.3.1. Warlordism in the Liberian civil war

It is known that one characteristic of the rebellion in West Africa in 1990 was the employment of child soldiers. The relevance of the concept of 'war-lord' already referred to above arises here in connection with the issue of the child soldier. Writing about African "rebel leaders" Bill Berkeley (2001) notes:

> [E]ach embodies a history, a culture, a symbiosis of interests, calculations, and assumptions which, taken together, and up to a catalog of essential elements that can transform latent evil into reality. And each has been a survivor, a well-adapted creature of a malignant environment. (Berkeley (2001:11)

6.3.1.1. NPFL and the roadblock: Colonel Papa le bon, nudism, funeral and headhunting

means, which, in this context, is a powerful "pull" factor. Political speeches on violence, myths around fall heroes and so on serve to draw out feelings of patriotism and create a culture of violence. According to Daly (1988:18-19) writes, tales of wars are often told in which might heroes ('hero', a Greek word, which means a man of superhuman strength), fire our imaginations. War heroes die or kill for a country or a belief. All these myths around heroes inspire loyalty and might make children blindly follow their heroic leaders. Violent games or films (e.g. Hollywood) do also have the crimogenetic effects on youths. We will devote a detailed discussion to these factors and their impact on African child soldiers.

Colonel Papa le bon, whom Kourouma described as “un drôle de numéro” (71) is the representative of Taylor in the writer’s fictional headquarters of Zorzor. We are told by the narrator that a few years earlier Colonel Papa le bon was seen as an abandoned child by his mother who worked as a prostitute and had no husband. “Pour commencer”, says the narrator, “il n’eut pas de père ou on ne connut pas son père. Sa mère se promenait comme ça de bar en bar dans la grande ville de Monrovia lorsqu’elle accoucha comme ça d’un enfant qu’elle appela Robert’s” (72). We are further told that Colonel Papa le bon (formerly Roberts) was known as almost an abandoned child of his mother who was brought up by his aunt. His aunt also never took care of him, and always locked him up alone in a room where he had no toys and used to play with condoms. The boy’s misery was so intense that it attracted the attention of the Catholic Church and he was placed in an orphanage before being sent to study in the US to become a priest. His return home coincides with the political unrest in his country. Being a true Krahn, a privileged tribe in the country, he gets involved in the war to bring in God’s justice, which means killing the enemy. However, he needs the assistance of child soldiers. The power of this ambiguity is already evident in his personality, a Catholic priest who becomes a war-lord.

At the beginning of Chapter 2, the narrator, Birahima, tells us about his arrival with Yacouba in Liberia where they are seized by elements of NPFL at the roadblock. It is here that a child soldier called Captain Kid is killed. He is described to us as still very young and short: “un vrai bout d’homme”(55) as tall as an officer’s cane: “haut comme le stick d’un officier” (56). This incident occurs when the two men, hired (given a gun and riding a motorbike) to protect passengers and the vehicle Birahima and Yacouba are on board, shoot at this child soldier assuming that he was a hobo or one of the small bandits: “les gars qui étaient sur la moto avaient cru que c’étaient des coupeurs de route. Ils ont tiré. Et voilà le gosse, l’enfant-soldat fauché, couché, mort, complètement mort” (55). As a result of this death, tension arises between the child soldiers and the passengers. The two men on the motorbike and other people are also killed on the spot, including a woman (one of the passengers) accidentally hit by a bullet. Meanwhile the passengers’ possessions are taken by the child soldiers, even their underwears. The child soldiers, not only plunder the passengers of whichever of their possessions appealed to them, but also ask them to undress.

It should be noted that the NPFL roadblocks were largely guarded by child soldiers like Captain Kid, mainly aged between 10 and 13, armed with Kalashnikov rifles. They were often

posted at roadblocks to collect money for the war-lords while they themselves were unpaid and survived by begging and extortion. One piece of evidence relevant to this reality of child soldiers at road-blocks comes from an observation by a visitor to Charles Taylor's earlier headquarters in Paynesville:

> A group of child soldiers awaiting his bidding nearby, in ragged, dirty clothes, a rifle in one hand and a bottle of spirits in the other. Manning road-blocks they jauntily display human skulls with sunglasses, but they themselves are now dull-eyed with hunger. Before they let a car pass through they ask for bread. (Furley, 1995:41)

In a further allusion to soldiers' attitude to violence and misbehaviour at roadblock, we may quote the following from the novel:

> Les enfants soldats décoiffaient, déshabillaient, déchaussaient chacun. Si le caleçon était beau, le prenaient. Les habits étaient mis à côté en tas, plusieurs tas : celui des chaussures, celui des coiffures, des pantalons, des caleçons. Le passager totalement nu essayait s'il était un homme de mettre la main maladroitement sur son bangala en l'air, si c'était une femme sur son gnoussou-gnoussou (..) Mais les enfants-soldats ne les laissaient pas faire (Kourouma, 2000:59).

It is at this moment that Colonel Papa le bon (also known as Roberts, a former Catholic priest and appointed Colonel by Taylor) arrives on the scene where people are confused, robbed and naked. Child soldiers meet with Yacouba's resistance when he, although naked and trying to cover his bangala (private parts), shouts loudly to attract Papa le bon's attention: "Moi feticheur, moi grigriman, grigriman" (59). The narrator, Birahima, seizes the opportunity provided by Colonel Papa le bon's arrival to shout even louder pleading to be taken as child soldier: "J'ai commencé à chialer" he says, "Je veux être soldat-enfant, small soldier, child-soldier; je veux ma tantie, ma tantie à Niangbo!" (Kourouma, 2000:62). Papa le bon orders that he should be taken together with the gris-gris man. We recall here that Birahima was not forced; rather he offers voluntarily to become a child soldier and is proud of himself: "J'étais content et fier comme un champion de lute sénégalaise", he explains.

We are also told by the narrator that the woman whose baby was accidentally killed is also asked to undress, but she refuses and the child soldiers tear off her *pagne* leaving her in her inappropriate underwear that hardly covered her gnoussou gnoussou (private parts) (51). She is described as a voluptuous woman: "[elle] avait un sex-appeal voluptueux" (63). This why Papa le bon comes closer and pretends to caress the woman's dead baby and finally orders that the woman and her baby's body together with Kid's body be escorted to his headquarters,

Zorzor, (where he already keeps many women as sex slaves) while other war prisoners and the new recruits (Birahima and Yacouba), among others, follow in a procession.

Before speaking about Captain Kid's funeral, let us first look at the trope of nudism which emerges strongly in the novel. Why does the novelist connect the trope of the 'naked body' to the context of war? The bizarre images of the uncovered bodies are related to what Bakhtin calls the 'lowest stratum of organic life'. By the 'lowest stratum', Bakhtin refers to the bowels and phallus, the genital organs, mouth and anus. These images, he acknowledges, participate in literature especially if a form of mockery is present (Bakhtin, 1968:319). While it is true that the humiliation people experience here is part of mockery, the meaning of this trope in the context of war offers more than that. A man at war is a naked person who is exposed and cannot hide who he really is. Jean Lartéguy (cited in Riegel, 1978: 325) argues that:

> La guerre, on la choisit pas. C'est une expérience étonnante. Vous arrivez devant l'homme complètement dépouillé. Il y a des tas de choses qui tombent, par exemple, les bonnes manières, l'éducation, la naissance, Et il reste l'homme nu. Les Nus et les Morts, c'est vrai, brusquement, cette rencontre avec l'homme véritable, l'homme pas truqué. Il revient à ses habitudes après, mais il y a un moment où il est d'une parfaite et d'une totale sincérité où vraiment il est nu. Connaitre l'homme nu, c'est quand même très important, c'est une expérience qui vous marque très longtemps et qui vous donne une réelle échelle de l'homme.

Following Lartéguy, in a war situation, a man experiences a number of losses such as his good manners and remains a naked person. What is left of him is the real him or 'veritable man', not disguised, but in perfect and total sincerity. Frederic Manning also suggests that what man faces in war is a reflection of who he truly is:

> Il ya une véracité extraordinaire dans la guerre qui débarrasse l'homme de tout vêtement conventionnel et le laisse en face d'un fait aussi nu et inexorable que lui-même. (Manning cited in Riegel, 1978:326)

For his part, Jean Guehenno argues that:

> La guerre nous a mis nus. L'excès même des malheurs qu'elle nous a fait souffrir a révélé en chacun de nous, quel qu'il soit ; un homme dénué, sans biens, sans intérêts, sans culture, sans patrie. C'est cet homme qu'il faut sauver. (Guehenno cited in Riegel, 1978: 326)

Through the experience of war we can measure our fragility and weakness as human beings. Vincent Sherry (2005:39) rightly argues that in the context of war a person loses a natural ability to resist certain temptations. While many dislike reading this trope of the 'naked body' which they perceive as the highest form of alienation in (especially African) literature, Anna Krugovoy Sliver (2002) regrets the fact that scholars fail to give this some attention. She says, "our hatred for the naked body has roots in a patriarchal tradition that has hated the body, especially the female body for over a thousand years" (171). It is not too much to say that it is this view which works through the novelist's mind as he wants his readers to know that there is more to this trope than the mere depiction of body flesh. His depiction of the naked body is symbolic of the revelation of our true culture of violence and how it hurts our own identity.

Returning to Captain Kid's funeral, let us also note that the killing of people on the occasion of Captain Kid's death provides a clue for understanding the horrors of war as a form of human sacrifice. In his *The Psycholoanalysis of War* (1974), Fornari discusses the beliefs which are reflected in this novel. His research shows how victims in primitive societies were offered as a sacrifice. The reason for the sacrifices was often the death of a chief or someone of importance. "The singularity of this reparative process", Fornari argues, "consists in a basic alienation of the sense of guilt aroused by mourning and in the subsequent war as a reparation which is also alienated since it is made by the enemy" (1974:59). Kid, although a child, was elevated to the rank of a Captain and honoured as a Chief. So, the killing of people on such an occasion appears to be motivated as a result of a basic process of alienation on the part of the child soldiers who feel guilty for not being able to save Kid's life. Colonel Papa le bon organises a funeral for him where he is depicted as crying at the sight of Kid's body, singing a powerful dirge song (64), and from time to time he would drink palm wine until he was completely drunk (67). The power of this ambiguity is made to correspond to the decline of our humanity. The song he sings is, in this context, a 'mock funeral dirge.' One could even speculate and say that he ironically mocks child soldiers whose deaths mean nothing to him even if the funeral he organises still serves him as a platform to show off.

His spectacle at the funeral is a practice not uncommon in postcolonial Africa where politicians often take pleasure in such theatricality. It is often in public places such as this that they cast themselves in romantic roles and market themselves as liberators, champions of truth and defenders of the weak. Besides, the gaudy adornment of Colonel Papa le bon suggests the war-lords' wealth, glory and earthly power (Kourouma, 2000:66).

The novel also shows how the human skulls which should be buried are used by Papa le bon to construct a fence. One could argue that this is an exaggeration on the part of the writer. Yet Taylor was himself accused of displaying the skulls of slain fighters at roadblocks as his rebel forces swept into the country in 1989. His fighters, it is said, strung human entrails across roadblocks and displayed human heads on poles to strike fear into the local civilians and soldiers of the Liberian army. Such a practice is close to what Fornari refers to as 'head-hunting', which consists of the desire to obtain the heads of enemies in the belief that since the soul is located in the head, so the cutting off of somebody's head means that the victor possesses his soul. Melanie Klein, for instance, calls fantasies attached to such a practice "maniacal processes" (Klein in Fornari, 1974). She seems essentially to argue that the basic persecutory anxiety felt in relation to the dead is controlled through a mechanism of negation. For her,"this process of negation, associated with the fantasy of omnipotent sadistic control leads to the transformation of persecutory spirits of the dead into tutelary deities as idealised good objects" (60-61). In other words, the motivation behind the perpetrator as discussed above is reflected in Colonel Papa le bon and can be best understood in Klein's comments in which she connects the rites of head-hunting with the ideas of triumph and vanity. "The head", she says, "is the trophy that is exhibited by the warrior as a proof of his invincibility and courage" (61). Her only argument is that it is the thirst for glory that brings war. If looked at seriously, this leads us to argue that the maniacal nature of 'triumph' and 'glory' which Klein speaks about, was not only "joined to the psychology of war among [ancient] people", but it is a part of "the psychology of war in general" (61). Such paranoid defence, it could be argued, occurs directly or indirectly in child soldiers (especially those who lost their parents and relatives) as a way to resolve their persecutory anxiety.

In addition to being grotesque, Papa le bon's physical body is a reflection of war-lordism and postcolony society. The war-lords present the most characteristic manifestation of cruelty and their actions cannot be understood without a knowledge of them; for civil war is through and through the fruit of warlordism. They are a group of people of all walks of life (scholars, politicians, business men0 unhappy with authority and fighting for their 'civil' liberty but whose undefined motives make them as violent as or even more violent than those in power. As Bill Berkeley who wrote about African war-lords in his *The Graves Are Not Yet Full* (2001), observed:

> The key actors who appear in this book are sophisticated, highly intelligent, and well educated. Many have graduate degrees from elite universities in England, France, and the United States, and several have Ph.Ds. A conspicuous feature of Africa's seemingly primitive conflicts is the central role played by intellectuals fomenting them. The killers themselves, like François Sibomana of Rwanda, may be illiterate, dressed in rags and rubber flip-flops. Their leaders, when I met them, were notably suave, clean-shaven, smartly dressed, with soft hands and sensible shoes…" (10)

Berkeley's objections apply here. As the novel shows, Kourouma's war-lords, far from being objects of hostile attention could be admired. Colonel Papa le bon, for example, is healthy; the body is superbly well shaped (although still utterly strange because of his behaviour) and, as shown in the quote below, is kingly:

> Sa tête était ceinte d'un cordon multicolore, il avait le torse nu. Ça avait des muscles d'un taureau et ça m'a fait plaisir de voir un homme si bien nourri et si fort dans ce Liberia de famine (Kourouma, 2000:66).

The use of the body here and in particular the body of the war-lord is political. The writer lays strong emphasis on the implications of this body than the body itself. Again, while this could be thought of as exaggeration, a technique referred to as *grandiosity* in fiction, it is not far from the truth. The bodily topography in this part of the text is closely interwoven with cartography. Zorzor, his headquarters, is divided into three districts inhabited by different groups: refugees, prisoners, sex slaves, children and child soldiers. All these groupings suffer persecution at the hands of Papa le bon. Such a ranking of people prepares us to understand that in the postcolony "power is not an empty space; it has its institutions, it has its hierarchies, it has its techniques" (Mbembe, 1992:14). People in Zorzor were disempowered and made to believe that the despot is the 'almighty one': "À Zorzor le colonel Papa le bon avait le droit de vie et de mort sur tous les habitants" (76). Owning the land, he rules over its dwellers by monstrous laws. The distorting or alienating description shows how the rationale of goodness from which his name "Papa le bon" ('Good-hearted Father') derives, loses its significance as the passion to kill or to own peoples' lives becomes dominant. In addition he has the power to carry out exorcisms and the charms (fetishes) he wears all over his body reveal his blending of the animist and Christian beliefs with which he is imbued. The grotesque features reflected in this character are presented as a result of extreme psychic deformation. This leads to the

assumption that most of the atrocious acts originate not only from external influence such as poverty, but also result from irrationality.

But why does the Good Father use child soldier? Perhaps his action can be justified in par given the situation prevailing in the country. It is said that most children whose parents were killed by Doe joined the NPFL. In this way, the priest, Papa le bon, thought to assist them. But this observation is not enough to explain the motives of war-lords toward child soldiers. He exploits child orphans like Kid who, as the narrator says had no parents: "comme personne ne connait les parents du capitaine" (66). The association of such a small child with work, and violence, is the irony used by the writer to show how senseless and uncaring the Good Catholic Father[58] (Papa le bon) was.

The reader is still left wondering how highly educated people like Colonel and Priest, Papa le bon could have taken part in the mass killing of their own countrymen. Berkeley once put this question to one of the war-lords, François Sibomana, when he asked him, "How is such horror possible?" (2001:10). Berkeley came to understand that "the forces that drove men like François Sibomana to barbarism" during the Rwandan genocide, "are no more peculiar to Africa – and no less evil – than the forces that drove fascism a half century earlier are to Europe" (2001:10).

When the child soldiers realised the inhumanity in this forest-monster, they did not hesitate to find ways for their deliverance; they killed him. It is therefore appropriate to look at him as a major grotesque figure. Colonel Papa le bon dies killed by a child soldier called "Tête brulée" and the latter takes with him many other child soldiers and weapons back to the United Liberian Movement (ULIMO) a faction in which he had served previously. The war-lord is turned into a victim by the very same child soldiers he exploits. This act of violence by a child soldier anticipates the structural and thematic details of the plot proper. It helps us to understand how "the applauding crowds of yesterday" can become today, as Achille Mbembe puts it, "a cursing, abusive mob" (1992:10). As the saying goes, violence

[58]The Congolese poet, U Tam'si, had to rebuke Christians in his *Epitomé* (1962) where we read:"In kissing your cross my mouth was stained with blood." Obinaju (in Oje, et al., 2000) remarks that "during the Congolese crisis 1960-1964, the Church of Christ played a very dubious role, allying with the colonialists instead of saving the innocent blacks from oppression" (79).

begets more violence – Papa le bon exposes child soldiers to death and child soldiers retaliate against him.

6.3.1.2. The Congos, Samuel Doe and Prince Johnson

This section focuses on the little known story of late President Samuel Doe and his ascent to power after the execution of the Tolbert government and Doe's own tragedy, tortured, mutilated and finally brutally killed by Johnson. The quotation of tribal tensions below is sufficient to guide the discussion. Let us recall that the description of circumstantial relation of events and the manner in which the writer grotesquely describes these events is what is essential. The historical information (provided in section 6.2.1 on 'the novel's Political and Historical Background) is expanded here.

Writing about the Congos, the writer says:

> [L]e dictateur Doe est partit du grade de sergent dans l'armée liberienne. Lui, sergent Doe, et certains de ses camarades ont eu marre de l'arrogance et du mépris des nègres noirs afro-américains appelés Congos à l'égard des natives du Libéria. (Kourouma, 2000:103)

As already stated, the humiliation of the black Nigger Africa natives in Liberia by their fellow Afro-Americans who were descendants of freed slaves also known as Congos is given as the root cause of Liberian crisis. The Afro-Americans saw their fellow Africans as easy to exploit as they were themselves by the white American slave masters. Put the other way around, the natives' position resembles the Negroes' position in relation to the whites with the only exception that their aggression was directed against their own king. Samuel Doe was against such exploitation even though his vision was extended beyond the defence of the marginalised groups, but his ambitions were to occupy high office. Kourouma's description of this dehumanised man utterly destroying his fellow countrymen and their wives and children is a powerful one. The scene of the killing of the Afro-Americans is historically verifiable and makes this account "hard to swallow" (Donald: 1989: 278):

> Après la réussite du complot, les deux révoltés allèrent avec leurs partisans tirer du lit, au petit matin, tous les notables, tous les sénateurs afro-américains. Ils les amenèrent sur la plage. Sur la plage, ils les mirent en caleçon, les attachèrent à des poteaux. Au lever du jour, devant la presse international, les fusillèrent comme des lapins. Puis les comploteurs retournèrent dans la ville. Dans la ville, ils massacrèrent les femmes et les enfants des fusillés. (Kourouma, 2000:104)

The reality of the theatre is very disturbing. Nothing is more desperate than the depreciation of human life. Killing defenceless women and children is an evil omen indeed. The statement that:"Tous les hommes de l'univers entier avaient eu marre de voir au Liberia les nègres noirs africains indigènes s'égorger comme des sauvages ivres de sang" (Kourouma, 2000137) shows how the whole world was in shock. By depicting such scenes of massacre where entire families are decimated, the writer places Doe as a sign of all the worst deeds that have come down through the history of Liberia.

The danger of excluding others because we think they are primitive does not need to be underlined, but requires only additional emphasis. The Congos were lost in their leadership having acquired the habit of turning everything to account for one end-selfishness. Richard Priebe (2005) admonishes against diminution of mutual interest arguing that "When the criterion for membership is single (or of a single cluster), for example, race, language, religion, etc., a simple mechanism for violent exclusion such as genocide may arise" (Priebe, 2005:53).

Now the interesting thing is that Doe whose vision to liberate the natives by killing the Congos has come to be regarded by the same natives as a demon that must be cast out. Doe is shown here as on the brink of insanity. As one might see, tropes such as death, cruelty, and inhumanity are very much at the centre of *Allah n'est pas obligé*. Birahima, our child narrator, is not just a child soldier, but almost a West African war researcher, and as such, it is not surprising that he knows about each historical figure's scene of death.

Doe is struck down by the hand of Prince Johnson who claims to be a man of God who always wished to come face to face with him. Doe's biggest mistake is to have forgotten that Prince Johnson was not just anybody; he claimed to be "a man who had become involved in tribal wars at God's command to kill the devil's men such as Doe. This shows that Doe's initiative to negotiate with such a man was not well thought-out, for Johnson knew from the start that he will not abide by what Doe says. "Pour dire vrai, le Prince Johnson était un illuminé" says the narrator and "on ne discute pas avec un visionaire" (141), he adds. That Johnson was more enlightened than Doe has been proven. Unfortunately for Doe, he did not realise this until it was too late now that he was at the mercy of the ruthless gang: "Samuel Doe, le dictateur, a su cela trop tard. Malheureusement trop tard! Il l'a su quand il a vu, lui-même vu de ses yeux, vu de son

vivant, vu ses membres partir morceau par morceau, pièce par pièce. Comme les éléments d'un tacot qu'on veut débrouiller"(141-142). If the man, Johnson, is described in such terms, all else that follows is possible. Numerous descriptions are presented by the narrator to explain the sequence of this tragedy. It is worth quoting here one extract in order to demonstrate the cruelty humans are capable of:

> Le commando [Johnson] fit coucher tout le monde, s'empara de Samuel Doe. Il fit attacher les bras au dos de Samuel Doe, le fit descendre de l'étage et le jeta dans une Jeep au milieu de soldats armés jusqu'aux dents. Tout cela fut vite fait, promptement fait, les soldats de l'ECOMOG n'eurent pas le temps de s'organiser, de réagir. Le commando put forcer la porte du siège de l'ECOMOG sans tirer. Le commando amena Samuel Doe au port dans le sanctuaire de Johnson (…) Et là, il le fit détacher et jeta par terre.
>
> Et une fois par terre, des souliers, des poings, dans une bouffée délirante de rire (…), il s'acharna sur Samuel Doe en hurlant: « C'est toi le président du Liberia qui fais la guerre pour rester président, toi un homme du démon! Un homme guidé par le démon. Tu veux par les armes rester président. Président de la République, le président de tous les Libériens. Mon Seigneur Jésus! » Il le prit par l'oreille, le fit asseoir. Il lui coupa les oreilles, l'oreille droite après l'oreille gauche : « Tu veux discuter avec moi. Voilà comme je discute avec un homme du démon. » Plus le sang coulait, plus Johnson riait aux éclats, plus il délirait. Le Prince Johnson commanda qu'on coupe les doigts de Samuel Doe, l'un après l'autre, et, le supplicié hurlant comme un veau, il lui fit couper la langue. Dans un flot de sang, Johnson s'acharnait sur les bras, l'un après l'autre. Lorsqu'il voulut couper la jambe gauche, le supplicié avait son compte : il rendit l'âme.
>
> Johnson délirant, dans de grandes bouffées de rire, commanda. On enleva le cœur de Samuel Doe. Pour paraître plus cruel, plus féroce, plus barbare et inhumain, un des officiers de Johnson mangeait la chair humaine, oui, de la vraie chair humaine. Le cœur de Samuel Doe fut réservé à cet officier qui en fit une brochette délicate et délicieuse. Ensuite, on monta rapidement un haut et branlant tréteau, en dehors de la ville, du côté-là-bas de la route du cimetière. On y amena la charogne du dictateur et la jeta sur le tréteau. On la laissa exposée pendant deux jours et deux nuits aux charognards. Jusqu'à ce que le vautour royal, majestueusement, vint lui-même procéder à l'opération finale. Il vint lui arracher les yeux, les deux yeux des orbites. Le vautour royal rendait ainsi inopérante la force immanente de Samuel Doe et les pouvoirs immanents de ses nombreux fétiches.
>
> Après ça, on enleva la charogne qui empestait à un kilomètre à la ronde. On la jeta à la horde des chiens. La horde des chiens impatients qui, pendant les deux jours et deux nuits, se disputaient à coups

> d'aboiements et de gueule sous le tréteau.les chiens se précipitèrent sur la charogne, la happèrent et se la partagèrent. Ils en firent un bon repas, un très délicieux déjeuner. (144-146)

Doe is represented here, not as the perpetrator he has always been, but as a victim himself. His slaying is related in slow motion, the narrator noticing every quiver both in the slasher's and the victim's face. The writer emphasises the end of this man following the law of reversal. Doe's venture into the ECOMOG[59] headquarters to meet Johnson, fooled into believing that he was a man of peace, was mistaken. He was playing with a complex being, a grotesque being, a person described by Kourouma as "illumine" and "visionaire" (i.e. seer). This is a man who is able to fuse the criminal mind with the mind of a loyalist. And upon hearing the news of Doe's invitation, the narrator says, Johnson is very excited at the idea of meeting Doe, as he had many times wished to do. However, contrary to many people's expectations, "[t]he meeting" we are told, "turned into a shootout, with 60 of Doe's men killed while ECOMOG troops looked on" (Furley, 1995:145) with Doe himself captured. All this is done quickly without giving the ECOMOG soldiers a chance to react. Doe is taken by Johnson and his gangs to his headquarters, where he would be tortured to death before his body was thrown away.

In the account of Johnson's mutilation of Doe's body, different techniques are used by the writer (description, alienation, and comment*)* to degrade Doe and also to expose the inhumanity of Johnson. Johnson starts off by reducing Doe to the rank of a non-human, he humiliates him by comparing him to a demon while laughing hysterically: "C'est toi le président du Liberia qui fais la guerre pour rester président, toi un homme du démon!" (144).

The scene of the mutilating of Doe's body is not easy to read. As it proceeds, they cut off his fingers one by one while the victim squeals like animals do, "le supplicié hurlant comme un veau" (145). That Doe is described as "squealing like a suckling calf" is significant. This shows the human body's fragility, vulnerability or limits. The body which

[59] The Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group**, or** ECOMOG**,** was a West African multilateral armed force established by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). ECOMOG was a formal arrangement for separate armies to work together. Its backbone was Nigerian armed forces and financial resources, with sub-battalion strength units contributed by other ECOWAS members — Ghana, Guinea, Sierra Leone, Gambia, Liberia, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, and others (see http://www.knowledgerush.com/kr/encyclopedia/ECOMOG/).

once lived in luxury and power now refuses to be associated with all these things: omnipotence or all-powerfulness. The safe body that was protected, we are told, by strong charms in his presidential mansions, but these charms were no longer active.

While one would have expected Doe's death to be the final stage of his painful journey, Johnson and his people are not yet satisfied. To show how inhuman they are, Doe's heart was put aside for one officer who wished to make a kebab out of it. (El;se where in the novel the Sierra-Leonean hunters ate sister Gabriel Aminata's heart in the belief that a fallen hero/ heroine's heart gives them strength and courage: "cela donne de l'ardeur et du courage", Kourouma, 2000:201). After all this, his body will be thrown to the vultures which came to peck out his eyes. Bakhtin argues that special attention in the grotesque is often paid to the "protruding eyes", that is, "all that seeks to go out beyond the body's confines" (1968:316). "…the head, ears, and nose also acquire a grotesque character when they adopt the animal form or that of inanimate objects…" (Bakhtin, 1968:316). The writer presents the corpse of Doe like the dead body of an animal only good as food for vultures.[60]But if the food is meant to sustain us, it is therefore logical to argue that where there is death, life is also expected. The transformation of the human body into a food for animals reads like an expansion of an old food-chain cycle: minerals are food for plants, plants are food for animals, animals are food for men, men become food for animals and so on. "Dismemberment, death, and decay may all be celebrated if one takes a cosmic view of the physical world" (McNeil, 1990:33). This chain can also go beyond the physical to the spiritual sphere if we consider that men are once more food for gods who feed on the blood of human sacrifice. The fusion of soil and blood as shown in the murder of Doe anticipates the revelation of chaos while the image of the body as food for animals is used to stress the re-creative power of physical life. Taken from another angle, the "ox", during Rabelais's time, "was led in solemn procession accompanied by the playing of

[60]Vultures are symbolically associated with the battle field. The Bible makes use of the same symbol, "wherever the body is, there the eagles (vultures) will be gathered together" (Luke 17 v.37). Jesus through the mouth of Luke refers to the church which will be snatched heavenly ward as a bird snatches its prey. And by the phrase ' the birds gathering where there is carrion of (spiritual) decay, it means for Christians that Jesus will return when wickedness will have increased. Clearly, the principle of life that springs out of decay is applied here as well. The motifs of rebirth and redemption occur in connection with grotesque coffins in literature.

violas with its head decorated with multicolored ribbons". So, "this ox was to be slaughtered, it was a carnivalesque victim. It was king, a procreator, symbolizing the city's fertility; at the same time, it was the sacrificial meat, to be chopped up for sausages and patés" (Bakhtin, 1968:202). The death of famous people is perhaps expected to bring new life. The decomposed body is revolting both to the eye and mind. "The modern mind" Harpham (1982) says, "finds it especially difficult to see what qualifies as filth to be sacred…" This is so because "we have lost the sense of participation in primitive mind." As he further argues, "fertility is the expression of the life force itself, and issues as naturally from corruption as spring follows winter's death and shoots spout from fructifying dung" (56). Although dirt and disorder cross boundaries and defy conventions, running against our mental habits, Harpham aligns them with the sacred because they are both transcendent categories. Besides, we believe this to be logical; the end of something (or somebody) often brings reflections on the fatality which leads to transformation and new beginnings. That the new Liberian president is trying to work hard to renew the country's hope and willingness to live and to reconstruct it from the ruins of war is, in our view, a reflection of this orderliness.

The use of language itself (grammar in this context) can also take us through this scene through which we can determine not only the action and the object, but also the agent behind the action. One notices that the subject is followed by the object or the complement comes after the verb in the following sentences: SOVC- "Il (S) le (O) prit (V) par l'oreille (C)", SOVC- [S]… "le (O) fit(V) asseoir (C)", SOVC- "Il(S) lui (O) coupa (V) les oreilles (C)", and SVC- "Le Prince Johnson (S) commanda qu'on coupe (V) les doigts de Samuel Doe (C)". In these sentences the action involves two participants, an agent and a patient, and the agent, who is Johnson or his people, act on the patient, Doe, who is a victim. The ideological process the writer uses here by showing us who killed Doe demonstrates an action with responsible agents. Such background agency helps us to understand how child soldiers are used to execute the war-lords' commands.

Before concluding this section, let us observe that the author depicts an incident surrounded by an aura of evil. As a writer, Kourouma plays with his grotesque figures and their actions. Johnson is certainly a grotesque figure, and one which creates disgust. Not only are his actions monstrous, but also his inner person is deformed although he pretends to behave as if he is pained by the sufferings of his fellow country men. The exotic

features are disguised in his religiosity as shown in this peculiar type of rhetoric: "Et lui, Johnson, un homme de l'Église qui était entré dans la guerre tribale sous le commandement de Dieu" (143) is ludicrous but also seductive. God, he argues, ordered him to wage tribal war in order to kill the devil's men – "tuer les hommes du demon" (143) who make the Liberians suffer. Clearly, Prince Johnson is a split character. First, through his name as 'Prince' which suggests ambiguity as being at once the 'Son of a King' and a 'War-lord'. As 'John,' he can also be easily associated with 'Saint' John of the Bible. So, the extreme cruelty that comes out of such a man indicates a distortion of Christianity into a religion of destruction. For example, the narrator shows us Johnson praying and asking God to bless the fetish: "Que Jésus-Christ et le Saint-Esprit veillent à ce que tes fétiches restent toujours efficacies" (140). Kourouma's imagery of a saint, a seer, who is, at the same time, criminal is telling. John Fraser describes the saint or seer in these words:

> There has also been the notion of the criminal as saint, or seer, or artist to contend with. Partly this arises from the phenomenon of criminals who themselves display remarkable extremes of violent criminality and genuine devoutness, Gilles de Rais being the paradigmatic example. Partly it comes from other situations in which the complex intensities and anguishes of the perpetrator of the crime (Othello, for example, or a good many actual perpetrators of crimes passionless), or the complexities of the situation in which the crime occurs (e.g., Hamlet's killing of Polonius), are such that it becomes difficult to see the figure as criminal at all. Partly too it comes from philosophical or quasi-philosophical endeavours, whether by Nietzsche, or Sade, or Genet, to demonstrate the awfulness of 'normal' social behavior in such a way that the much more limited destructiveness of the genuinely risk-taking outlaw looks good in comparison (Fraser, 1974:22).

This lengthy passage is insightful in that it can be applied to our context. Clearly Johnson is a person who knows how to contrast his apparent social good behaviour with his courage in taking a greater risk with his own life; in so doing, it becomes difficult to dissociate his good deeds from his bad deeds and his character is therefore ambiguous. Like Johnson, the Ugandan LRA's leader, Joseph Kony, also claims that God wants him to fight evil people who have to be eliminated because they are leading the country into lawlessness despite "hold[ing] the ignoble record for having the world's youngest reported armed combatants, aged five" (Singer, 2006:20). In like manner, Johnson claims that God ordained him to carry out his judgement. We admit that Johnson's knife which began God's judgement of Doe does not differ from what Doe used to end Tolbert's reign.

By grotesquely presenting Johnson as the man of God and a killer, the writer satirically exposes the church to be as hypocritical as those politicians who brought war in the country. One may wonder why Johnson who continually espouses Christian virtues should be the first one to start throwing punches (at Doe) when the occasion called for action. Kourouma is famous for his use of caricature to describe scenes of physical violence by people who claim being of God. Not only do these passages mock power, they also draw our attention to the representation of Africa's wars as spectacle.

Thus ends the story of the tyrant, Samuel Doe, and his opponents, Prince Johnson and his gangs. Doe's power and position were ended and his life was snuffed out in disgrace. Johnson's punishment was quickly effected and Doe's earthly remains (or carcass) were cast into the city gutters, a fact which the novel's account takes special note of: "on enleva la charogne… on la jeta" (146). The carcass of Doe became dung upon the face of the fields of Monrovia, his skull here, his feet and hands there in such a way that no one was able to recognise him and say: 'This is Doe.' What Kourouma means is that there was nothing else left of him to be seen or pointed to, or that might lead Liberians to praise him for. In the end, none of Doe's or the Congos's power, pomp, or privilege proved to be lasting.

6.3.1.3. Women at war: the womb of violence

As examples of women warriors, we have a Liberian General of the army, Onika Baclay, and we will also discuss here the case of Colonel Aminata Gabrielle even although she is from Sierra Leone. We will then turn to the second part of the novel's plot dealing with war-lords in Sierra Leone.

Women warriors are pivotal figures in this novel. *Allah n'est pas obligé* shows this in its Chapters 3, 4 and 5. The transformation of women from icons of peace into ones of death becomes the central argument in understanding the writers' strategies in explicating gender issues in civil war situation. These women are presented by Kourouma in many guises: as warriors, sadistic mothers, making sexual advances to male children, traitors as well as child molesters. Unlike women in Dongala's novel where they are described in their beauty although humiliated by child soldiers, Kouroma's female characters are depicted in such a way that they arouse fear and disgust.

By including women in this novel, the writer acknowledges war as a major institution which brought changes in culture and by which notions of femininity and masculinity had to be rethought. The woman's role in war is not only scandalous, it is in itself a sign that the francophone writing has undergone changes and Kourouma probably was the first to have attempted to bring in reflections on African women's role in war and sex in his writing although this would be reinforced by Dongala two years later in his *Johnny chien méchant.* It is evident that the role of women in war initiates discourse, a changing discourse on cultural history from which one will have to rethink African culture.

6.3.1.3.1.General Onika Baclay and the sisters-in-law

General Onika Baclay and her daughters-in-law, Hadja Gabriel Aminata and her girl soldiers are a vivid representation of the grotesque behaviour in this section. Although known as religious, they are depicted by features that emphasise rather than hide their wickedness. Onika Baclay (Samuel Doe's sister), for instance, is described to us as "un drôle de numéro matricule. Mais une drôle de femme, très juste à sa façon. Elle fusillait de la même manière femme et homme, tous les voleurs, que ça ait volé une aiguille ou un boeuf (111). Of Onika's daughters-in-laws, Sita is described as a Muslim, but is not at all humanitarian (103); Monita is in charge of prisons and gives food to prisoners who have only a few hours to live (103) and Rita is in charge of the child soldiers' division.

Rita is one of the female characters who allow the writer to explore not only the reversal role of women, but also to show how the child protagonist loses his innocence. By allowing the child engage in sexual intercourse, Kourouma is able to show us the ambiguities that haunt both women and children when in situations of war and civil unrest. There is confusion between Birahima's naivety and his corrupted mind. The child's attempt to play innocent is false.

Before his eyes, Rita changes, from being a commander of child soldiers to being Birhima's lover. " Petit Birahima, tu es beau, tu es joli'" (114) she says to the boy. There no question about that, she loves him too much, and takes him to her home when her husband is not there to give him food and have sex with him. "Rita Baclay m'aimait comme c'est pas permis"(114) the boy says " quand Baclay était absent, elle m'amenait chez elle, me mijotait un plat… Je mangeais bien et, pendant le repas, elle ne cessait de

dire: '…tu es beau, tu es joli'" (114). As one may see, the child's memories do not indicate any regret, but joy: "Et après le repas, me demandait tout le temps de me déshabiller" (114),"Et j'obéissais, Birahima adds, " Elle me caressait le bangala, doucement et doucement" (114). "Elle faisait plein de baisers à mon bangala et à la fin l'avalait comme un serpent avale un rat" (115), he seems to conclude. The statements clearly show that even though still a child, Birahima has already lost his innocence, for he speaks from personal experience and he is enriched by that experience. He knows what he is doing and enjoys it. His only fear is to be caught by Baclay as he argues: "Si le colonel Baclay nous voyait, il ne serait pas content" (114). The child's sex creates the irony of the novel in which we see a child soldier as both naïve and yet not innocent.

Also important here is that we note that open orifices, particularly mouths, are central to grotesque bodily representation (Bakhtin 1965:317). Even more important, such representation aligns this body with its social and political underpinnings. This image of a shift from reproductive sexuality to orality represents the opposite of reproduction. The emphasis on the oral illustrates war as a perverted act. Sex which was once the epitome of natural human behaviour is made here completely perverse. Such orgiastic fantasy by a married woman and her indulgence in erotic acts with a male child while her husband is at the front, not only speaks of her infidelity but is also a symbol of disloyalty to the national cause (for those who consider war as an act of patriotism). Not only are love and war intertwined in this scene, but their functions are portrayed as completely reversed. This scene could also be interpreted as people's subconscious love of war. War in West Africa, far from being seen merely as an outcome of external constraints, is first and foremost, an internal treachery.

Child sex by Dongala, as already mentioned in Chapter 5, remains a taboo in francophone literature., "Sexuality", Veit-Wild, et al. (2005) write "a terrain which in African society has been treated with the utmost secrecy" (xi). Though the writer deals with the subject, it is regarded as a foreign influence which is slowly breaking this taboo in this fiction.

As an agent of debate, let us return to Onika and her use of child soldiers. As already pointed out, ULIMO operates in the mining areas. Onika is money driven woman, she secures a very rich part of the country. Gold and diamond dealers who take advantage of war and come to do business in the country need defence groups which Onika provides by

using child soldiers to protect them while she generates capital through shares. This work, however, is not without risk for Onika's child soldiers who constantly fight wars and die in numbers. But when the child soldiers are defeated, Onika blames them claiming they have offended the spirits of her ancestors. She does make recourse to the priest (Yacouba and others) to organise cleansing ceremonies, she walks the boys naked down to the river where these ceremonies are held and prayers addressed to the ancestors:

> Mânes des ancêtres, mânes de tous les ancêtres. Esprits de l'eau, esprits de la forêt, esprits de la montagne, tous les esprits de la nature, je déclare humblement que j'ai fauté. Je vous demande pardon le jour et la nuit aussi. J'ai mangé du cabri en pleine guerre (Kourouma, 2000:126).[61]

Like most Africans, Onika believes that ghosts or spirits of ancestors are benefactors. In their "imaginary environment", Fornari (1974) observes, "where the ancestors or spirits are left to exist, men experience the most elementary forms of enemy territory and relationship to an enemy object" (48). Although we disagree with Fornari who refers to the world of ancestors as 'imaginary' (for, to Africans, this world is real), we do, however, agree with him that once things go wrong, Africans often find an enemy to blame and this becomes the main source of tensions that lead to wars.

Fetish, it seems, helped to reconquer Niangbo. Yet, while Onika may believe that the worship of ancestors and the fetish assisted in this victory, Birahima does not think so. For Birahima, the victory is a result of a massive contribution by Tête Brulée. Where then did things go wrong when they were defeated for the first time? And where really does the victory come from now? Is it the courage of Tête brulée and the fetish combined? The narrator through the passage below shows that this victory left him in a state of confusion:

> Moi alors j'ai commencé à rien comprendre à ce foutu univers. A ne rien piger à ce bordel de monde. Rien saisir de cette saloperie de société humaine. Tête brulée avec les fétiches venait de conquérir Niangbo! C'est vrai ou ce n'est pas vrai, cette saloperie de grigri? Qui peut me répondre? Où aller chercher la réponse? Nulle part, Donc c'est peut être vrai, le grigri…ou c'est peut-être faux, du bidon, une tricherie tout le long et large de l'Afrique. A faforo (cul de mon père)! (Kourouma, 2000:129).

[61] Spirits of the ancestors, spirit of each and every ancestor. Spirits of water, spirits of forest, spirits of mountain, spirits of nature all, humbly I confess that I have sinned. Day and night I ask your forgiveness. I smoked hash in time of war (Kourouma,2000/ 2006:115).

Birahima seems to doubt, if not reject, African traditions despite the rituals of initiations he himself had undergone before leaving his country. He is caught between traditional beliefs, on the one hand, and modern warfare, on the other. If Birahima is asking all these questions, it is because as a young boy he does not understand why these ceremonies are done in order to bless the killing of people as demonstrated in Onika's defeat of Niangbo where many people were killed and among them was Aunt Mahan's husband whose decomposing body was found in his house by Birahima and Yacouba.[62] He does not know what to accept and what to reject. Birahima's in *Allah n'est pas obligé* can be compared with Joseph Toundi in *Une vie de boy* who being confused "neither yields to the demands of the colonisers fully nor revolts against them completely, once he has exposed the insubstantiality of their moral claims" (Gikandi, 1987:59). Like Toundi, Birahima fails to acknowledge the links between belief in fetish, politics, economic interests, military powers which people like Onika understand so easily. Reflecting Gikandi's (1987) words, Birahima is that "ironic naïf who makes observations and asks questions without understanding their full import" (58). However, his doubt is very important in the sense that it helps us avoid assumptions such as that child soldiery is a product of African traditions. In his study of myths, Gikandi (1987) makes again an important observation when he says that that: "it is no longer enough to say that myths express a community's fears, or hopes, or expectations, for…the apprehension of myth is not always uniform." The critic futher argues that "while a community may express its identity through its mythologies, it is also true that individuals may often find themselves locked into a struggle with their community as to the meaning of such myths and their implications for personal conduct" (165).

Commenting on the Niangbo battle, the narrator argues in a manner that draws this war to

[62] Onika's defeat of Niangbo has a structural function in this novel. It is here in Niangbo where Birahima's aunt used to stay before she ran away to Sierra-Leone after her husband was killed. It was during these attacks that her husband was murdered while she managed to escape. The neighbour gives this report to Yacouba and Birahima who came to the house where they found the corpse. He said: "The Krahns came. They smashed his head; they ripped out his tongue and cut off his cock., his tongue and his prick (sex), to make their gris-gris stronger" (Kourouma,2000/2006:122). Ironically, Yacouba and Birahima contributed to the murder of their aunt's husband.

what is known as spiritual warfare; for when the gris-gris men intervened, the victory came as if decided by the spirits of ancestors. If the deaths of people at Niangbo are understood as a result of their prayers to ancestors answered, in this way, wars in Africa cannot only claim to be politically driven. One might speculate and even argue that these wars are also caused by the bloodthirsty spirits of the ancestors in whom African people believe.

6.3.1.3.2 Colonel Hadja Gabriel Aminata and the girl soldiers

In *Allah n'est pas obligé* young girls are also involved in violence. As the war damages the community leaving elderly people and children abandoned, Colonel Hadja Gabriel Aminata emerges as another female character who feels compelled to protect a number of virgin girls. Aminata puts these girls in some kind of boarding-house at a place called Mile-Thirty Eight (Kourouma, 2000:194). This woman is simultaneously Christian, Muslim and animist: "Aminata était tiers musulmane, tiers catholique et tiers fétishiste". She too is forced by circumstances to become violent. She demonstrates extreme violence which conveys social and political meanings that cannot be ignored. Like Kroh in Charly en guerre, charity by Aminata here does not simply mean protection of those who cannot protect themselves; the law of war obliges children to make an effort to defend themselves. This is why Aminata, not only protects these girls, but has them transformed into girl soldiers. Despite being a mother to them, she also coaches them. There are even suggestions that she "machine-gunned any girl who strayed from the path" (Kourouma, 2000/2006:181). Accordingly, the girls are submitted to harsh discipline: they go through early-morning ablutions of their Muslim prayers – "les filles faisaient leurs ablutions et courbaient la prère musulmane", to get rid of the smell of urine that always hangs around them: "[les ablutions] chassent la persistante odeur de pipi que soutient toujours les filles nègres noires et indigenes" and then say communal prayers, do physical exercises, followed by drills – "séances de maniement des armes" (Kourouma, 2000:195).

It should be remembered moreover that Aminata had to defend the virginity of these girls as reported by the narrator : "elle s'était mis dans la tête pendant cette période troublée de la guerre tribale de protéger, quoi qu'il arrive, la virginité des jeunes filles avec le kalach" (196). She is an excisor (i.e. she performs female rituals of initiation). Such rituals involve the trimming of genitals or clitoridectomy. "The trimming of the genitals", as Mbiti observes, "symbolizes and dramatizes separation from childhood. It is often argued that the sexual organ attaches the child to the state of ignorance, the state of inactivity and the

state of potential importance (asexuality) but once the link is severed, "the young person is freed from the state of ignorance and inactivity" (Mbiti cited in Mutisya 1996:101). Pushed further, Aminata's stand corresponds to the demand there is in our African communities to protect children from sexual exploitation. In Aminata's eyes, it is the greatest possible disgrace for a girl to lose her virginity before she is married. This view is espoused by many Bantu people. Among the Luba or Lulua tribes of Kasai (Dr-Congo) if a bride is found to be a virgin, her parents will be rewarded by the bridegroom with a goat generally referred to as a *Mbuji wa nyima* (literally translated as the 'back goat'). In case her virginity has not been proven, the girl brings shame upon her family; it is seen as a sign of bad upbringing.

In his recent study, *An African view of women as sexual objects as a concern for gender equality,* Elijiah M. Baloyi (2010) challenges such traditional beliefs arguing that, "it is good that virginity was highly prized by our ancestors and still is up to today, but guarding it through clitoridectomy indicated a bias against women and underlined the humiliation they suffered because nothing was done to preserve virginity in men" (5). For Baloyi, if clitoridectomy was used to prevent girls from having sexual intercourse before they are married, certain measures should have been applied for the same reason towards boys as well.

Especially worthy of notice are those passages in which the the writer drwas on the death of girl soldiers and Aminata herself. Readers are shocked by the death of a little girl, eight year old Sita, killed supposedly by the workers living in that area (196). As a result of this, some workers who came near Aminata's "filles de la brigade" at night were often found dead and emasculated (asexués) with a note on them: "Par le dja, l'âme vengeresse de Sita" which means "the work of the *dja*, the avenging spirit of Sita" (Kourouma, 2000/2006:182). It is said that when the hunters, called Kamajors[63] arrived in the area they

[63]The Kamajors are a grassroots militia force which was a significant impediment to marauding government and RUF troops. For displaced and unprotected Sierra Leoneans, it is said that joining the Kamajors was a means of taking up arms to defend family and home due to the SLA's perceived incompetence and active collusion with the rebel enemy. The Kamajors clashed with both government and RUF forces and were instrumental in countering government soldiers and rebels who were looting villages. The success of the Kamajors raised calls for its expansion, and members of street gangs and deserters were also co-opted into the organization. However, the Kamajors became corrupt and deeply involved in extortion, murder, and kidnappings by the end of the conflict. It is against this background we also read their confrontation with Sister Aminata.

wanted these girls to see them as "huntable". Sister Aminata warns them that she would execute any hunter who tried to corrupt one of her girls "elle tuerait sans sommation et sans pitié tout chasseur qui essaierait de dévergonder une de ses filles" (198). But the mocking mob of libidinous hunters laughed at her. However, the death of a 12 year-old, Mirta enraged Aminata. Like Sita, Mirta is killed after being the victim of a collective rape by the hunters: "lls la violèrent en un viol collectif" (198) and left her to die in pool of her own blood. This incident leads to the other girls killing one of the suspects throwing his body in the street. The hunters later seek revenge as Aminata continues to kill more of their men. She puts up a serious fight, which they win only after making use of heavy weapons. The attitude of the Kamajors toward Aminata's girls reminds us of other rapists' attitudes toward unmarried women. For example, Lucy in J.M. Coetzee's novel *Disgrace* is presented as a lesbian. As a lesbian, "Lucy would be regarded as 'unowned' and therefore 'huntable'" (Graham, 2005:260). Trobisch's (cited in Kimathi, 1994:14) view of how Africans males described an unmarried African woman as a garden without an owner seems to confirm this attitude. Likewise, Fornari argues that among some ancient people "wars are waged in order to secure women as wives" (Fornari, 1974:44). Reflecting on the condition of women in West Africa during these wars, it is argued that most women or girls who came in contact with the RUF or other rebel groups in Sierra-Leone experienced rape[64].

Additionally, Kourma's book generate a significant dimension which reminds us of our own history, and to ignore this would be unscientific. We cannot speak of girl soldiers without locating this novel in the historic context. Aminata and his girls remind us of the Kingdom of Dahomey. As far as the military organisation was concerned, we are first reminded of two names that stood in the history of this kingdom**,** namely: Agadja, (1708 - 1732) and Gezo (1818-1858) considered to be the greatest warriors. History has it that the Fon were renowned for their prowess in warfare—not unusual until one realises that many of the Fon warriors were women. This elite female soldier corps, called Ahosi or "our mothers" (in the Fongbe language) or Amazons in English are discussed by Professor B.

[64]Sex abuse or rape was used as a kind of reward to child soldiers. One RUF operation in Sierra-Leone was even called "Operation Fine Girl" whose aim "was to find and abduct pretty girls, especially virgins, the younger the better" (Singer 2006:104). Richards et al corroborate this idea arguing that "the pattern of recruitment of the RUF which was mainly carried out along the Sierra Leonean and Liberian borders includes the enlistment and training of young girls and the insurgents even established "combat wives units" (Richards et al cited in Ogunmola, 2009).

Edgerton in his book, *Warrior women: the Amazons of Dahomey and the nature of war* (2000), not as factious figures, but as women known to human history. When King Gezo took power he chose to expand the ranks of his women soldiers, honouring them not only as his loyal guards but as the premier troops of his army. It is probable that to avoid the military plot, the king "placed female companies who usually acted as his bodyguard and who were devoted to him, and charged in time of peace with his protection even within the palace" (Forde, et al., 1967:80). These women were celibate and were forbidden to marry until they reached middle age. In other words, they could serve for two or three decades if not killed in battles. They were, according to Edgerton (2000), chosen from the largest and strongest of young women, usually in their early adolescence. They were either of slave origin or Dahomean. It is also said that these young adolescents went through years of rigorous training i.e. hours of athletic dancing, long marches, wall climbing, and weapons handling, which resulted in creating a corps of stronger, pain-resistant, skilled fighters who were faster soldiers compared with the male soldiers. Although they sometimes fought side by side with men, they were conscripted, housed and trained in separate barracks (see Edgerton, 2000:151-154). The same strategy (see, J.S. Bergh et al., 1984:14) was also applied by Shaka. It is not surprising to note that women who take on the role of warrior during their adolescent years not only can become as aggressive as male soldiers but can also be even more ferocious than men in combat. "The war against the French showed that even very young, recent conscripts would fight ferociously" (Edgerton, 2000:151). "Over a two month period in 1892, they fought in thirty-two bloody battles against the French, maintaining their morale and enthusiasm for close combat to the very end" (Edgerton, 2000:154) before they were all killed by the French troops with the help of the *tirailleurs sénégalais*, that Bakary Diallo deals with in his war-novel, *Force-Bonté*, published in 1926. In one of the battles, 825 bodies were recorded of whom some were very young – 14 or 15 years old. They were also very beautiful, strongly and finely muscled too (Edgerton, 2000:110).[65] The French Foreign Legionnaires and Marine Infantry who fought against them in 1890s, acknowledged that they were, not only far superior to Dahomey's

[65] Sometimes accounts of this type from the Westerners who claimed to be eye witnesses were passionately racist. There is no certainty that a 14 year-old girl would be used in wars as this quote suggests. In fact, the Amazons were highly organised. They had a permanent army and a reserve which guarded the palace in war-time. Chances are therefore that these 13 and 14 year-olds would have been part of the reserve. As Egerton (2000:20) notes elsewhere "young girls ,thirteen or fourteen years of age were attached to each company, where they learned their duties but did not go to war with the company until they were more mature and could handle a musket".

excellent professional male soldiers, but every bit the equal of those proud French soldiers (2000:2).

By addressing this issue of female warriors, Kourouma, not only reminds us of our history, he also wants us to recognise the connections between sexuality and war. "Societies" Fornari (1974) writes, "have at their disposal a number of destructive institutions that operate side by side with the natural death" (9). There were, among many others, "castration, monasticism, imposed chastity, [virginity], slavery, and the repressive laws demanding the isolation of criminals" (Bouthoul in Fornari, 1974:9). These practices contribute to what Fornari calls "direct" or "indirect infanticide" (9). In light of the above, Aminata's institution of protecting African girls' virginity is influenced by her religious fanaticism and can be easily seen as infringing on girls' freedom. This makes us argue that while Aminata's struggle to maintain girls' virginity might be understandable, she remains in many ways an abuser of the very children she claims to protect. As such, her institution falls under what we have described as indirect "infanticide". While this is said, there is a sense in which these stories and images project women's struggles in wartime, their resistance, but also their pride as African women. Aminata also reminds us of the degree of resistance put up by the woman as a victim.

The image of 'emasculation' mentioned above is also worth some attention. If "men's unconscious weapons are", as Fornari puts it, "equated with the penis", so "disarmament is feared as castration" (1974:47). Disarmament and castration are concepts which are associated with weakness.

Also relevant in the novel's discussion of Aminata's girls is that the novel points us to what Harpham (1982) refers to as a "fatality/fertility complex" (58), which he defines as a romantic theme of love and death to mean that that which gives life (a woman gives birth to children or is a care giver) also takes it away (a woman kills her children). The monstrous mothers of this novel reveal a perverted motherhood. They are depicted as child killers who are able to turn against those they were supposed to love. The African woman who was once known as a mother and guardian of customs is now at war. The "woman, for all her cares, is a double-edged sword. She can give life, provide love and happiness, protect and the like. But amidst all this, she is also a devil incarnate when it pleases her, for she can deceive, hate and destroy" (Obinaju in Ojo, S, et al., 2000:78). This is so, not for

her lack of concern for children, but in spite of her concern for them. Hardship and war have changed the care of motherhood into this kind of indifference. Fornari's (1974) statement that "war is distinctly the business of the male" (44) no longer holds. Likewise, the popular African conception about being man "... to control women and prevent them from contesting patriarchy" (Cooper, 2001:49) is being challenged. Kourouma challenges the cultural split between war-like men and peaceful women. Fo, women are no longer outsiders in war; at worst, they are dangerous enemies under the guise of caring, nurturing female role model. Gendered spaces and roles have been reversed. It becomes clear that when one person has both genders, there are more possibilities for terror.

6.3.2. Warlordism in Sierra Leone

In Chapter 5, the story changes since as shown in the plot summary, the protagonist, Birahima and Yacouba, go to Sierra Leone influenced by the idea that Birahima's aunt is there. Their journey starts shortly after 15 April 1995: "day of Foday Sankoh's lightening strike that delivered the knockout blow to the Sierra Leonean authorities and let him get his hands on the useful part of Sierra Leone" (Kourouma,2000/2006:172).

Birahima and Yacouba are captured by the elements of RUF at Mile Thirty Eight which was under the command of Tieffi. The story offers more shocking details depicting child soldiers in Sierra Leone as performing unbearable atrocities. Amost five groups are identified as waging war here. Like in Liberia, the natural resources of the country have become the symbol of the armed conflict as the different factions fight for control over the diamond and gold regions. In *Socio-Economic Injustice and Cronyism: Warlordism and Tayloryism in the Sierra Leone Civil War,* Ogunmola (2009) provides us with an irony encapsulated in the fable on Sierra Leone below:

> At the time of creation, it is said, God created a tiny country rich in mineral wealth, with diamonds, gold, bauxite, rutile, iron ore, chromite and platinum; an abundance of offshore fish; relatively fertile land; and plenty of rainfall. People from the neighbouring territories became furious and demanded equal treatment. God, however, cautioned them with the caveat that they should wait and see what kind of government would rule over Sierra Leone (Zack-Williams in Ogunmola, 2009:3).

Commenting on African countries in his article, *The Abuse & Insult on the Black. Who is to Blame?* (Part 3), Pastor Sam Aweda notes:

> Foday Sankoh was initially a critic of a corrupt Government. He however became greedy for the control of diamond. A satanic minded Foday Sankoh turned Sierra Leone to a war zone. He forced under-age boys who should be in school into drug addicts popularly known as 'kid soldiers'. They burnt tens of houses in a row, raped women, forced parents to murder or rape their children and vice-versa. Foday Sankoh's kid soldiers reduced citizens, which he wanted to govern, to half-able bodies by maiming them. Citizens were asked to choose what they preferred; long-sleeve or short-sleeve. Long-sleeve meant amputating at the wrist while short-sleeve meant cutting the limb at the elbow. (Aweda, 2009: para 19)

Despite its natural resources, the Sierra Leone described above suffers from the so-called paradoxes of the plenty, what Auty Richard (1993) refers to as a "resource curse"; According to Richard, a "resource curse" is defined as "the phenomenon whereby countries with an abundance of natural resources tend to nonetheless be characterized by lower levels of economic development." It is as if these countries rich in natural resources attract war while remaining the poorest in the world. In Ogunmola's view, the civil conflict was also triggered by the spill-over effects of the first Liberian civil war and the emergence of warlords who capitalised on the frustration brought about by years of neglect and the absolute poverty of rural dwellers to launch their guerrilla warfare. Two thirds of RUF youth fighters used in this war were either primary school dropouts or peasants working on farmlands in the rural areas and most of them were illiterate (Richards in Ogunmola, 2009:26). Davies also notes that a number of the child soldiers were "children and who [could] hardly carry an AK 47 rifle" (in Ogunmola, 2009:26).

As Kourouma's concept of 'bordel' (dump or bloody mess) aptly suggests, the novel also concerns itself with this political decay. Writing about what he sees as disgusting, Kourouma defines this country as bordel, its fate even worse than that of Liberia.

> La Sierra Leone c'est le bordel, oui, le bordel au carré. On dit qu'un pays est le bordel au simple quand des bandits de grand chemin se partagent le pays comme au Liberia ; mais quand, en plus des bandits, des associations et des démocrates s'en mêlent, ça devient plus qu'au simple. En Sierra Leone, étaient dans la danse l'association des chasseurs, le Kamajor, et le démocrate Kabah, en plus des bandits Foday Sankoh, Johnny Koroma, et certains fretins de bandits. C'est pourquoi on dit qu'en Sierre Leone règne plus que le bordel, règne le bordel au carré.(Kourouma, 2000:163)

As already stated, here wars are motivated by economic interests and struggles for monopoly over mineral resources trigger the most absurd scabrous and deadly passions. Be it the war-lords, foreign business men or the belligerent greedy bandits, everybody has his eye on this mining paradise and can use any heavy weapon or armour in order to occupy and possess the resources.

The above context helps us to read Kourouma's Sierra Leonean characters in his novel.

6.3.2.1. Tieffi, the *Lycaons* and the myth of cannibalism

Birahima and Yacouba are arrested at Mile-Thirty-Eight by Tieffi who not only is a General, but also an absolute master of his world: "Le Général maitre absolu des lieux et des hommes." (186). Tieffi resembles Fonday: "Le Général maitre Tieffi ressemblait trait pour trait à Sankoh. La même barbe grisonnante, le même bonnet phrygien de chasseur; la même joie de bien vivre, les mêmes sourires et rires ébourifiants" (186). If Tieffi resembles Fonday this much, one then assumes that he is the double or shadow of that "satanic minded Sankoh", "who turned Sierra Leone to a war zone and forced under-age boys who should be in school into drug addicts and turn them into child soldiers", as described in the quote above.

As the story unfolds, Birahima is interested in becoming "un petit lycaon" (187). Tieffi asks if he knows what a lycaon really is: "T'as connaître ce que c'est un Lycaon?" Tieffi explains to him:

> …eh bè, les lycaons, c'est les chiens sauvages qui chassent en bandes. Ça bouffe tout ; père, mère, tout et tout. Quand ça fini de se partager une victime, chaque lycaon se retire pour se nettoyer. Celui qui revient avec du sang sur le pelage, seulement une goutte de sang, est considéré comme blessé et est aussitôt bouffé sur place par les autres. Voilà ce que c'est, c'est pigé ? Ça n'a pas pitié. T'as ta mère sur place? (Kourouma, 2000: 187)

Central to this quote is the question that Tieffi, the war-lord, asks Birahima (in his broken French): "T'as connaître ce que c'est un Lycaon?". Tieffi explains to the boy that to qualify as a Lycaeon, he needs to be brave. That means, a child must first kill with his own hands one of his parents and afterwards be initiated: "il faut d'abord tuer un de tes propres mains" (188). Wishing to be reassured that the boy understands what he says he insists, "tu entends, de tes propres main" before adding: "tuer un de tes propres parents (père ou

mère) et ensuite être initié". (188). The proper initiation of the young lycaons which follows involves ceremonies taking place in the forest at the end of which the Mende initiates are given a lump of meat prepared by the sorcerers with different types of ingredients mixed with human flesh: "les cérémonies de l'initiation se dansent et chantent en mendé. À la fin de la cérémonie, une boulle est faite par les sorciers avec beaucoup d'ingrédients et surement de la chaire humaine"(188). Tieffi speaks to Birahima in a strained kind of laughter as if he was mocking the ignorance of this boy with regard to Mende mysteries.

Birahima cannot be part of this elite division where child soldiers are paid a lot of money and given food and drugs because he is worthless; he has no parents that he can kill and he is not Mendé: "je ne pouvais pas faire partie de l'élite des enfants-soldats, les petits lycaons. Je n'avais pas droit à la double ration de nourriture, aux drogues à profusion et au salaire triplé des lycaons. J'étais un paumé, un vau rien", he observes. Instead, he works in the mines as a slave: "J'étais dans la brigade charge de la sécurité des mines. Ceux qui travaillent dans les mines étaient des petits esclaves" (Kourouma, 2000 :189).

To reach a definite conclusion on such a difficult subject of culture is hard. The aggressiveness directed against the enemy has come to be seen as acceptable in warfare. But what is surprising here is that it is directed against one's own parents. This led Zhang Khai-Ying (2009) to argue: "L'ennemi devient difficile, si pas impossible à definer" (208). However, it is not just enough to focus on the political and the social. The reasons for the boys killing their parents may vary, but here they are associated with mysticism and rites of initiation. As such, we have to move away from the economic reasons for war and look at it from a religious or mythical point of view. Kourouma presents his characters as veiled caricatures which are a reflection of primitive people, and their behaviour an unconscious display of "parricidal impulses" (Fornari, 1974:50) toward their parents. The fact that the Lycaons undergo initiation rites into warfare, as Tieffi explains, means that war in this context becomes, "intimately connected with struggles against such impulses. Just as the Oedipal complex is understood to cause the child experience of rivalry by "project[ing] aggressive impulse on the (temporary) hated parent" (Greenberg, 1991:14) one agrees with Fornari's (1974) view that "the injuries father inflicted on boys during initiation rites intensify the boys' wish to kill their fathers" (Fornari, 1974:50). But this cannot be correct because this initiation according to Tieffi takes place after the killing of one's parents. But

there is also a sense in which we can look at Tieffi's argument as an exercise of subversion by the writer who wants to twist the myth. Perhaps by introducing this myth here the writer is arguing that initiation rites can create in children unconscious motives which might later lead to maladaptive behaviour and war.

While Kourouma's ethnological data in the novel may shock readers, there is a clear similarity between his fiction and the findings of Garry Hogg concerning the legend of cannibalism among the Sierra-Leoneans in the 1950s.

Garry Hogg (1958: 94-98) argues that it was only recently that Sierra Leone was the home of the leopard societies in which cannibalism was highly organised. At one time in this country when any native desired to become a member of the secret leopard society which consisted in getting a *borfimor* (a sham or medicine), the applicant had to identify the nearest chief or priest and consult him. It was the duty of the latter to introduce him to the whole team of medicine men by first giving him an appointment to meet the other members in the forest and be given the *borfimor* and a leopard-knife. As the candidate did this, Hogg reports, he repeated an oath:

> I come now to get this medicine from these people, but if I reveal any secret, or betray any fellow-member, then as I walk a track a snake shall bite me; as I go on the sea my canoe shall overturn and drown me; in the open spaces when I walk, the lightning shall strike me dead (96).

The phrase in the novel: "Celui qui revient avec du sang sur le pelage, seulement une goutte de sang, est considéré comme blessé et est aussitôt bouffé sur place par les autres" (Kourouma, 2000 :187) draws the reader's attention to the secret of this oath. In the manner characteristic of child soldiers, the person who takes this oath is bound to keep it secret, for he cannot reveal such a secret without losing his own life. In this manner, the secret would go no further. And after such an oath, the people conducting a deal would, according to Hogg, meet three days after to decide who the victim would be. It was generally a girl over 14 years old. The initiate, following this myth, had to produce as a sacrifice one person of his own blood, or failing to do that, of the blood of his wife's family. With time, Hogg remarks, things changed; it was suggested that it could be as a woman, a girl, or a boy, even though the eldest girl was preferred. Before setting forth in quest of the victim, the initiates took a meal together where human flesh would be served.

Following Hogg, once the victim was singled out, the initiate and other people approached the mother if the intended victim was a girl or the father if it was a boy. This was done to persuade him/her of the necessity to offer such a sacrifice for a medicine whose function was to protect the family. Despite their unwillingness, they knew too well that they had no choice but to concede or more sacrifices would be demanded. If it was agreed upon, the leopard men would go to the surrounding forests and roar as if they were real leopards (at least to the eyes of the non--initiated). One of them, known as *Yongolado*, whose strength and ability had been recognized like a leopard's own was the one chosen to capture the victim. He would disguise himself in a leopard's skin and it would be arranged that the victim should be sent on a track that leads to danger where he would be captured and cut into pieces. A morsel of this meat would, by cruel irony, be given to the father or mother of the victim.

Hogg's assumption that local people did this to get a 'strong medicine' (*borfimor)* which would enable them to compete with White people is not very convincing although one might speculate that the brutal force of the conquest, colonialism or slavery and their attendant ills pushed Africans (Sierra Leoneans) into looking for a strong charm (*borfimor*) for protection. This shows, not only people's desire for protection (the leopard secret society), but a whole community's struggle with the forces of colonialism. In the context of this novel, like colonialism which pushed people to mutual destruction, child soldiers are exposed to new idols of civil wars. The child soldiers called the Lycaons kill their own parents in order to obtain a strong fetish for war.

This myth is probably the most important in this novel for several reasons. First of all, Kourouma is aware of the relationship between politics and culture and of the connection between old and new myths governing us today. Secondly, the postcolonial systems are shown as appropriating traditional practices. Though the *borfimor* used to make a strong charm is no longer in the daily practice of the Sierra Leonian people, postcolonial Africa still clings to similar beliefs. The words by Tieffi cannot be taken for granted:

> Moi Tieffi, par exemple, je vais jamais au front, à un combat sans une calebassée (un bol) de sang humain. Une calebassée de sang humain revigore ; ça rend féroce, ça rend cruel et ça protège contre les balles sifflantes (Kourouma, 2000: 188).

Although this can be also understood as a hyperbole to emphasize the magnitude of children's perversity (excesses of war) and not as something which happened in reality, it still makes us think of postcolonial Africa. "Sang" as Tieffi observes, is the new password to power, the willingness of people to kill still defines postcolonial power in Africa today. And if we recall Hogg's statement evoked above that those carrying out the sacrifice "had no choice but to concede or else more sacrifices would be demanded including themselves" (cf. 178) the killing of one's parent becomes a ritual act, which, on account of the terror they are victims of, gives the lycaon no choice but to concede in order to save his own life. Tieffi's *petits lycaons* are both 'sacrificers' and victims. It should be argued, however, that nothing mentioned here (e.g. eating of parents' flesh) was ever the experience of child soldiers in a true sense. Yet neither can everything be fictionalised because myths offer us the opportunity to reflect on our lives. What matters the most in this novel is not these rituals, but what they point to. It is today's decadent "rotted underbelly of a [postcolonial] society that has lost its direction" (Gikandi, 1987:112) that Kourouma describes, a society in which power has become a symbol of sacrifice and war.

Kourouma's account of Sierra Leone relates to the tragedy of Foday Sankoh's and his RUF. According to the novel, in order to put up a strong resistance against Sankoh, Captain Valentine Strasser, who overthrew President Momoh in 1992, recruits 14 000 youths who became *sobels* (176) and join the RUF soldiers. Birahima explains the concept of *sobels* in these terms: "des soldats dans la journée et des rebelles (bandits pillards) dans la nuit". The *so* in *sobels* comes from *soldier* and the *bel* comes from *rebel* (i.e. they were soldiers during the day and rebels at night). Most disturbing of it all, however, are small children (including babies) who have their hands cut off in Sierra Leone to stop them voting when they are old enough and to ensure they cannot shoot a gun or fight back. The method works as described below:

> Foday donna les ordres et des méthodes et les ordres et les méthodes furent appliqués. On procéda aux «manches courtes» et aux «manches longues». Les «manches courtes , c'est quand on ampute les avant-bras du patient au coude' les «manches longues», c'est lorsqu'on ampute les deux bras au poignet. (Kourouma, 2000:179).

Child soldiers in Sierra Leone involved in these atrocities (including the lycaeons) remind us of RENAMO's child soldiers in Mozambique who "were ordered to sack villages, shoot

towns' people and in some cases burn their own homes and even kill their own relatives" (Furley, 1995:33).

Kourouma's use of language makes this account of child soldiers one of pure imagination especially when we look at the accumulation of grotesque strategies such as *exaggerations* and *distortions* as illustrated in this passage in which child soldiers perform ruthless and difficult tasks. For example after one of them has killed his father or mother he must ensure that not one drop of blood is found on him. If not, he is also killed and eaten by his peers: "celui qu revient avec du sang sur le pelage, seulement une goutte de sang, est consideré comme blessé et est aussitôt bouffé sur place par les autres" (187-8). This kind of description surpasses the horror experienced by child soldiers.

Whereas Kourouma might be chiefly concerned with the experience of unreality, the trope of cannibalism that he discusses remains a metaphor of a devouring Africa's wars and other evils perpetrated throughout our human history. If we compare millions of people who were tortured or killed during the slave trade, wars of conquest and colonial violence with a few victims who were occasionally sacrificed for religious purposes as partly reflected in this text, the question arises as to which is more damaging than the other. Warner's statement: "If my enemies are like me, how can I go on feeling enmity against them?" (1994:74) puts the history of humanity to shame.[66]There is clearly a sense in which Kourouma uses the trope of cannibalism as a metaphor of any system of destruction. Kyiiripuo Kyoore (2004) is right when he argues that "Kourouma's novel is a fictional documentation of a history of human tragedy, and the historical figures who take on fictional roles in the novel only demonstrate Paul Veynes' assertion that history is a true novel and that the conception that history makes of historical 'causality' is exactly the same that a novelist makes of causality in his or her novel." Kourouma, he argues, "evokes historical figures in order to lampoon them, to make them an object of mockery in order to

[66] Regardless of culture, cannibalism in literature is a universal theme. Cannibalism as a concept was used to define the *alien* by Western critics and travellers but ended up by mirroring them. As Warner puts it, "By tarring the savage with the horror of cannibalism, settlers, explorers, colonizers could vindicate their own violence" (1994:74); "the conqueror's imagery" she adds, "can betray that he is himself the devourer, like the slavers throwing overboard the dead and dying"(4). "Montaigne", Warner further notes, "reminded his readers that they were as savage as the victims as he lamented the plundering of the New World in a great threnody: […] so many goodly cities ransacked and razed; so many nations destroyed and made desolate; so [many] infinite millions of harmless peoples of all sexes, stages and ages, massacred, ravaged and put to the sword; and the richest, the fairest and the best part of the world topsiturvied, ruined and defaced for the traffic in pearls and pepper. Oh mechanical victories, oh base conquest! (1994:74).

emphasize the human consequences of the irresponsible acts of politicians." "The privilege of fiction is that the writer can manipulate history and question historical causality", he adds.

Kourouma's fiction is based on reality and to that extent it represents just another dimension of reality. As we conclude this section, we also recall Kuisma Korhonen's *Tropes for the Past: Hayden White and the History* in which she discusses White's thesis about the idea that: "narrative discourse is not a neutral medium for the presentation of historical events and processes but a significant mode that endows those events and processes with plot, coherence, and meaning" (White in Korhonen, 2006:135). Thus, Kourouma's obsession with events of death by the war-lords is not without significance in his novel. Death, as we have seen, is a common trope in this novel – it goes from children who are killed accidently to leaders' violent deaths as well as to multiple violent deaths (as in Papa le bon's fence made of skulls). One way of understanding death in the novel is to consider the fact that death has lost its meaning in Africa. People no longer die of natural death (e.g. disease) and so as the child Birahima begins to accept his fear, he also begins to think that death can happen to him at anytime. The idea of death also helps remind readers of the historical context of the novel and the theme of war. Its presence lingers even though the war has ended, for in the novel at least, war continues to create violence and death long after it has been declared over. Our discussion of the obituaries below supports the argument that death is a major theme in this novel.

6.4. Kourouma and the Writing of Child soldiers' *Oraisons funèbres* (Memorial Obituaries): Dismembered but not Unremembered

Whereas an obituary is a form of an advertisement among people about the passing of friends and acquaintances frequently read in daily news papers, its use in this novel conveys ideas of difference. Kourouma offers us the life stories of child soldiers through the mouth of his child protagonist, Birahima. In this section, we are going to examine, not only linguistic and stylistic features, but also the distinctive ways in which the writer of child obituaries deviates from the general standard by incorporating comedy, and irony. The content of these obituary texts not only provides the reader with the story of a life already lived, and give the writer a chance to chronicle a human life from start to finish, but they also provide him with an understanding of culture by discovering deeper themes

and meaning beyond the simple retelling of events. Kourouma's aesthetic is embedded in concepts of history and memory which helps us to remember African children in the past.

Anyone who has ever attempted to read novels about child soldiers will attest that the major subject is death and there is an almost obsessive concern with the death of child soldiers. While treatments of death are as varied as the authors who write them, Kourouma, in his *Allah n'est pas obligé*, presents the theme of death through obituaries. And while death is a subject which arouses anxiety, the writer treats it in his novel as a source of laughter even though he recognises the seriousness of the subject. It is difficult for some to believe the depths of sorrow Kourouma expresses over the lives of child soldiers. Others might think the writer is actually mocking child soldiers. Yet it may be better to see Kourouma's lament as a reflection of a true African writer's genuine grief over abusive power and how the latter affects children's lives. In the face of the incomprehensibility of children's untimely deaths, laughter might be the only appropriate response to a violent and hopelessly absurd universe.

The tragedy of war is written by Kourouma as *farce*. Obituaries are treated humorously in this novel even though they remain dramatic while the plot itself may have its child soldiers doing silly or absurd things; it also allows moments of serious reflection as could be expected of a tragedy. Tragedy is often described as based on empathy. Brecht ascribed to tragedy "hypnotism," the task of "inciting emotions" and transmitting them from actor to spectator (Brecht in Magun, 2010). Kourouma portrays, not only his children's pain and death, but also the sense that we live in a world where people are no longer able to sympathise with children. Thus, the obituary writing as a genre has an ontological dimension - that of creating empathy. The explanatory power of these obituaries therefore rests, not only on the writer's description of death, but also by making death appear as a pretext for understanding the interminable pain of childhood in Africa.

In this novel, death pervades the story and the mind of its protagonist who offers a commentary in the form of obituaries on the brevity of child soldiers' lives and the meaninglessness of their deaths. We regard obituary writing here as a strategy unique in its representation of child soldiers' mortality in war. This strategy has been used as an interpretative tool accounting for the deaths of child soldiers. Kourouma's novel seems the

only novel to date that makes use of this device and in this way can be seen as innovative. But the question arises as to what the particular message his novel conveys in this regard.

In exploring this aspect of the novel, several questions arise: Can we write obituaries for children? Obituaries are normally a type of tribute given to those who have led heroic or significant lives. Could we then regard child soldiers' deeds as heroic? Furthermore, can we valorise the death of a child as a perpetrator who died in war? If not, why are these children given obituaries?

Our purpose in focusing on the obituaries is not necessarily to address the obvious question about the overwhelming presence of death in this novel. Instead, this investigation is prompted by the writer's quest to understand the problems created by men understood as the "black holes" dug by these men's evil acts which lead Africa's children's souls to wallow in despair despite their willingness to live. The child, Kik, for example, was crying, screaming all alone: "Je vais crever! Je vais crever comme une mouche" (Kourouma, 2000:97).

While child obituaries are not common, they do nonetheless exist, especially in an elegiac form. Normally, however, the only child who would be given an obituary would have done something considered heroic. Such is the example of the 12 year-old Aids activist Nkosi Johnson, who died in 2001 after challenging the government's AIDS policies and united millions of South Africans in the fight against the disease. With his mature views and sense of humour, it is reported in his obituary by Sap that "Nkosi had become an international symbol in the fight against the disease"(Labadie, 2001). According to the same source, even Former president Nelson Mandela praised Nkosi as an "icon of the struggle for life". The boy is also remembered for saying, "Children should be allowed to live a life and not be born to die" (Labadie, 2001)[67]. Obituaries are written about what kind of life one lived and not necessarily about the kind of death one died. In his *The Genre Function*, Anis Bawarshi (2000) writes:

> We recognize obituaries, for example, as notices of a person's death, usually accompanied by a short biographical account. They serve to notify the general public and so do not play as direct a role as, say, the

[67] Like Nkosi, a 13-year-old boy, Hector Pieterson became an iconic image of the 1976 Soweto uprising alongside a dozen children who marched and died on the streets of the city in 1976-77.

> eulogy does in helping those who are grieving deal with their loss. The purpose of the obituary, then, is not to console those closest to the deceased or to help them maintain a sense of continuity in the face of loss, but to ascribe the deceased with a social identity and value, one that is recognizable to others within the community. So the obituary's purpose is not, like the eulogy, to assess and praise the meaning of the deceased's life and death; rather, it is to make the deceased's life publicly recognizable, perhaps even to celebrate the value of the individual-as-citizen. (Bawarshi, 2000:355-6)

Kourouma's book does not confirm this. The unbelievable violence and dread, the blood and killing disturb the reader. However, if examined with care, we will see that although Kourouma recognises child soldiers' use of violence, he seems, at the same time, to argue in his obituaries that they have been made victims of the evils of history, that they were not responsible for these wars and that should therefore be admired for their endurance. The responsibility for destruction, Kourouma claims, may be found in the acts of the children's families and later on the acts of the war-lords. It is as if the writer argues that the wrongdoers had been victimised themselves in the past which affects their present life. The temptation to cling to such a line of reasoning is strong, especially when we remember that most child soldiers grew up in environments already characterised by violence, and that at the age of 9 or 10 were snatched from schools or separated from their parents and taken to the forests as boy soldiers. Sometimes these terrified youngsters wandered aimlessly along jungle tracks, starving and desperate, harassed by both wild animals and other warring groups unable to make sense of what was going on in their lives. It is important for us to remember that a huge amount of children's pain of which we ourselves are the unwilling witnesses today, is the direct result of mistakes by those holding powers, and being such it is wholly unjustiable for us to cast the tiniest stigma of blame upon children for its existence.

Before looking at some obituaries, let us look at an article which agrees with our argument. In his *De l'enfance tragique dans Allah n'est pas obligé de Kourouma:entre guerre et représentation littéraire de l'horreur* (2011), Gomis discusses the purpose and therefore gives explanations why Kourouma uses obituaries in his novel. Gomis (2011) suggests that " ...parce que le tragique est devenu un moment de la dialectique et de l'orchestration rhétorique du roman, Kourouma opte pour l'oraison funèbre" (110). He seems to say that if tragedy has become a rhetorical great moment, it is because of the recent history of wars. As Gomis proceeds in his analysis of d'*Allah n'est pas obligé* ,for him, the use of the

obituary contributes to the narrative construction of the novel through which the tragic is expressed in an aesthetic form as explained below:

> Le choix de l'oraison funèbre donne au dispositif énonciatif d'*Allah n'est pas obligé* toute son amplitude. L'oraison funèbre éclaire deux possibles romanesques qui le sous-tendent. En effet, grâce au procédé d'empilage et à l'énumération, elle donne à la construction narrative la forme d'une « écriture kaléidoscopique à travers laquelle le tragique ne peut apparaître autrement que comme une particulière expression esthétique. Mieux, l'oraison funèbre, qui participe de la figuration du réel, s'assimile à un mode opération à travers lequel le témoignage se fait pièce à conviction de la réalité tragique (Gomis, 2011:111)

According to Gomis two things should be noted in relation to Kourouma's use of this device (obituary) in his text. First, it gives the tragic a form of aesthetic expression. Second, it reinforces one's belief in the tragic reality itself. In Gomis's view, this device allows one to verify reality even though he does not show very clearly how the Kourouma allows the reader to verify this truth. Further, the critic explains that such a device allows history to explain itself: "Si Kourouma a voulu se détourner du modèle explicatif en vogue dans le roman historique, c'est parce qu'il a choisi de laisser l'histoire se raconter toute seule à travers le regard naïf d'un enfant qui expose sans fard son propre vécu"(112). In Kourouma's novel, one or the other of Gomis's reasons underlies the use of the obituary.

Let us examine four obituaries more closely.

6.4.1 Sarah

A girl soldier, Sarah, is killed by her boy friend, Tête brulée, whom she asked to make love to her in public. Her obituary starts with an unusual *hyperbole* which makes her death remarkable. "Sarah", says the narrator, "était unique et belle comme quatre et fumait du hasch et croquait de l'herbe comme dix" (92). Sarah's father, Bouaké, a sailor, is never seen at home because he has to go to sea and the child stays with her mother whose job was to sell rotten fish at the market in Monrovia. The mother dies when Sarah is only five and her father gives her to one of his cousins, Madame Kokui, who has five children of her own and makes Sarah her dogsbody, cleaning and selling bananas in the streets of Monrovia every day. When Sarah goes out selling these bananas, children living on the street steal some of them. As a result her aunt leaves her a whole day without food. When this happens again the following day, the girl simply decides to beg money until she gets

enough to pay Madame Kokui back. But since she is two days late, she cannot escape her aunt's anger. The young girl resolves to sleep in the doorway of a shop called 'Farah' where she is unfortunately spotted by a man who rapes her. Left almost for dead after the adult male has abused her, she is taken to hospital. When asked about her home by nurses, Sarah does not want to speak of Madame Kokui. Instead, she tells them about her father. Since he was nowhere to be found, the nurses decide to put Sarah in an orphanage run by nuns, and it is here that she lives until the civil war breaks out. As in any civil war, no one is safe. Five nuns are massacred while the others flee leaving Sarah and her friends to fend for themselves. Given the circumstances, the girls are forced into prostitution and the use of drugs at an early age in order to survive. They finally see their enlistment as girl soldiers as the only solution.

Though Sarah's image is distorted and degraded, it emerges very clearly from the narrative that the girl suffered both moral and physical neglect. Over 59 years ago, Joseph Trenman pointed out that:

> …a child who has been deprived of affection is harking back to what he feels he has missed because he still has need of it, and that the other who is surfeit with affection and care is resentful because it has left him unprepared to deal single-handed with realities of the world outside his home (Trenman, 1952: 188).

The above quote explains why Sarah wants to go back to the father she loves but who has remained distant from her. This reminds us of Machel's argument that "poverty, hunger, desperation and fear may drive women and girls to exchange sex for food, shelter, safe passage, identification papers, or other necessities for themselves and their families" (Machel, 2001:57). As might be expected, the girl's life could only worsen:

> Elle était devenue complètement dingue. Elle tripotait dans son gnoussou-gnoussou devant tout le monde. Et demandait devant tout le monde à Tête brulée de venir lui faire l'amour publiquement. (Kourouma, 2000:92)

Sarah is a street child, addicted to drugs, and sexually active at an early age. Her new status as a girl soldier carries these bad habits to extremes.

6.4.2. Kik

Captain Kik, the Cunning (le malin) steps on a mine when a group of people are running away from child soldiers. Unlike others standing by the roadside, Kik the Cunning runs

into the forest and tries to cut off the fugitives' path back to the village. Suddenly an explosion is heard, it is followed by the cry of Captain Kik. "C'était pas beau à voir", says the narrator, "un gosse comme ça, rendre l'âme comme ça". The child screams, as quoted above: "je vais crever! Je vais crever comme une mouche" (97). Even worse, the male nurse who was among the fleeing child soldiers thinks it appropriate to amputate the boy's leg immediately which he throws to a passing dog: "On coupa sa jambe juste au genou. On la jetta à un chien qui passait par là" (98) says the narrator, and the boy is left to die alone in a village: "Nous avons adossé Kik au mur d'une case et nous avons pris notre pied la route" (99).

Kik's obituary shows that Kik's tragedy started when he was at school. He and his friends heared unusual noises of gun shots which left them with no other option than to run and hide in the forest. Returning home, Kik finds to his amazement his father and brothers' throats cut, his mother and sister raped and their heads smashed. As Kourouma writes, "all his relatives, close and distant, dead" Kourouma 2006:90 trans. by Whynne). "Kik regagna la concession familiale et trouva son père égorgé, son frère égorgé, sa mère et sa sœur violées et les têtes fracassées. Tous ses parents proches et éloignés morts"(Kourouma, 2000:100). Birahima closes his obituary with an open question which seems to sum up the rationale the writer was dealing with in writing his novel:

> Et quand on n'a plus personne sur terre, ni père ni mère ni frère ni sœur, et qu'on est petit, un petit mignon dans un pays foutu et barbare où tout le monde s'égorge, que fait-on ?
> Bien sûr on devient un enfant-soldat, un small-soldier, un child-soldier pour manger et pour égorger aussi à son tour ; il n'ya que ça qui reste. (Kourouma, 2000: 100)

For Birahima through whom the writer conveys these pertinent thoughts, the society is to be blamed, not the boy who is mere victim of prevailing circumstances. This view could also be said to be most children's opinion when asked about why they use violence. "Children who have lost their parents" Machel observes, "often volunteer as they believe that this is the only way to guarantee regular meals" (2001:11). Such children, to paraphrase Machel, may feel obliged to become soldiers for their protection or just to avenge the death of their parents. Although the writer may be violating certain literary rules by inserting such a moral statement as Roscoe points out: "the moral message of the novel should be made implicit in the consistent action and dialogue of the novel. It should

not be in the form of a running commentary by the author, particularly not when the author is very confused about what he wants to prove," (in Gysin, 1975: 180)[68] However, the reasoning behind Kourouma's statement remains correct. Kourouma seems to sympathize with the child regardless of his debasement and his descent into violence which are blamed on society.

6.4.3. Sekou and Soso

Like Kik and Sarah, much the same can be said of Sekou's past. Sekou (also called le *Terrible*) dies in a horrific battle at Sannniquellie. At Sannniquellie where the female general, Onika Baclay is responsible for keeping the 'bossmen' safe, armed bandits armed invade this rich gold-area taking everything and leaving a few child soldiers, who tried to resist, dead. Onika, who is about to lose her business, pursues these thieves in Nianggbo, but the enemies' positions are well calculated so that her close-packed soldiers have little chance to succeed as the enemies return the attack. Like swarming ants, the bandits fall on Onika's battalion with the result that many of her men, especially child soldiers, are slain forcing the leader to withdraw her troops although in the end Nianggbo is taken largely due to the incredible efforts of the child soldier, Tête Brulée, and the use of black magic.

Sekou is not without a past. His father, the narrator says, is falsely accused for complicity in the theft his boss is victim of. He is tortured and imprisoned in Côte d'Ivoire. Sekou's mother Bita goes away to earn money in order to return the boy to his studies or solve the family financial problems, but for reasons not known to us, she never returns home. The boy decides, in turn, to go in search of one of his uncles in Ouagadougou who has a motorbike (123) where still obsessed with his mission of finding his uncle, he is hired by a certain driver, Mamadou, to be his new boy, but, the two are apprehended by the *guérilleros* (123) who hijack the vehicle and leave them in the forest. Here they are apprehended again and taken hostage by other fighters – the *gaillards cagoulés* (123) but they manage to escape and while on the run, Sekou happens to come across a village where child soldiers live and speaks to their chief: "Je veux être un enfant-soldat."(124). The death of this entrepreneurial boy leaves Birhamina full of grief as he says: "Je pleurais à larmes chaudes de voir Sekou couché, mort comme ça" (124). On the other hand, we

[68] This is a violation of a fundamental aesthetic principle - sanctified from Aristotle on down - to portray a character in speech, thought or action in a way not consistent with what you, the writer, might conceivably do in similar circumstances and in similar conditions.

have also Soso (also called *Panthère),* whose father was an alcoholic and came home so drunk that he could not tell his wife from his son (124). Soso and the mother lived in such constant fear that every evening they started trembling for they knew exactly what to expect from this man. One day, he hits his wife so hard that that she starts to bleed. Under emotional stress, Soso stabs his father to death with a kitchen knife: "Soso en pleurs se saisit d'un couteau de cuisine et piqua son père qui hurla comme une hyène et mourrut" (125). After having killed his father, the only thing left for Soso to do was to become a child soldier: "Il ne resta plus à Soso" says Birahima le patricide, "qu'à rejoindre les enfants-soldat" (125). The fantasy of a good mother attacked by the bad father (Fornari, 1974:107) is very telling. The sudden transformation of Soso into a child soldier does not seem to surprise the writer who acknowledges that becoming a child soldier was the best thing for this child. "To control the persecutory anxiety" writes Fornari, "the individual [the patricide or the boy who kills his father) tends to submit to the feared object whose bad qualities are denied" (107). Soso becomes a child soldier and yet as brutal as his father whom he had killed.

Unlike most obituaries which appear to reflect the importance of the decedent with a long list of accomplishments, the above obituaries seem to deviate from this terrain. Each obituary gives the name of the child soldier who died, why he or she was important in the protagonist's one view, a detailed story and a long list of his or her misadventures or sufferings endured in the course of his/her short life; the geography of death and circumstances surrounding his or her death are also mentioned, making clear that it was in war that these deaths took place. There is in these obituaries no place for fame and family warmth; instead, emphasis is placed on children's notoriety, on the hardship of being abandoned, of being forcibly used as combatants, and so on. In life everything has a price and everybody has dignity, but child soldiers in Africa deserve neither one nor the other. That is where Kourouma's power of imagination comes in.

6.4.4. Kourouma's conception of child soldiers' deaths

What Kourouma argues against in this text stems from his realisation that the contemporary culture of death is destroying many young lives. Even though death exists, one must live his life to the fullest. This view is not taken into account by the institutions of war and those who work behind them. They deprive children of the opportunity to live, of enjoying their childhood. By involving children in war, they fail to understand the

concept of childhood in the most humanly worthy correct way despite Philippe Ariès's claims that the idea of childhood is in fact a recent invention, "an artefact of modernity" *(*Aries, 1960:125) which did not exist in medieval society. Surprisingly, childhood still suffers from misconception even today. Children's dignity is not respected. Who makes decisions as to who must live or who must die? It is children's right to life that Kourouma's novel, in one way or other, advocates. Through these obituaries the writer seems to say that every child in Africa is an individual who should be respected as such in his family and community at large. One does not need to read between the lines to realise that this work is an elaboration of mourning. The eradication of a whole generation of young people does not need any clarification at all; the facts are there for anyone to see and feel. The artist may have wanted these obituaries as a means make an effect on the reader without making moral comments about the barbarism of our new culture of violence. Kourouma's obituaries reveal Africa's inability to mourn its children despite the fact that the killing of children is no secret to us. Anyone who visited Rwanda, Sudan, Sierra- Leonne, Congo, Liberia and Côte-d'Ivoire in 1990s and 2000s will testify to images of children's deaths more horrible than anyone can imagine.

But the question is why would one mourn them if they were used as instruments of death? Lamenting on the fate of such children being exterminated in war would appear to makes the writer shift the results of violence away from the real victims (unarmed civilians) on to the perpetrators (child soldiers). Can we say that the writer inverts the issue here by lamenting the death of the killers? Kourouma not only regards child soldiers as victims of the rebel powers that lead them to death, but also believes that even as soldiers these children deserve to be remembered. As a former soldier himself, Kourouma not only brings the motif of child soldiers' deaths into the public debate, but also places it in its historical context. Although Kourouma hated child soldiery, he spoke out tirelessly against war,[69]but in his book, as a father, he tries to describe with compassion child soldiers' sufferings thus becoming a defender of their rights. Kourouma is aware of the birth of the new culture of violence and the death of childhood it entails. In this context, Kourouma presents two types of death: the one is 'cultural' whereby people have forgotten essential values of respect of human dignity – here he writes about the loss of our humanity; the

[69] At the outbreak of civil war in Côte d'Ivoire in 2002, Kourouma stood against the war as well as against the concept of Ivorian nationalism, calling it "an absurdity which has led us to chaos." (see http://www.enotes.com/topic/Ahmadou_Kourouma)

other refers to the 'physical death' of child soldiers in war. In so doing, the writer seems to espouse the idea that child soldiers played a role in the making of African recent history for good or worse. This view is supported by McIntyre in her *Invisible Stakeholders: Children and War in Africa* (2004) which refuses to see them merely as perpetrators for most of them fought for their survival. As such they are invisible stakeholders of our recent history. The child survivors like Birahima certainly know what it means to be fighters, the hurt and pain of being reduced to the status of producers of their own death. Taking the above into consideration, Kourouma, as a skilful creative writer, knew that by stripping these children of their testimony he would have deprived, not them alone, but Africa as a whole of its history by eliding such important traces of memory.

Barbarism in politics and culture went a long way in making people forget that a child is a person. We concur with Schiller's words as a warning not only in his own day, but as one that also applies to us that: "a man always becomes a butcher when he justifies terror and violence" (Schiller in Ray, et al; 2001: 145). It is doubtless no coincidence that Kourouma's critique of terror and death in Africa also concurs with Achille Mbembe's underlying ideas in his *Necropolitics* where he reflects on the twin issues of terror and death as he writes:

> Terror and death are at the heart of each. As Elias Canetti reminds us, the survivor is the one who, having stood in the path of death, knowing of many deaths and standing in the midst of the fallen, is still alive. Or, more precisely, the survivor is the one who has taken on a whole pack of enemies and managed not only to escape alive, but to kill his or her attackers. This is why, to a large extent, the lowest form of survival is killing. Canetti points out that in the logic of survival, "each man is the enemy of every other." Even more radically, in the logic of survival one's horror at the sight of death turns into satisfaction that it is someone else who is dead. It is the death of the other, his or her physical presence as a corpse, that makes the survivor feel unique. And each enemy killed makes the survivor feel more secure. (Mbembe, 2003:35)

In this instance, the life of a child soldier is one of survival; he kills in order to survive and when he does not kill, he dies, not as a villain although nor as a hero in a true sense of the word. The child soldier is sometimes memorialised as a heroic martyr and sometimes vilified as a mad boy and a terrorist. Emmanuel Dongala describe him in his *Johnny chien méchant* as a "Mad Dog." In this way, the child is the representation of total evil, a monstrous beast even though influenced by a corrupt political system. Others, however, such as Florent Couao-Zotti in his *Charly en guerre* regard the child as the most

unfortunate victim of civil war who miraculously survived it. For Kourouma *Allah n'es pas obligé* represents the child soldier as a child like any other child even though he becomes a killer. Like any child he was inherently good as Jean-Jacques Rousseau once said: "La nature a fait l'homme heureux et bon, mais la société le dépravé." This is a lesson we learn from Ishmael Beah's *A Long Way Gone* (2007) where the former child soldier takes us into that experience and makes us understand it. Reading such a novel stops us from being too critical of the kind of people child soldiers became during war.

If what happened to child soldiers happened to us we would have learned how to appreciate them. We would, as Susan McClelland puts it: "find solidarity in our wounds and pain ...recognize the human condition and our vulnerability, which then draws forth our compassion..." (2007). When we feel the sufferings of others**,** when we pity them, we will put less blame on them. If we perceive child soldiers as victims, we will equally see them as relatively powerless, not just against the world of violence but against themselves and consequently hold them somewhat less responsible for their antisocial behaviours. We do not consider it a hasty generalization, but rather as an ingenious hypothesis, strongly supported by some striking facts. Child soldiers' acceptance of suffering is a dramatic form of witness. Clearly, these children have offered the world an example of knowing to what extent they have been able to respond to the test of suffering. This helps us realise, as Jack Wintz (2002) once observed that, "even age has a message, and suffering a dignity and a salvific force."

6.4.5. Remembrance or forgetting?

Despite referring to child soldiers' mistakes and death in his obituaries, one could further argue that the writer never really sought to "represent" horror, but to "remember" it. Kourouma clearly did not want the reader's reflection to end with the use of child soldier in war and their death, but with his obituaries he expands the notion of remembrance. He finds in his novel, a way, not only to represent death, but to explore the content and meaning of a violent culture. That we think is a task of a writer with historical knowledge. Only in discovering blocks of such memories can one see Kourouma's importance as the post-war African francophone novelist of historical art. With respect to memory of African children's pain and death in war can the terrible sin of war be kept in view and not lost sight of when speaking of Africa's future. The strength of Kourouma's novel lies in his

message implied in reminding us to remember child soldiers. The redemptive future has its way through this traumatic past.

Also noteworthy is that in his account the child narrator, Birahima, often warns us that he is free to offer his obituaries or not. He is not obliged to give us these obituaries more than he needed to tell his story to himself. Yet he chooses to tell us the past of some child soldiers while hiding others. Presenting obituaries brings to mind "remembrance" while hiding them quite simply refers to "forgetting". In this regard, the text focuses both on forgetting and remembrance which enable us to trace a memory. It could be also argued that lack of mourning may also refer metaphorically to forgetting of bitterness that keeps people in a melancholic state. Here too, however, forgetting does not imply *amnesia* – inability to remember events or "loss of memory". For this reason, according to Kieffer, there can also be no historiography" (Kieffer in Ray, 2001:152). By the grave of his friends, our narrator gave utterance to these profound words saying, "Je pleurais pour leurs mères. Je pleurais pour tout ce qu'ils n'ont pas vecu" (121) is a very important line in the narrative because it shows child soldiers' feelings about themselves and their fate in the corrupt world they live in. The statement is also meant to illustrate how parents would feel about their children died in war. Through these obituaries, therefore, writer sends an important message of remembrance. As Machel puts it,"When we speak about hundreds, thousands and millions of war affected children, it is essential to remember that each number and each statistic represents a child's life - someone's son, daughter, sister or brother" (2001:6). A life lost in the backwoods of Guinea, Liberia or Sierra Leone is no less valuable than one extinguished in any conflict around the world. Yet there, most victims have a grave and a name while most child soldiers who died in this war not only have not been given a proper burial, but they have also remained unremembered. Unlike most sociological studies which focus more on graphic violence, statistics or refer to child soldiers simply as an anonymous mass of people, Kourouma refers to them by their names with specific identities as individuals whose experiences are worth remembering. For him, every one of these children deserves to be spoken of. The most important motivation in preserving the memories of the victims is to ensure that humanity never ignores, forgets or diminishes the fact that these horrors occurred.

Birahima gives these obituaries as a war survivor who survived to tell the story. According to Primo Levi: "the 'saved' are not necessarily the best, the worst survived, the selfish, the

violent, the insensitive, etc." Likewise "being a witness is not necessarily a question of having a story one lived but of what she or he saw (seen by close by) as part of his/her experience" (1989: 62-63). For Françoise Sironi, Lisa McNee states that those who have escaped death have a power other people do not have: "Ceux qui ont échappé à la mort ont un pouvoir (d'ordre psychologique) que les autres n'ont pas" (Sironi in McNee, 2004:5). In this respect, Birahima can be compared to Faustin in Monénembo's *L'Aîné des orphelins* in the sense that they are all survivors of terror. A survivor is in McNee's (2004) words, a "sponge" which "release[s] the words of torment" (5) for those who were not part of the terror. The survivor "carries" says McNee, "a double burden" which she further explains:

> […] the burden of the painful memories of torture, and the burden that the oppressors and those who turned a blind eye to their acts do not wish to carry. She/he must provide a testimony, witness to the horrors that humanity is capable of committing, for no one else will do so. (5).

In this respect, *Allah n'est pas obligé* fits into the category of works which were grouped under the project *écrire par devoir de memoire* mentioned above. Not only does it record the past events of war, but also points to the fact that all children (soldiers) who have been victims of these wars have the right of acknowledgement for their sufferings and deaths.

Africa, it is believed, has taken a new (negative) cultural form. The sorrowful feelings which use to accompany the loss of the younger ones seems absent from the novel. This is because, culturally, there is no sense of bereavement or loss among people toward others and children in particular. The cultural practice of 'mourning' is dying. For Kourouma history and culture not only comprised elements that render the destruction of the notion of childhood visible for all to see and feel, but they are themselves constituted with such elements that participate actively in this process of destruction.

Kourouma's purpose in writing these obituaries was not to condemn child soldiers but to show how children have been drawn into a destructive war. The writer is able deride the grotesque aspects of war while defending the individual (child) soldier.

What efforts do we make to remember child soldiers or even compensate the survivors of war? Most studies on child soldiers have kept this chapter closed as if child soldiers are not worth being remembered as agents of recent history. People speak about child soldiers without a sign of mourning in their face. "What is a man without a mourning?' Joachim

Kaiser (in Heinrich Böll, 1985) asks. In short, if we fail to mourn or bury our dead, there will surely be continuous war, for we will have invited them to live among us.

6.5. The road from soldier back to child: demobilization and reintegration of child soldiers

As important as a novel's beginning is its ending. At the end of the book, Seydou is sent by his cousin, Dr. Mamadou in search of the latter's mother, Birahima's aunt, who escaped death in Liberia and fled to Sierra-Leone, with the promise of 1 million CFA. It is during this trip that the boy, Seydou, becomes a child soldier. It is in Sier Leone where Seydou, Birahima and Yacouba meet and are informed about the passing away of their aunt. Doctor Mamadou himself finally joins them at the scene of his mother's death. But when Seydou reminds Mamadou of his promise that he would give him money to set up a grocer's shop, but the doctor's response is: "Absolument rien, rien de rien parce que j'ai les funérailles de ma mère à organiser" (232). Angered by this response, Seydou refuses to go back home with Mamadou and Yacouba.

The boy's refusal to go back home suggests the continuity of war. Kourouma makes some child soldiers in the novel wrestle with their own opinions of war. Seydou is the voice of those people who continue to argue in favour of the war: "Je reste ici à Worosso pour jouir de mon grade de colonel" (232). But we notice, at the same time, that his decision is heightened by the fact that he has no other job and no money for survival. All that the shocked Seydou can do is to survive through war. As you may see, there is no humour in this account; instead, there is irony. Aunt Mahan's death symbolises peace settlements while the money promised to Seydou by Doctor Mamadou represents post-war assistance to child soldiers. Reflecting on this analogy, Mamadou's response to Seydou is an indication of the neglect of child soldiers. Likewise, the Doctor's failure as a medical doctor to attend to his sick mother who dies of malaria is a sign of his insensitivity. He is one of those who nurse people to death rather than nursing them to life. In contrast, Birahima's journey home with Mamadou indicates that in Africa there is a room for rehabilitation and accepting a child as wicked as he is in line with the adage that "there is no bad bush to throw away a bad child" (Sesay, 2003:188).

Furthermore, Seydou's refusal also indicates how difficult the demobilisation process is. In his case, he needs money. Supporting child soldiers financially as a strategy has always

been criticised because children abuse it; they return a gun and use the money they are given to buy another gun and can still keep the balance.[70]A commander in DRC once noted, "You can't demobilize [our] child soldiers because others will enrol them" (Singer, 2006:190). Not only do child soldiers face economic challenges, but also psychological ones which have no less impact on their lives. Psychologically, Singer argues, "ex-child soldiers demonstrate these symptoms caused by their dislocation from family, sense of uncertainty about future, and memories of extreme violence and loss" (2006:195-5). Like Seydou, many child soldiers find it difficult to accept that their sufferings of many years of war go without recognition. For boys who knew nothing in life other than killing, the end of war could be interpreted as a loss of meaning. It would appear as if child soldiers need to remain in touch with the war environment they forged throughout the years. For others too, coping with civil society after losing three to four years of their education remains a challenge. One Liberian boy said: "I am not thinking about school now. After this war I am going to another country to fight" (Machel, 2001:18). For those who lost their parents in this war, there is no home to go to. "It is not uncommon for children who were soldiers", Machel observes, "to harbor deep-seated feelings of shame and worthlessness. It takes time for them to rebuild their confidence and self-image and accept the possibility of a new life" (2001:19).

It is the child soldier's 'future' that the writer highlights through Seydou's reaction. How does it feel to go back to a place where there will be no job nor will one be able to re-orientate his bravery or military skills? *La grande guerre* (in Riegel, 1978:477) could help us to deepen our understanding of Seydou's reaction. As the writer observes: "certains soldats qui ne quittent plus l'uniforme et refusent de se dessaisir de leurs armes, crient à une guerre sans fin." Veteran, Bestman for his part says, "La guerre se terminera pas de si tôt. La guerre finira jamais. En tout cas, nous en verra pas la fin" (1978:477). Child soldiers express the feeling of most soldiers prior to their reintegration. When war lasts a

[70] In Sierra Leone, as Singer (2006) notes, the United Nations earmarked $34 million to disarm, demobilise and reintegrate ex-combatants of which only $ 965,000 was directed toward the tens of thousands of child soldiers in Sierra-Leone. As a result of the failures of the peace process, most of the ex-child soldiers rejoined the warring groups (2006:184). The same applies to Mozambique where according to Machel, "cash payments for former child soldiers frustrated demobilization efforts and actually encouraged children to return to military groups" (2001:17) In Mozambique, where more than a quarter of the total groups were child soldiers, the formal demobilisation programme did not include them. They returned to civil life with no support. According to Singer, "the outcome had long-standing societal repercussions, including high levels of banditry that plagued Mozambique for the following decade" (2001:185).

long time, soldiers get so used to it that it becomes their way of life and they become strangers to normal life or the world of peace. Civil life scares some of them with the challenges it presents. This is particularly common among young soldiers. As Riegel (1978:316) puts it: "les soldats, les très jeunes surtout se sentent coupés de la vie normale, de la vie du temps de paix. Ils sont devenus des étrangers par rapports leur pays". Riegel also argues:

> Aujourd'hui, nous ne possédons dans le paysage de notre jeunesse que comme des voyageurs…Nous sommes délaissés comme des enfants et expérimentés comme de vieilles gens ; nous sommes grossiers, tristes et superficiels…je crois que nous sommes perdus. (Riegel 1978:316)

The young soldiers look at the disorientated world in which they are forced to live as one for which they were never prepared. These young soldiers are children abandoned with the experience that only old people can have. For some child soldiers like Seydou, the world in which they feel useful does not exist outside the battle field, but we cannot lose sight of the fact that others like, Birahima, desperately wish to return home and rebuild their lives afresh.

The task of reintegration of child soldiers is complex. "A child's return to community life is" in Machel's view, "a slow process of healing that requires a network of support from parents, teachers, religious and other community leaders" (2001:19). It requires, she further argues, "[a]n effort that includes community mediation, forgiveness, cleansing rituals allowing them to reunite with their families….their health needs, vocational and educational aspirations have to be identified" (2001:19). Singer's (2006) assumption that, "the recovery of lost childhood is one of the most difficult challenges that the use of the child soldier doctrine has raised" (2006:207) agrees with this novel. "Unless the needs of children are explicitly incorporated into peace and reconstruction plans, they will not be given the priority status that they merit" Singer (2006:186) observes Although it is sad to see child soldiers seem to find in war their only way of survival, the most strange and dangerous thing, however, remains our unpreparedness, lack of readiness or simply our unwillingness to integrate them back into our communities. It is of supreme importance for the good of these children that we should stop treating them as killers Such omissions are not only tragic, but dangerous, for they pave way for further violence.

6.6.Conclusion

Charly en guerre, Johnny chien méchant and more particularly *Allah n'est pas obligé* share a great deal in common with most recent sociological studies - a great emphasis on what is termed "unrooted childhood". This concept is often understood as an embodiment of estrangement and nomadism. In their Unrooted Childhoods*: Memoirs of* Growing Up Global (2003), sociologist Ruth Hill Useem coins the term *Third Culture Kid* (TCK) to describe children who are born in one culture (home culture) and live in another second (third, fourth) referred to as the "host culture". As Hill shows, this blend is a combination of all cultural influences which children finally make their own. Borrowing from this analogy, child soldiers as a social group disconnected from their parents' culture (home culture) and now living in a warrior culture (host culture) could be associated with these TCKs. They stand between two cultures: the military, on the one hand, and the civil community, on the other. In the process they are able to create a third culture in which they make poor choices upon which their future lives are likely to depend. In this respect, the positions taken by the above scholars are reflected in this novel. There is a general agreement that child soldiers are not just fighters, that they are indeed products of a new culture. Kourouma seems to argue that violence is no end in itself, but part of larger significant patterns of meaning. This is the same as saying that most children find war as their only chance to survive.

The grotesque or intermix of incongruous elements has been dealt with through techniques as varied as exaggeration, alienation or realist description. The incoherent and inhuman behaviour by the war-lords have helped to identify child soldiers more as victims than perpetrators. Put in simple words, child soldiers in this novel are more observers of the atrocities of war and less conscious manipulators. Besides, children's violence is characterised by a set of features which appear on the surface as caused by the war-lords while their own private family lives have played a major role toward their destruction. The child soldiers' contrasting and paradoxical features are a symbol of complexity of postcolonial existence. We concur with John Walsh who argues in his "Coming of Age with an AK-47: Ahmadou Kourouma's "Allah n'est pas oblige" that "[t]he child-soldier is a product of the near absolute lawlessness of Liberia and Sierra Leone and a sign of the instability of the nation-state in West Africa" (2008: 192).

Perhaps Kourouma's quest motif represents the African postcolonial pilgrim who does not want to progress but is interested in turning back like the Israelites at Cades-Barnea. Kourouma's Birahima moves through the forests in quest of truth about wars, a truth which Africa without doubt needs, and out of which is born deception, and less hope.

It is right to speak of Kourouma's book as an imaginative work, but there can be no doubt that it is also a serious contribution to history. As conscious as Kourouma is of his responsibility as a writer, a historian, reconstructing the history of his region; he has more than the artist's gifts for combining fact and fiction into a tragic novel. More importantly, however, he does not fall into the trap of providing easy answers to the problem of child soldiers nor does he show clearly the psychological motives of his complex characters, especially his child protagonist. Nothing in his novel speaks of the future for his people when life is being constantly destroyed by pride and unmeasured ambitions of the war-lords perpetuating war. These truths, conveyed in an African style of storytelling, enriched by myth, make *Allah n'est pas obligé* one of the few suceesful tragedies by the Ivorian writer inspired by West Africa's wars of the 1990s. Both through its use of myths and the nature of the subject (the child soldier), the writer has produced a work of fiction that has a universal appeal that transcends geographic limits. Thanks to this book by Kourouma, and his thorough knowledge of his native Côte d'Ivoire and the neighbouring Siera-leonne, we are able to understand the region's story of war. Our memory of this war and the child soldiers who waged it is bound up with that of Angola, Congo Burundi and Rwanda which left us with no option but to meditate on the vanity of powers, rulers, and the fate which awaits all of them.

Chapter 7: Summary of the analyses

7.1. Introduction

From our discussion of the three novels, it has become clear that the writers' use of the child soldier or the use of the literary perspective in the representation of child soldiers has shed some light on this figure. These novels try to establish a link between the trope of the grotesque and the child soldier in the context of civil wars. That these novels contributed to the understanding of this character is not accidental. The African francophone writers tried not only to dramatise the violence perpetrated by child soldiers, but also to acknowledge that this child is a reflection of today's society. Representing the child in fiction, however, is not enough by itself. This is why the writers tried also to use different techniques to make the child soldier issue understandable. These techniques are thus summarised:

The writers' texts showed quite clearly that the meaning of the concept of child soldier is influenced by social contexts which determine whether the child is violent or not. Readers who take for granted that what makes the child grotesque is the context, and not his actions, will be tempted to impose meanings on this child or see him simply in a negative light. The basic question that guided the analysis was whether the children who constitute the subject of the study are to be classed as "rebels", "killers", "monsters" or "victims", together with the question of whether society has to be regarded itself as "rebel". This led us to examine the writers' perceptions, which although different in some aspects were also found to be similar in many other respects. The aim of this chapter is to summarize the key points identified in our textual analyses in chapters 4, 5 and 6.

7.2. Writers' perceptions

In presenting his vision of the human tragedy that overwhelmed his society during the war, Dongala satirises the terrifying manifestations of the national youth crisis through the metaphor of the child soldier's "madness" in his *Johnny chien méchant*. The event is portrayed as a tribal war, for the tribal militias are mobilised by the government represented by one tribe to fight the rival tribe contesting the elections. The writer's perception of the realities of war in his country rests on the premise that it was absurd, pointless and void of a sound ideology. However, the question of whether these children should be denied the status of killers because they were forced to kill has been problematic. We could have referred to them as mere victims if they did not kill.

Johnny chien méchant is melodramatic, terrifying and poignant. As a novel, it offers a realistic panorama of life in Africa and the youth crisis. Perhaps this book is one in which Dongala is primarily concerned about his work, not only as a literary artist, but also as an activist. This is clearly shown in the way he consciously describes the tensions of the civil wars in his country, the atrocities of the postcolonial regimes, the senseless killings and lootings by child soldiers in the 1990s, and so on. All these are depicted in such a way that they create both disgust and empathy. The result is a carefully crafted study of both the country and its youth crisis in which children like Johnny die untimely; their days are cut short in the middle of their childhood. It appears that the writer *views* the stability of his nation with great concern.

The most probable reason Dongala writes about child soldiers in this way might have been his realisation that the child soldier issue needs the world's intervention. Although the book is apparently addressed first to the French speaking audience given the fact that it was originally written in French, it has a place in the literatures of all nations and is addressed to an ever-widening audience. Its English translation has played a major role in this regard. We might even speculate on the author's intention when he was writing this book and argue that he also had American readers in mind. He was concerned about the literary form and skilfully crafted his characters to reach his immediate audience for Americans, we are told, are known as "sentimental in matters affecting disaster, starvation and sufferings especially when it concerns women and children" (Ezeigbo 1991:65).

Although Dongala did not lose his African touch in his novel, one could also admit that his work has been partly influenced by both the American human rights logics and sense of humour. He knows Americans are thirsty for marvels as Fraser argues, "in their reading of crime magazines", Americans readers, "enjoy being assured of the omnipresence of violence, cynicism, and corruption, since it makes their own decently undramatic lives appear more admirable in the contrast" (Fraser, 1974:115). If we consider the journalists' insistence that Laokolé's mother's broken body be filmed, this would appear to be what most readers would like to see in a war novel:

> Vous savez les spectateurs cherchent l'image forte, l'émotion forte. Pendant qu'elle parlera, nous passerons un gros plan de son visage ravage par la douleur puis nous allons faire un zoom arrière pour nous arrêter un instant sur elle en plan américain la montrant assise le torse droit; enfin

> nous allons zoomer sur ses jambes pour s'arrêter sur un gros plan de ses deux moignons. Ce serait dramatique. Les américains disent 'when it bleeds, it leads', en d'autres termes plus il y a du sang, plus c'est spectaculaire, plus ça marche. Et dans le genre, ces moignons sont imbattables! (Dongala, 2002:171)

This view is corroborated by McNeil (1990) who says, "the more blood, the more memorable; the more bizarre or irrational, the more curious" (166). Here we might point out that Laokolé, like John in *Charly en guerre,* refuses such proposals because such actions become a pure contradiction of the values and sympathy they are meant to defend. As a matter of fact, they express a mockery of the suffering people. Although the gruesome realities of this war have won Africa a bad reputation as Laokolé expresses when she says, 'l'humanité était tombée bien bas' (Dongala, 2002:186), but she also shows that despite the war there were still some good people such as the man who risked his own life by carrying her mother on a bicycle: "Certes", she says, "sans mon argent, il n'aurait pas pris Maman, mais sans lui, mon argent n'aurait pas sauvé Maman" (Dongala,2002:211). Through this statement, Dongala corrects the stereotypes of Africa as perceived by the public, for within the 'world' of hell there is still a latent potential for humanism. Put differently, important lessons could still be drawn from this war, especially through those people whose good works mirror hope for Africa, as one reviewer aptly writes:

> Dongala nicely contrasts the local successes, the people who have made something of themselves, with the purely destructive elements: the Africa that is laid waste to here is a place of some promise and many individual successes, though often on a very basic level. (Complete Review, 2005)

The representation of war in this novel is double-edged: on the one hand, it is grotesque and shows that war is destructive, but on the other hand, it creates hope out of this inhumanity.

From a purely negative perspective, Dongala's grotesque strategies developed in representing child soldiers as rapists, looters and killers arise from the fact that he rejects the very idea of viewing children as soldiers. The truth of his fiction lies not in its referents (child soldiers) themselves, but in his struggle to make us see why children were not supposed to live that kind of life. The world Dongala refers to and wants us to identify with is one of peace and joy (*Kiessé*) for children to enjoy their childhood, and not a world in which children are turned into small soldiers. The strategy of reading his novel entails

understanding where the writer puts his emphasis. Dongala's emphasis is not so much on children as perpetrators, but on the dangers they face as victims of violence as clearly illustrated by the untimely death of Johnny. The writer recreates the fight between Johnny and Laokolé, the final girl, as a symbol of 'a war to end war.'

Children in *Charly en guerre* are unequivocally portrayed from the outset as victims of violence. But one could still argue that the writer depicts the way these children fought back against the rebels as losing their innocence and that they revert to it again when they decide to run away from their country. In this way, their partial loss of innocence is quite understandable. The danger is to portray children in this war solely in terms of victimhood; it would be misleading to attempt to reduce children at arms to absolute innocents.[71] However, if we consider that *Charly en guerre* is ironically used for explicit propaganda, the aim of which is to justify the actions of African children, this kind of perception is unavoidable. In *The African experience in literature and ideology* (l990), Abiola says "All art is propaganda, though not all propaganda is art"(1) and rightly so. Like Dongala's *Johnny chien méchant*, Kourouma's *Allah n'est pas obligé* is also very disturbing in that it depicts children as killers. But he too acknowledges that most children are forced by circumstances to become killers, and one might even say that they are the ones who are more killed than killing. Unlike *Charly en guerre*, what *Johnny chien méchant* and *Allah n'est pas obligé* share in common is that they give their child soldier a dimensional character and leave space to enter into complex discursive and generic interactions illustrating the fact that the debate on the African child soldier is not an easy one.

Couao-Zotti's narration also depicts trauma in a way entirely different from *Allah n'est pas obligé* and *Johnny chien méchant*. While the other two novels pull the reader into the narration through chains of events that proceed at a fast pace, as a result of the brutality in their texts, in *Charly en guerre*, the narration unfolds slowly leaving time for the reader to observe and absorb the trauma the children are experiencing. Couao-Zotti's's novel thus forces the reader to learn more about children's pain.

[71] Drawing a line between *innocent* civilians and the minority in power directly responsible for *war* is *difficult and makes* the myth of children's *innocence in Africa's wars hard to* believe.

In Kourouma's *Allah n'est pas obligé* child soldiers are tools through which the rebel leaders can hold on to their wealth and power whereas in *Johnny chien méchant* they are given permission to spoil themselves with the spoils of war in the same manner as the leaders of their country. However, while these kinds of actions are expected to make us conceptualise the behaviour of child soldiers as grotesque, they serve more to assign the agentive role of violence to the rebel leaders or politicians who use these children. A further relevant feature is that the child soldiers in Kourouma's and Dongala's novels are used or forcibly recruited in large numbers to form a children's army, so it is quite natural to see them mobilised for destruction. *Charly en guerre*, in contrast, portrays its child soldiers not as a large group but simply as a few children wandering in the forest where they are picked up by the rebel or government forces and asked to follow and serve. They have, in this case, already been victimised by war even before being used by the war-lords. Couao-Zotti seems to ask whether our common sense allows us to see the major causes behind child soldiery. For when people refer to children caught up in war as 'soldiers', 'rebels', or 'killers', they base their view on the actions performed by children rather than on the hidden actions of those who exploit them.

Another feature of the novels is that they unanimously treat child soldiery as a process rather than an attribute. Such a way of representing child soldiers gives us an opportunity to argue that when a child is used as a killer, the process of exposing him to violence is not just something which happens to him (by which he becomes victim) but it also becomes a clear marker of his current nature or the features of his life. In this sense, the child is both victim and perpetrator. Any attempt therefore to emphasise either his victimhood or 'perpetrator hood' simply demonstrates where the writer's or reader's sympathies lie.

As already argued, different techniques in the representation of child soldiers are evident in these novels. It is noticeable that *Johnny chien méchant* uses many active sentences to show how child soldiers are agents of violence whereas *Charly en guerre* and *Allah n'est pas oblige*, to some extent, often use passive sentences. The passive voice is used to show interest in the person or object that experiences an action rather than the person or object that performs it. This makes *Charly en guerre* more concerned with the children who have been made victims than with the people who made them into victims. This is the reason why the journey motif makes up the entire plot of the novel. Unlike Kourouma and Couao-Zotti, Dongala wants his subjects (child soldiers) to act; he gives them an active voice.

It is also noted that Couao-Zotti, as a writer, has a particular ability to superimpose tragedies one upon another. In other words, sad events build upon each other until they reach a certain threshold or a certain depth where something bad will have to happen. This is done in order to make his children less grotesque rather than being agents of violence. If we consider, for example, the scenes in which John is involved in killings, the later are narrated by shifting responsibility from John to Alpha Kroh who is portrayed by the writer as an incarnation of evil. The position the writer constructs for the reader in this way is based on the belief that John's grotesque acts are the result of his submission to the rebel leader under whom he was forced to serve. However, if we consider that John moves from one rebel faction to another, such information implies that child soldiery is a future or perpetual danger rather than a past or present reality. This feature becomes even more apparent in *Allah n'est pas obligé* where the permanent danger children face is highlighted by their mass movement from one rebel faction to another and even from one country to another. Child soldiery could be, in this sense, compared to a river. It can be seen as not so much a phenomenon as a movement of youth in Africa that evolved and derived from complex roots and still posing a severe threat to our future rather than looking at it simply in terms of a group of children whose past made them decide to fight. Put differently, it has to be seen as a result of a culture of violence rather than limiting it to the eruption of recent wars.

The connection between child soldiery and death is amply explored in *Allah n'est pas obligé.* Kourouma interprets child soldiery as a space where the death of children occurs. This facilitates the view in which child soldiery is seen as the cause of young people's death. Like Gaston Bouthoul, Kourouma considers "war as a voluntary destructive institution, the aim of which is the elimination of young men" (Bouthoul in Fornari, 1974:7). In other words, "war" as Fornari (1974) argues, "appears to be a recurrent social function, characterized by the accumulation of human capital, a part of which, at a given moment, is brutally ejected" (7).[72] Kourouma seems to show us how society has at its disposal a number of destructive institutions, one of which being child soldiery. Child soldiery reads in this particular novel as direct infanticide caused both by negligence and

[72]Bouthoul begins with the empirical statement that every war causes an abnormal increase in mortality and that, consequently, war may appear to be a voluntary destruction of previously accumulated reserves of human capital, an act performed with the implicit intention to sacrifice a certain number of lives. Although the intention is neither explicit nor conscious, he maintains that it is particularly operative (Fornari, 1974:7).

brutality. The War-lords, as we already said, use child soldiers who die for them in war while they get richer and richer. In so doing, these writers trace the origins of the child soldier movement through the operation of a wide variety of social contexts.

The strength of Kourouma's novel lies largely in its incorporation of factors that led children to violence. Violence affecting children, Kourouma seems to argue, is germinal to a wide range of behavioural, psychological, social, economic, and political related problems at every level of society. Children are exposed to violence in many different ways, including maltreatment by their parents, the poverty to which they are subjected in their homes, parents' deaths, and so on, which constitute spaces from which children experience violence as a chronic condition of growing up. Such child victims with a record of emotional and physical abuse could become perpetrators of violent acts themselves whether or not influenced by war. Violence and death are an important message in *Allah n'est pas obligé* as they are in other books about child soldiers, but with an emphasis here on his obituaries. What does set the ideas in this book apart from other books with the same theme is his style of writing. It is a testimony to Kourouma's postcolonial craftmanship evident not only in his indigenisation of the French language but also in his skill at creating a complex fabric of magical, mythical and dreamlike elements from his native culture woven through with a narration of history and war as well as the grotesque exaggeration of some issues. Also crucial to his use of these fictional modes is letting each of these elements (whether myth, history or lament) rub against each other to reflect reality. In addition, Kourouma challenges our established conventions by creating a child character as a narrator and by inverting the role of masculinity opposing men with girls or women soldiers. In this regard, history, reality and unreality work as one.

Technically, some may regard these novels as revealing weaknesses in their perception of child soldiers. *Charly en guerre* is a kind of fusion of reportage with fiction. Reportage is often perceived as destroying art thus making it sound like a journalistic report. Although all three novels have this tendency they differ in the use of this technique. Throughout the novel, Couao-Zotti's prose gives the reader numerous examples of the writer advocating for *suffering children* caught up in war in Africa. When the two children see a distant UN truck appear, they quickly come out of the bush, expectantly, their hearts beating in communion with the *Casques Bleus* (Force de maintien de la paix) and what they represent. It is these *Casques bleu* who will take them to the port and help them leave the country.

Even the fight between John and Ken, the German photographer, not only offers an arena where barriers created by race and class differences should be neutralized, it is also helps us realise that the writer is conveying a message that it was time that the international community comes around to stop war, and not to stand as or turn into a judge**.** In so doing, it would have helped African children in a very concrete way rather than taking pictures for broadcasting when those concerned were already be dead.

The circumstances as provided by civil wars raise questions about preconceived notions of race, class, security, failure of humanitarian assistance in time of war or politics of indifference which Dongala poses and places the answers in Laokolé's mouth:

> …ces deux femmes: une Américaine noire, une Suédoise blanche et l'image de Katelijne la Belge s'y est ajoutée: trois femmes dans un camp d'Afrique central, qui essayaient d'aider l'humanité; trois forces fragile qui refusaient de baisser les bras devant l'indifférence du monde…Pourquoi venir risquer leurs vies dans un pays où les gens étaient assez stupides,,, Qu'est-ce qui faisait que malgré la cruauté dont les humains étaient capable, il y en avait qui se sacrifiaient pour en aider d'autres? Autrement dit, vu tout le mal que les êtres humains s'ingéniaient à réaliser, le bien ne devait plus exister, et pourtant il existe. Pourquoi? Mystère et boule de gomme! *(*Dongala, 2002:181).

The previous notions of race, weakness and femininity and indifference are partly challenged by the actions of these women. By showing this strongest act of humanness by women of different races and nationalities to people caught in war the writer transcends the all-too-familiar critique of failure of humanitarian assistance in time of war and concentrates on these actions. *Johnny chien méchant* is an affirmation of the difference in individual responses to change even if the global response is what is expected in such crisis. So, Dongala selects these women for the reader and presents their commitment to help others as his preferred way of making propaganda or inviting the world to stop war and child soldiery without commenting directly on the issue.

Dongala has a serious intent in treating the theme of child soldier and with proven talents as a writer, he is doubtless aware of the need for an appropriate language and register which gives his protagonists and action their required stature. In Couao-Zotti's book, not only the nine year-old, Charly, but all his characters (including the rebels) are shown as human, and still less are they portrayed as animals as 'Mad Dog' even in their most

violent, monstrous actions or cruelty. This saves him from misrepresenting his children as perpetrators.

Elsewhere we saw in Kourouma's text references to the use of dictionaries. His child protagonist thinks it is necessary to use them in order to explain his story to all kinds of people: "Il faut expliquer parce que mon blablabla est à lire par toute sorte de gens" (Kourouma, 2000:11). Kourouma's reference to the French language cannot only be regarded as a means by which "he confronts a dilemma already raised in *Soleils*: what to do with the language of the colonizer?" as Walsh (194) seems to suggest. However, we totally agree with Walsh when he argues that the implication of the use of language in this text is that "the francophone ideology of fraternity and humanism is long gone given the state of "uncivil" wars in Liberia, Sierra Leone, and, later, the Ivory Coast" (194). In this respect, the child-soldier's degraded speech might be read as a strategy used by the writer that reminds us of the colonisers he invites to come and fix the mess left by their legacy of their rule. But, if also taken seriously, Couao-Zotti is likely to have reached a large audience, especially among the youth, as his use of the propaganda technique is more direct when compared to the other two writers' own use of the device. Despite his propagandist intent, as a writer, his anti-war vision is clear and his work not less artistic.

The features summarised above show how each of these writers perceives the reality of war. The writers' own sympathies and backgrounds and the social contexts in which their texts were produced play an important part in the process of their perceptions of child soldiers and war. What is of particular interest is the way in which the writers' perspectives, although different, are unified by the use of similar literary techniques (distortion, alienation, reportatge, degradation and propaganda) under the umbrella of the grotesque realism.

The purpose of the grotesque as far as questions of language and techniques are concerned in these texts is to expose violence through images and symbols. For example, the image of food or consumption is closely related to the idea of war in all these novels. Kourouma offers a food chain depicting Doe whose body becomes food for men, animals, birds, plants and so on. War has also been depicted as something to please the gods; it is as if people fight to make them a feast. Dongala employs the cattle raiding motif in connection with war and joins it to the idea of a pig which must be stolen. The idea of looting others

provides, according to the writer, great sport for the youth without jobs. The idea of war as arising from such a motif is also expressed by Couao-Zotti in whose book we see rebels invading the refugee camp and steal food. However, here the writer associates food with the rebels' lust for the women they kidnapped. It should be remembered that women (in a war context) are a universal seduction for the military. The concept that runs through much of the foregoing discussion is therefore that of grotesque consumption; either of men by war or of war by those who take advantage of it to enrich themselves or for survival. War is, in this sense, a matter of consuming or being consumed. One thinks of John in *Charly en guerre* who says: "Depuis le début de la guerre on vit comme dans le jungle. Si tu ne te défends pas, ton frère par contre, ne te ratera pas" (Couao-Zotti, 2001:95).

In this respect, it is important to note that the analysis of these texts reveals greater compatibility with the view that the grotesque is a vehicle which transports the meaning of terror, horror, and violence from society to child soldiers and vice versa. However, by searching the deep causes of violence, we look at all these novels from Rabelais's perspective of his world which led us to remove the common illusion that these wars are caused by tribal hatred. Rabelais' 'images of the material bodily lower stratum' helped us understand why people wage wars. According to him, "the greatest treasures and most wonderful things lie hidden underground" (Bakhtin, 1968:369). Following Bakhtin, the mighty thrust downward into the bowels of the earth, into the depths of the human body is reflected in Rabelais' entire world from beginning to the end. We also see the downward movement in "fights, beatings, and blows; they throw the adversary to the ground, trample him into the earth" (Bakhtin, 1968: 370). These grotesque features are all present in these novels (e.g. fight between John and Ken and the trampling of one of them in *Charly en guerre*, the killing of people, rape, even of animals (pig) are reflected in *Johnny chien méchant* and *Allah n'est pas obligé*). The following quote by Rabelais sums it all up:

> Go, my good friend; may you depart under the protection of that intellectual sphere, whose centre is everywhere, circumference is now here, and whom we call God. When you return to your world, bear witness to your fellow man that the greatest treasures and most wonderful things lie hidden underground and not without reason. (Bakhtin, 1968:369)

If, as Rabelais says, treasures come from debasement, it could also be that the war we see in these novels holds a number of secrets. This becomes even more evident when we consider that wars in Africa are fought because of natural resources such as oil, diamonds,

or gold. And Africa has seen millions of its people dead; graves were dug in which people were buried in mass as a result of this war. These people die because of Africa's wealth or treasures hidden under this land. That is why spaces in *Allah n'est pas obligé* are always connected to people's (such as Taylor, Onika, and Johnson) immoderate desire to protect their gains though still in search of those which promise far greater benefits. This book illustrates better than any other work the cause of civil wars in Sierra Leone, notably the quest for mineral resources. This is what led Gomis (2011) to argue: "La course pour le monopole dans l'exploitation des pierres précieuses en Sierra-Leone serait sans doute l'une des causes de la guerre tribale" (108). It does not come as a surprise when Kourouma writes about Foday Sankoh:

> Foday Sankoh ne se laisse pas prendre au jeu de la démocratie. Non et non. Il refuse tout. Il ne veut pas de Conférence nationale, il ne veut pas d'élections libres et démocratiques. Il ne veut rien. Il tient la région diamantaire du pays ; il tient la Sierra-Leone utile. Il s'en fout. *(*Kourouma, 2000:169)

So this little phrase, "Il tient la Sierra-Leone utile,"says it all: is he god?

But watching the indifference of westerners while her country is at war and selling weapons to African people so that they can kill each other, Laokolé in *Johnny chien méchant* silently observes:"pour le monde occidental nos gorilles ou notre pétrole comptaient plus que nous les humains, ou encore, ce que j'aurais dû comprendre toute seule tant c'était évident, qu'en nous entretuant nous enrichissions les marchands d'armes" (Dongala, 2000:169). We concur therefore with Berkeley (2001) when he argues that "inflamed ethnic passions are not the cause of political conflict, but its consequences" (15). We might call it by any name but it is more characterised by human greed than it is by traditional ethnic rivalries. The assumption by McNeil that "whatever may be the pretext of war, if it be examined to the bottom, it will be found to proceed from a nation, by long peace becoming too numerous, and consequently desirous of occupying those regions possessed by another" (McNeil, 1990:28) is to be taken seriously. War could then be simply defined as "an attempt to take by violence from others a part of what they have and we want" (McNeil, 1990:57).

7.3. Conclusion

The writers of these novels are clearly in control of what they narrate including the subject of the narration itself (the child soldier in this respect). The use of different techniques reflects this sense of control over the reality they witnessed. As such, they are also authors, not only of their works, but also of the subject of their narration by trying to humanise or distort them. In so doing, they change the power of the factual truth, which shows itself in the choice of the form of narration (fiction). If we consider the fact that the writer is not the creator of this fragmented world he is representing, "he can barely," in Gikandi's words, "influence events in it; hence he works from, and with, small situations which he can control and explain" (1987:113). We can assume that their representations of child soldiers more as victims, far from being a mere manipulation, are close to reality. We presented the writers writing about the child soldier issue as obliged by art to distort the child soldier (figure) and yet capable of creating a perception that calls for our empathy for him or it.

All these three novels fulfil the goal of tragic realism as already described. Much has been said of tragedy as a serious drama in which a central character, the protagonist - usually an important, heroic person - meets with disaster either through some personal fault or through unavoidable circumstances. In most cases, the protagonist's downfall conveys a sense of human dignity in the face of great conflict with some overpowering force, as a fate of society to destruction. Like the francophone war novelists, Luc Rasson too laments, "La guerre apparaît surtout comme une fatalité révélatrice de l'incapacité des hommes à maîtriser leur destin" (Rason in Aimé Gomis (2011:113). With this in mind, *Johnny chien méchant* becomes a story, not only of the sufferings of people, but also of the tragedy of a boy, Johnny whose life ended too quickly. We know how this boy was abandonned to himself to make decisions that led him to untimely death, his dream of being a colonel remaining unfulfilled. In *Charly en guerre*, we see the potentially devastating impact of everyday stress in the lives of young children caught up in the horrors or conflicts in which they are not merely bystanders, but targets. Although Charly and John entertain some hope, they, like Birahima, are crushed under the pressure of bad memories of their past and the daily challenges they face. However, unlike Charly and John, Birahima in *Allah n'est pas obligé* lives in perpetual despair and guilt. These feelings are deeper in him than they probably are in the other two novels. For Birahima, like Solo in Ayi Kwei *Armah's Why Are We So Blest?* (1972) "remembrance of these things of the past only accentuates the sense of his death which he carries around his neck like an albatross" (Gikandi, 1987:93).

Birahima manages to come out of this war, but has no future. In short, the three writers have succeeded in representing the complexity of child soldiers' lives both as victims and perpetrators but their constructions of these characters is done in such a way that children's vulnerability in the face of crushing world is highlighted.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

This chapter provides a conclusion for this thesis. First, an overview of the study is provided and the major findings are summarised; second, the primary merits of the study are given; and third, suggestions for further research and an indication of the limitations of the study are outlined.

8.1. Overview and major findings of this study

This study focused on the most misconceived and misunderstood character of child soldier in recent francophone African novels about child soldiers. The study started out from the hypothesis that despite being conceived in most people's minds as a grotesque figure, the child soldier character can rather be understood in all its complexities. The primary approach of this study *was* to use the grotesque as a device for the analysis of the texts. The grotesque as a device of misconception becomes particularly important in this analysis because the reader's misconception of the child soldier arises from his inability to understand that the meaning of the child soldier goes beyond his presentation as a grotesque figure. To achieve this goal, it was important to (1) explore the techniques used by the writers in working out meanings with regard to the concept of child soldier and the perceptions of war realities, (2) demonstrate that child soldiers are not only 'producers' of violence but also its 'products' (victims), and (3) put the child soldier issue in both its social and historical context for a better understanding of the concept, in order to transform the *distorted image* of the African child soldier to that of the original image. This means that a child soldier is a child like any other child despite being engaged in war.

Given the plethora of grotesque features emerging from these novels, the major risk for readers of these books is the reinforcement of the stereotypical belief that African child soldiers are criminals. However, there are reasons to believe that although the child soldier character is not particularly attractive, we can still understand why he does what he does. In short, the novels about child soldiers strive to represent a reality beyond its mere representation. The novels go beyond the reality of violence towards presenting a society which destroys children's lives rather than being destroyed by them.

8.2. Phase one of the study

After the introductory chapter which dealt with the aims and the hypothesis of the study, Chapters 2 and 3 constituted the first part of this thesis. These two chapters examined previous works by African francophone writers in order to determine the context of violence perpetrated by child soldiers in this fiction. Most of these novels use the child as a central character with a focus on the issue of colonial and postcolonial violence toward the child. There are, however, certain fundamental differences between these works in their representations of the child's experience. The conclusion was reached that the child soldier issue is a postcolonial phenomenon. Some of the works expose the child's sufferings, as in Oyono's *Une vie de boy*(1956) in which the child suffers the full weight of colonial violence whereas others put the child in a position of revolt against this violence, as in Beti's *Mission terminée* (1957), *Remember Ruben* (1973), and so on. The postcolonial novels by writers such as Monénembo, Beyala, and Nkashama, are built around the same theme of childhood and violence which moves the reader to another level of the child's experience. These novels are concerned with the child's sufferings at the hands of the guardians or parents who were supposed to protect and care for him/her. The later works of art about child soldiers operate in a well-defined context of civil wars. These works are primarily concerned with the new realities of wars in which children are used as soldiers by evoking the political and socio-economic factors that led to these wars. They remain close to the reality of child soldiers' daily lives. Although regarded as innovative works, they still claim the literary tradition of past decades, writing within the marginal space of which they are part. Some of these writers seem to believe that the child soldier's experience is buried deep in our history. The child character is portrayed as caught between recent reality (history) and the mythical reality of his past. As such, these works are depositories of the complex meanings of the child's existence in postcolonial society. In short, Chapters 2 and 3 discussed the child from the perspective of victim and then gave a view of him or her as a protagonist. The view of the African child as a victim of violence forms the basis for our discussion of the novels examined.

Chapter 2 also claimed that there is a connection between the child soldier and the grotesque because the features characterising these children are both monstrous and bizarre. The study found that since the grotesque body is used as a mode of representation of the reality of war by the writers, it should consequently constitute the basis of the textual analysis. But the study led to the affirmation that it is not only the grotesque body

that has been used in the representation or conception of these texts. Elements of oral tradition have also been briefly outlined and found relevant to the analysis of these novels. The child soldier issue thus seeks a medium which can explain this concept without depending solely on one method. To surmount this problem, we tried to create a balance between the theory of the grotesque body and other strategies used in the texts as modes of mediating reality. We therefore looked at the features inherent in the issue of the child soldier (e.g. the child's background) in an attempt to assess postcolonial society in its most comprehensive ways because the child soldier's grotesque behaviour is reflective of the same society. In this way the analysis took the reader closer to the worlds depicted by the writers in their texts.

While Chapter 2 ends with the demonstration of the application of the theory of the grotesque, Chapter 3 addresses the problems that the reader is likely to encounter in reading these novels about child soldiers. Judging from several reviews of these books it appears that most readers believe the novelists wrote these texts to severely criticise and condemn child soldiers. While this is not entirely false, we also think that the readers need to realise the fact that the writers' views highlight how African children were transformed into killers rather than merely condemning them.

The study has shown that just as the character of the child soldier is complex in real life, so are readings of the narratives about child soldiers. The writers point to this complex reality and it could even be argued that these novels create incongruence rather than offer clarity in understanding the child soldier issue. The major problem for the reader of these novels arises from established habits of reading African novels. The reader of African novels is used to acquiring meaning through an exploration of themes, but these themes unfortunately carry with them certain overtones. Consequently child soldiers are taken for what they are not, or, at least, for whom they do not want to be. Our argument has been that although the writers present the child soldier's monstrous acts in a world in which things are upside-down, they do not only try to make this child into a caricature by showing his grotesque deeds which the reader already recognises, but also indirectly focus on a knowledge of the world in which these children live. In other words, the readers are presented with the life or actions of child soldiers the meaning of which will only emerge from the motives which constitute these actions. The reader is made to understand that the meaning of these texts and the child soldiers portrayed in them will not be necessarily

found in the child soldiers' actions but in literary devices such as myths, symbols and other linguistic strategies which give context to these actions. Therefore the reader who feels disturbed by the reality of these texts needs to understand that the reality offered by these texts remains illusory until the meaning of these devices is dealt with. This section also tried to emphasise that the child soldier is an alienated or marginalised character in a world in which mythical reality coexists with the worse elements of modern civilisation. As such, the child soldier as a narrator of his story assures his reader that he lives in a world which he found to be already misshapen. It is this world that is to be condemned rather than him. The most salient feature of representation used in these texts, especially in *Allah n'est pas obligé,* is, without doubt, magic realism. We used the term 'magic realism' to mean that these texts combine both the real and the magical. In short, despite the writers' dramatisation of the ancient myths in their works, there is a sense in which we can argue that these devices are used as a way of explaining today's realities of violence or to show that life today is not better than that which we might call primitivism.

These texts therefore require new reading habits. Unlike many contemporary novels, the texts about child soldiers use grotesque imagery in a manner which forces us to leave behind our old ways of reading the African novel from a thematic point of view. Any successful reading of these texts needs to take the above issues into account.

8.3.Phase two of the study

The second phase of the study dealt with the analysis of the texts about child soldiers. The child soldier was characterised by the nature and degree of violence children are engaged in or exposed to in these texts. However, the question we constantly asked throughout the analysis was whether the child soldier is a victim or a perpetrator.

In Dongala's *Johnny chien méchant*, the youth's madness, which seems quite arbitrary to outside observers, turned out to be understandable once one is given a clear picture of the politically dangerous ideologies of tribalism the child soldier s were introduced to by the local authorities in their country. The seeming madness of the child is contradicted by the implied message the novel sends. The more we witnessed Johnny's madness in action, the more we were required to acknowledge the generalised wars on the continent to which political madness has led. The distortion is so intense in this novel that the central character, Johnny, is equated to a 'Mad dog'; a metaphor which shows the boy as

a human being caught in the order-zone between two natures – he lives a kind of animal-like existence. Grotesque elements were shown to pervade all his actions. He is frequently referred to as carelessly killing innocent people, including children. Women appear to him to be his own property, he has many girl friends and rapes even women he should respect as mothers. He turns his town into a place of looting and survives on his ill-gotten riches. But all this happens after a government represented by one tribe legitimises itself and enlists the youth for tribal warfare.

This, as argued before, does not necessarily mean that the writer represents this war as a tribal war. For many reasons linked to Johnny's background and the politics of his country and given the intensity and frequency of monstrosities, he is represented as a major grotesque figure in this novel. Other child soldiers remain comparatively minor grotesque characters even though they all assume grotesque traits. Laokolé's unpremeditated act of murder at the end of the story developed out of her contact with Johnny's madness, and as such, it cannot turn her into a monster. It is important to note that it is the government which incites the youths to violence and turns them into obscure grotesque characters. The use of these children by the government is a clear indication that its own violence exceeds that of child soldiers. It goes therefore without saying that Johnny's absurd and egoistical clinging to his gun and his careless attitude toward society is exactly what the postcolonial leadership in Africa is to society at large. In other words, the boy's animal-like behaviour or wickedness points to the madness of the postcolonial political regime. The process of transformation goes as follows: we have a 'normal' child (Johnny); he falls into the hands of the political leaders who capture his mind, brainwash it and as a result, he becomes animal-like. This seals the communion between human, state corruption, and bestiality. So, by tracing the origin of the grotesque behaviour in *Johnny chien méchant*'s child soldiers, the government clearly appears to be responsible. As such, one enters a zone where they become aware of the possible coexistence of innocence alongside violence in Johnny and other child soldiers. What appears to be the writer's vision is that society's *maladroit* efforts in not caring about children has brought painful results for a society that the world now laughs at.

The same point is taken up by Kourouma's *Allah n'est pas obligé*. Kourouma's book is not only highly significant for the light it throws on African myths or culture but in that it constitutes a perfect example of a careful analysis of children's own troubled childhoods

and the *unsympathetic* behaviour of the war-lords who undermine the notion of childhood by using children as combatants. The fact that the children's new life stands in a set of relationships to each other – from family background to their status as victims of the war-lords – is clearly vital to the understanding of what happens to the children. For Kourouma the conception of the child soldiery is understood as a process of acquiring a new set of grotesque behaviours in addition to the set of internally homogenous behaviours indirectly accumulated over years although they all serve the same purpose of destruction. Put in other words, the child soldier is characterised by complex internal (devouring him from within) and external features (officially imposed on him by wars) whose networks may connect, interweave and overlap to make him the grotesque figure he has become. Kourouma connects child soldiery to ancient myths. It may be possible to speculate that child soldiery has its roots in these traditions, but not a great deal is known about the use of children as warriors in ancient times in Africa. The importance of these connections is beyond doubt, however. In other words, today's society makes use of the so-called myths we condemn given the emphasis on the cult of violence and other awkward practices. Cannibalism, for instance, is an apt metaphor for civil wars. That Kourouma uses myths in his novel is not entirely fictional, as it is suggested by attitudes to violence articulated in these myths.

Children in Couao-Zotti's *Charly en guerre* are without any other form of process victims of this war. *Charly en guerre* properly shows that children's violence is no end in itself, but part of larger significant patterns of meaning. This is the same as saying that most children become involved in war as their only chance to survive. The novel as a whole is an elaboration of the concept of survival which is its central theme and an apocalyptic vision. Those who see child soldiers merely as murderers are interpreting the phenomenon from an incorrect standpoint. As a writer, Couao-Zotti is more concerned with the real world and less with fantasy. In *Charly en guerre*, although the young rebel, John, may possess both disgusting and empathetic qualities, which fit him into the grotesque template, the writer chooses to make him a victim of war. Also significant is that the child protagonist is reunited with his mother after a separation of three years. This encounter is symbolic of his reintegration into a society lost to him by war. Her voice re-establishes the natural and social bond so much needed by child soldiers for their reintegration into society. Couao-Zotti is one of the writers whose writing provides a solution to the problem of child soldiers. Not only is he concerned with, and about,

children, but he also writes for them. He sees in art a weapon that children can use to fight against violence. As such, he is seen as imposing duties on those to whom he devoted his art. This kind of ideology is what is expected of this new generation of writers.

Both in *Charly en guerre* and *Allah n'est pas obligé* child characters are used as agents for exploring the effects of war on children. This way of narrating personal experiences lived by children has created empathy in most readers of child soldier novels which also prompted this study. The child soldiers in this fiction are victims because they are not the authors of the crisis they are in; instead, the world of violence which we seek to comprehend is created by the writer who believes that he must fight against violence.

8.4. Achievements

This study achieved a number of things. Apart from being a rare attempt to examine recent fiction about child soldiers in detail, we believe the work also sheds light on certain problems surrounding the interpretation of these characters. In so doing so, the study has demystified the problem of the child soldier and refuted several stereotypes. Child soldiers are still in the eyes of many perceived as 'rebels' 'killers', 'monsters' and so on, a perception which relates back to the old myths about Africans as barbaric, savage or gret-monkeys. Such stereotypes still force African children into a dark page of history. The present study swings from the negative perspective of placing emphasis on young people's capacity for rebellion to placing them in a broader social context which depicts challenges that these children face on a daily basis and which drive them to violence. The purpose of these descriptions and explanations has been to portray the issue of the child soldier as part of a social process, as a social practice, showing how it is determined by social structures and contexts which can have an impact on the child and change him. The issue of the child soldier has been understood in this context as a process of struggles or relations of power and the actions of child soldiers are understood as an outcome of these struggles.

While the grotesque can be used in a work of art to incite laughter, the stereotype cannot; it is the misrepresentation of who people really are that makes stereotypes dangerous. This study has tried to rise above the stereotypes and prejudices about child soldiers. Many have jumped from their observations of child soldiers' grotesque features to the

conclusion that they are rebels, killers and a lost generation. It has been our contention that any attempt to assess this phenomenon in this light fails since it only contributes to an increase in the stigma of which the child soldier has been a victim. What makes the issue of the child soldier so misleading is mostly our erroneous perception of the perversity of child soldiery while forgetting the power hidden behind it.

In this respect, the study resists dominant discourses and some of their perceptions of child soldiers. Despite being helpful in many aspects, such as fighting against the use of child soldiers, however, relying entirely on such discourses leads to dependence on moral principles to explain the problem of the child soldier. We would tend to think that such discourses made African children appear to have nothing in common with other children in the world. Such discourses also bring to light the same type of oppositions and distinguish categories of beings, facts, and values according to the rule of discrimination: a child soldier is what a normal child is not. Put in other words, A is what B is not.

The implication of this study is that it is cognisant of the fact that children wherever they are in the world have the potential to become perpetrators should they be exposed to the same realities. One psychologist, who spent time trying to rehabilitate child soldiers, notes: “It was sobering to think that under certain conditions, practically any child could be changed into a killer” (Singer 2006:75). A combination of unimaginable misery which many children face in their lives (such as poverty, propaganda, and alienation) has, as Singer argues, “led children… to seek out or adhere to ideologies that provide this sense of order, regardless of the content” (2006:41). The idea that child soldiers fight wars which others have started is something one can hold on to.

The study does not question the importance of moral values which guide people through life, but what it argues that reason should not be confused with emotion. If ‘moral’ is not submitted to a discipline in order to make the subject it deals with more explicit, it becomes useless even though it is used in today’s scholarship. Despite the fact that the moral is submitted to a contextual authority upon which it acts, we can attest that such a case study needs a clear model of analysis in order to make its results credible and believable. The study has tried to show that the child soldier is as normal as any other

child except that he has been made violent. If this concept is missed or rejected, the novels lose their universal appeal.

We also believe that the choice of methodology and theoretical framework contributed to the success of this work. This methodological orientation helped us to locate the phenomenon of the child soldier phenomenon within, a particular stage in the development of African history (see the study of novels on childhood and violence in Chapter 1) which, as we know, is in large part determined by colonialism. Such a perspective was inevitable given our commitment to articulate our argument based on the postcolonial line of thought (which by its nature attacks the dominant discourse and gives voice to the marginalized groups) we were constrained to follow. Thanks to this, it was possible to fit the above novels into a scheme which forced the issue of the child soldier to be analysed as a postcolonial issue. This allowed us to link the features of the child soldier as an appropriate analogy (or extension to) with colonialism, slavery or any other form of subjugation which constantly re-create themselves disguised in new forms. It is in this context that the child soldiers' acts, whether forced or voluntary, have come to be regarded as having grown out of a lived experience of inequality and subordination.

This work made extensive use of Gysin's interpretation of grotesque material which we borrowed in part for the novels' analyses. With this we were able to distinguish between what is grotesque and what is not and different types of grotesque figures (e.g. major grotesque figure, minor grotesque figures). For Gysin (1975):

> The grotesque figures can be arranged according to the frequency of the incongruous or extraneous traits and incoherencies of behaviour, according to the combination of features, according to their relationship to other characterizing features, or according to the effect a figure has on other figures or a particular situation.(129).

His analysis also shows that the intensity of the grotesque features depends to a large degree on the choice of a particular means of expression as for example the combination of simile and metaphor. To these he adds the function a figure has within a specific story. This function is what determines the length and frequency of the grotesque traits. Not only does the critic classifies the grotesque figures into 'anonymous groups', 'minor figures', and 'major characters', but he also distinguishes between grotesque figures, objects, and

situations. These tools for analysis among others produced results which confirm the thesis that the language used by child soldiers is the most appropriate way to understand them.

In short, the use of the grotesque as a method of analysis in this work has provided several outcomes in terms of (1) 'possibility' and (2) 'development'.

- Examining war from the grotesque point of view has given us the *possibility* of understanding the close affinity that exists between war and the grotesque. As a theory, it helps readers understand their responses to texts and explains why characters do what they do. As such, we believe that the language of the grotesque is a valuable medium for locating violence and its agents.

- This fiction is provided with a form of 'development' because the use of the grotesque, which was once featured as having reached its peak only within the Anglo-American and Latin-American writing, is now given a new direction in contemporary novels about child soldiers. The francophone fiction on civil war has made considerable advances. An important factor that has contributed to this is without doubt children's involvement in war. It could be well argued that the contemporary fiction about child soldiers has brought a new layer to what has been referred to as the *grotesque Africain*. The grotesque in this work is therefore an avenue through which the imagery of a decadent society is expressed.

- The novel about child soldiers is the product of a cultural crisis and disintegration. Through this type of novel societal inequalities and hypocrisy in religion and governments are addressed. The francophone writers are among many who, as McElroy (1989) puts it, "turn instinctively to images of the grotesque to convey a sense of falling off, of lost direction, of empty self-indulgence-of decadence" (130). Their writing "conveys powerful impressions of things having gone out of control, of the animal in man having been given free rein, and of the monstrous forces of the psyche having been loosed" (130). It (writing) depicts a world in which former beliefs and boundaries have collapsed, categories have lost their separateness and the world is perceived as anarchic. The child is now seen as dangerous as a soldier, a woman at war can no longer be seen as a weak creature, a hero is no longer judged by his size, for smallness does not mean insignificance.

This is in line with our insistence on the importance of understanding the child soldier within the context of grotesque language as a window through which we can understand the postcolonial issue affecting children today and their transformation into agents of violence.

8.5. Suggestions for further research

If we were asked what part of research we would like to further with regard to this topic, we would certainly wish to study the developmental character of child soldiers from perpetrators to peace brokers or peace builders of their continent. This would also imply, as the writer of *Charly en guerre* implies, giving the heart of the child a sense of hope**.** This does not mean that the bizarre, terror and pity are not inspiring, for *Johnny chien méchant* was very inspiring in this regard. What is argued here is that not enough effort is made in dealing with the social and cultural aftermath of Africa's Civil Wars. The question as to what kind of future awaits the African child tomorrow? needs to be answered by both the critics and new francophone African writers. As Singer (2006:184) argues, "lack of attention to the child soldier doctrine in peace process and post war planning" is dangerous.

As critics, we are interested in the return to historico-legendary souces in neo-african writing. We agree with Blair that the supernatural elements associated with historical figures such as Soundjata, Shaka, Guezo (or Gezo), and so on, their childhoods, the miraculous exploits of their youth and manhood "should be a rich field to exploit in African drama [literature]" to repeat Blair's words (1976:107). Eugene Dervain acknowledges the fact that in his writing, he "draw[s] on the rich reservoir of African legends just as French authors have turned for inspiration to the myths of Ancient Greece" (Dervain in Blair, 1976:107). The same holds true for our contemporary writers who should make the same effort – to renew the best in the past – to give us a complete picture in their discussion of violence in Africa.

The analysis showed, for example, that the strongest roots of these wars were rooted in a kind of 'tribalism' which has enslaved children, so that awareness needs to be created in them to look at each other with respect regardless of to which tribe they belong (even if this issue constitutes another myth we have tried to refute in our discussion). Nevertheless, we think that it is time children should begin to allow themselves to loosen the bonds that

tie them to sacrifice. Children should act as agents of change without necessarily letting themselves fall prey to political ideologies. Quoting from Mohandas K. Gandhi, Abbot (1993) argues that the moment that the slave resolves that he will be no longer a slave, his fetters fall. A significant step toward the belief in change for future needs to be taken. It is also believed that 'African literature' is one of the artifices by which African children can overcome their war. Even here, a good model of identification for children needs be given. In his *L'Enfant noir*, for example, Camara Laye, Harrow argues, provides the portrait of his father, a man known...as "père" and as "a thoroughly admirable figure" (Harrow, 1993:143). Like his father, Camara Laye's mother is equally portrayed as a good model of child protection. In fact, she is called "Daman." "Daman," as Adele King (1980) suggests, is the "symbol for Mother Africa." Both "the mother and Africa", King argues, "are associated with warmth, comfort, security and love" (18). Laye was able to probe the past and show the roles which African people played in shaping the destiny of their children. Readers found no way to deny but rather to admire Laye's childhood in a world others once considered uncivilised. Although Kourouma was right when he once argued that: "the world described by Camara Laye in *L'enfant noir* is gone and has given way to the world of 'tribal wars' into which many children have been dragged"(Borgomano, 2002), one can still learn from this past for a better future for our children. Such a joyful childhood, as shown in Laye's book, would not have been possible unless children's rights were highly valued in their communities. "Laye's ideological premise is that the value that will rehabilitate Africa in the eyes of the world are", in the words of the critic Gikandi "buried deep in our history" (1987: 3). But these values (human rights in this context) define themselves in the fusion of the real and hidden worlds which Laye refers to as "hidden things and mysteries" (Killam, 1973:160). The tragedy Africa faces today is because, we argue, it has stopped its quest to understand these mysteries.

8.6. Limitations of this study

The question of the child soldier remains complex and difficult for the critic if we consider that the issue of the child soldier is by its very nature a social problem and not a literary one. In addition, the concept of the child soldier is recent and newly coined. This suggests that such a concept is primarily a matter of language rather than of experience. Without denigrating the value we attach to language, language sometimes finds it difficult to capture experience. This reminds us of McNeil's (1990) consideration of language as in conflict with itself. The idea of a language of war as in conflict with itself

stems according to McNeil from the idea of war as spectacle (41). Likewise, by referring to a 'child' as 'soldier' in a war situation, people are not necessarily saying he is one (although he looks like one), but they are describing not only the child, but also the war which fascinates their mind. It is as if they find themselves caught in a language that is repulsive and appealing at the same time. Moreover, the writers explain why child soldiers have become so violent (and without a doubt they have succeeded in doing so), but we should acknowledge that their reasoning is based on limited observations. Since they are only spokespersons for child soldiers' experiences, their novels, like any fictional works, are based on opinions.

Although the study presents some limitations given the inability of language to capture experiences, the same language remains key to understanding war and child soldiery.

8.7. Final comments

Like most postcolonial texts, the francophone novels about child soldiers fight for the minority or those without a voice. Our interest in attempting to understand the writers' views on child soldiers is because the study has tested the relevance of these views which we think could make a major contribution to the ongoing debate on child soldiers.

The writers give children a voice in these stories. Their voice as narrators, although given expression through the gunshot, is, as already argued, a metaphor of the deconstruction of society and its claim for social justice, equal rights and opportunities. Their beliefs, feelings and modes of thoughts articulate a new consciousness, self-realisation and identity, all of which reflect the dynamic transformations they go through in today's society. These children remind us of their pain, sadness and death which some of them survived while others didn't.

John and Charly in *Charly en guerre* and Birahima in *Allah n'est pas obligé* who are coming of age restarted their lives elsewhere but many like them died. The Arab-American poet Naomi Shihab Nye's (in Farish, 2002) poem, "All Things Not Considered" in her *19 Varieties of Gazelle,* argues that for many children there are no second chances as she writes: "You cannot stitch the breath back into this boy." (Stanza 1). This is why this work has been dedicated to African children who continue to suffer, especially those who did not survive to tell the stories of their pain and death.

War has acquired a new prominence in writings from writers as different in temperament and nationality as Dongala, Kourouma and Couao-Zotti who have made the concept of the child soldier a part of literary discourse and there are many signs to indicate that all those who promote children's studies will be inspired by these novels. But, as already stated, this concept is not linked to peace but to war, magic and the grotesque. For many, the term has become a key to a new understanding of Africa. Indeed, magic or grotesque realism is a much more useful theory which tells us that the body of child soldier in these novels is a parody of our decadent postcolonial society. This fiction is a symbol of a culture or a civilisation which has failed, on the one hand, to put the boundaries or control the passions of the younger ones, and on the other, to improve the conditions of human life and address the concerns of youths that drive them into violence. Youth violence and delinquency can take many forms, child soldiery being but just one of these. DR-Congo's capital city of Kinshasa, for example, is experiencing a completely new problem of youth gang violence which seems to have emerged over the last two years and is spreading fast throughout the country**.** The problem – or as it is dubbed in Kinshasa, the *phénomène* is a new criminal youth subculture. The phenomenon is called *kuluna* and its gangs, *kuluneurs.* That "kuluna had exploded the urban gang category into a *phenomena* is", according to Alex Engwete (2010), "in the realm of the unexplainable." Engwete further argues, "it is deemed a phenomenon because of its city-wide extent, the level of violence deployed, the weapons involved, and the rising toll of casualties." Whether in broad daylight or at night, the *kuluneurs* are armed with clubs, machetes and other blunt objects and they raid and occupy a city square where they seize from passers-by and street vendors any valuable they can lay their hands on: money, watches, cell phones, merchandise, shirts, shoes, jewelry, etc. And the victims who try to resist are hacked with machetes, clubbed or stabbed. As we write these lines, Congo is characterised by massive participation of youth in gang activities, high levels of street violence, and raids despite the government's efforts to stop them. If there is a common trait to the 'child soldier' and 'kuluneurs', it is that each phenomenon, in its own way, reminds us of poverty as the root cause. While we acknowledge the destructive power of youth's violence, we also recognise the troubling possibility that the violence might be the only form of expression available to those who have been denied access to resources and freedom. This leads us to argue that many of the most trenchant questions about youth violence in our societies might be answered in light of a fuller appreciation of the writers' discussions about the deeper social and economic problems facing the youth today. Until the youth's interests are identified and met, critics

of the child soldiers' violence (and other forms of violences) will continue to deplore the effects of wars and the destructive powers wielded by child soldiers. Until we understand the implications of the conditions of subjugation, we have and continuously create, we will keep on blaming children, the innocent ones, for our own madness.

We would like to close on this important note which is where our analysis started. In fact, the question is left open exactly as to 'who is a monster and in the eyes of whom?'This reinforces our argument that child soldiers are not in themselves perpetrators or victims, sinister or terrifying, but that they 'have been made to be so.'

This study did not deny the grotesque in the child soldier nor avoid commenting on their monstrosities. Unlike Thomas Browne who says that "there are no grotesques in nature", we rather concur with Theophile Gautier that "le grotesque a toujours existé dans l'art et dans la nature" (Gysin 1975:xix). The study's main argument has remained the same – it is that there is another voice behind the story, a voice which incites children to violence which should be held responsible. Let us recall Fraser's (1974) distinction between two types of monsters which shaped the line of thought in this analysis. Fraser helps us to understand that "mere compulsive violence or violation even if disturbing to the eye, are ultimately of little interest" but "what ultimately is of interest" Fraser writes "is the kind of violence that is perpetrated by coherent personalities, acting autonomously and intelligently" (1974:90). Drawing from Fraser's study of movie-monsters, there are, as he puts it, "two sharply different kinds of movie 'monsters' as also revealed in these novels. On the one hand, he argues, "we have those beings who cross the border between the human and the monstrous or are in the process of doing so; but are themselves victims of forces outside their control" (90). But, here "although it might appear explosive and challenging" he argues, "genuine derangement, whether in actuality or in art, is mostly too inward turning, and hence simply not interesting enough"(90). "Violences of deranged persons" is according to Fraser "still essentially inward-looking, in that the victims do not really figure in them in terms of their own identities, but in terms of whatever particular delusional system the violator is working in terms of" (92). The second type of monster and the more disturbing of the two, is, as Fraser puts it, a "totally committed and self-controlled figure gripped by an obsession in the pursuit of which he will shrink from absolute violence and atrocities that seem necessary" (1974:92). If people don't easily identify them as monsters, grotesque figures,

perpetrators or iniquitous, which they are, it is simply because, he further argues, "they are not patently crippled, deformed, contemptible, or pitiable like the figures in the first group, and up to a point they are capable of functioning perfectly successfully in normal society" (92). He adds that "the atrocities that they commit or are responsible for issue from coherent, unified personalities functioning with complete certainty and, in a sense, non-monstrously" (92). Borrowing from the above analogy, child soldiers clearly fall under the first category, they are deranged and do whatever they are asked to do out of their own consciousness. Even if their consciousness is to some extent involved, it is less well articulated. In this sense, child soldiers appear like victims of violence themselves. On the contrary, the figures of people showing intelligence, stylishness, organisation are, despite all these false appearances, far more dangerous than the children in these novels who are 'not really' monsters. Simply put, it is the war institutions and all those who work secretly behind screens to create war who should be seen as the real monsters.

Riegel's (1978) remarks about the Great War below do not differ from Fraser's arguments or from the civil war in which African children are used as fighters. For Riegel, the young generation has been involved in war for which it is not responsible, neither for starting it nor for the effects it leaves among the living. It is with anxiety that the young soldier looks to the future:

> La jeune génération a fait la guerre ainsi qu'on le lui a ordonné mais elle ne se sent responsable ni de son déclanchement ni des innombrables séquelles qu'elle laissera sur la terre et parmi les humains. Ce sentiment d'irresponsabilité envers le passé se projette également sur l'avenir. C'est avec une trouble anxiété que ces jeunes soldats, vieux par l'expérience vécue cependant, regardent le futur (317).

To conclude, let us once more reiterate that "[c]hildren," as Marina Warner acknowledges: "are not in rebellion but suffer from the compulsion of conforming" (1994:30). We should therefore not, in legal terms, confuse the "suspect" with the true "perpetrator" hiding in society. It is in this manner, we come to the end of the study of the child soldier in this fiction. So complex an issue, yet so simply narrated. So sad a history, but so artistically put. It is plainly not fact, and yet it is factually accurate.

Let us once more reiterate that the framework of this study is both literary-specific and generally human. War or violence is part of human life, but what we deplore is when people fail to settle their conflicts. This reminds us of Mofolo's *Chaka* where we read:

> There is no country in the world where wars do not take place. At one time or another tribes quarrel and prepare to fight: sometimes they fight for years, but in the end peace returns again and the country prospers once more. Sometimes when the tribes are dwelling in peace a male *child is born* to a chief in a certain tribe and that chief's son is enough to cause disturbances in the tribes, so that peace departs from the earth and he spills the blood of many though he be but one. But such slaughter as was seen in the great wars was a thing not known in the days of old, when the country was first inhabited. The tribes were living in peace, each in its own habitation where it had been placed when Unkulukulu (God) brought man out of the reed-bed. In that time of profound peace and prosperity there was no one who thought for a moment that the time was close at hand when their life would be utterly transformed or that one day would wander over the land without any fixed abode, killed by hunger and thirst while in flight. (1931:4 amphesis added)

After all this is said, we are satisfied with having provided a broader picture on the issue of child soldiers through a literary approach. Understanding the big picture of what actually causes these children to commit crimes rather than simply dissecting the crime itself is a useful tool in working towards decreasing child-instigated crimes and to rehabilitating the child-criminal.

The fiction of war has made considerable contribution to African francophone literature in particular and humanitarian studies in general. The writers' strategies laid a path for understanding child soldiers and peoples' frame of mind in the war regard. The child soldier rose to the occasion but perhaps best described in this passage by Dongala where he shows how children destroyed their country, a passage that exposes, not only utter violence, but also human folly:

> Je ne sais pas pourquoi je racontais cela à une bande de gens qui n'avaient rien à apprendre dans l'art de piller puisqu'ils l'avaient déjà fait mille fois et puisque c'était la raison majeure pour laquelle nous combattions. Pour nous enrichir. Pour faire ramper un adulte. Pour avoir toutes les nanas qu'on voulait. Pour la puissance que donnait un fusil. Pour être maître du monde. Ouais, tout ça à la fois. Mais nos chefs et notre président nous ont ordonné de ne pas dire cela. Ils nous ont enjoint de dire à ceux qui nous poseraient des questions que nous combattions pour la liberté et la démocratie et cela pour nous attire les sympathies du monde extérieur (Dongala, 2002:80).

We may laugh at such a joke, but we are also ashamed and feel guilty for it is the adult society that made children behave that way. Nonetheless, these shocking revelations are to increase our awareness about this culture of violence brought about by civil war.

Since any human work can never claim to be perfect, we are convinced that this work has opened a wider discussion, and hope that other researchers will engage in further research in this area. We recognise the limits of this study just as Todorov (1970) claims in his *Introduction à la literature fantastique* that:

> Le travail de connaissance vise une vérité approximative, non une vérité absolue. Si la science descriptive prétendait dire toute la vérité; elle contrédirait à sa raison d'être. (27)

This simply means that this work is open-ended.

Bibliography

I. Primary sources

Couao-Zotti, Florent**.** *Charly en guerre*. Paris: Éditions Dapper, 2001.

Dongala, Emmanuel. *Johnny Chien Méchant.* Paris: Le Serpent à Plumes, 2002 (translated as *Johnny Mad Dog* by Maria Louise Ascher. New York: Farrar Strauss and Giroux, 2006)

Kourouma, Ahmadou. *Allah n'est pas obligé*. Paris: Seuil, 2000 (translated as *Allah is not obliged* by Frank Wynne. New York: Anchor Books, 2007)

II. Secondary sources

a) Books, These, Articles and Reviews

Abbott, Franklin (ed) *Boyhood: Growing up Male.* Wisconsin University Press, 1998.

Achebe, Chinua. *Anthills of the Savannah*. London: Heinemann, 1988.

_____ *Things Fall Apart*. London: Heinemann, 1958.

_____ The Truth of Fiction. In: *Hopes and Impediments: Selected Essays 1965-1987* by Chinua Achebe. London: Heinemann, 1988, 95-105.

Ahmad-Slavin, Fawzia**.** "Ousmane Sembène's 'Les Bouts de bois de Dieu'**:** The Mechanics of Change." *LitteRealite*; 7, 1-2(1995): 49-61.

Althusser, Louis. *Lenin and Philosophy*, New York: Monthly Review, 1971.

Amadu, Sesay (ed). *Civil Wars, Child Soldiers and Post Conflict Peace Building in West Africa***.** Ibadan: College Press, 2003.

Archard, David. *Children: Rights and Childhood*. London: Routledge, 1993.

Ariès, Philippe. *L'Enfant et la vie familiale sous l'Ancien Régime,* Paris: Plon, 1960. (translated as *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life,* 1962, New York: Vintage Books).

Armah, Ayi Kwei. *Why Are We So Blest*? 1972; rpt. London: Heinemann, 1974.

Armstrong, Nancy and Tennenhouse, Leonard (eds). *The Violence of Representation: Literature and the history of violence*. London: Routledge, 1989.

Arndt, Susan. "Boundless Whiteness? Feminism and White Women in the Mirror of African Feminist Writing." In: *Body, Sexuality and Gender,* edited by Veit-Wild, Flora & Naguschewski, Dirk.Amsterdam & New York: Rodopi, 2005.

Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths & Helen Tiffin. *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice*

in Post-Colonial Literatures. New York: Routledge, 1989.

Auty, Richard M. *Sustaining Development in Mineral Economies: The Resource Curse Thesis*. London: Routledge, 1993.

Bakhtin, Mikhail. *Rabelais And His World,* Cambridge, Mass.: The M.I.T. Press, 1968.

Baker, Charlotte. "Être albinos": The Trope of Albinism in Williams Sassine's "Wirriyamu" and "Mémoire d'une peau." *International Journal of Francophone Studies*, 13,1, (2010):9-22.

Barker, Derek Alan. "Escaping the Tyranny of Magic Realism? A Discussion of the Term in Relation to the Novels of Zakes Mda." *Postcolonial Text*, 2 (2008): 1-20.

Baker, Houston, Jr. Blues, *Ideology, and Afro-American Literature: A. Vernacular Theory*. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1984.

Baloyi, M.E. *Patriarchal structures, a hindrance to women's right*, VDM Publishing Company, Saarbrucken, 2009.

_____"An African view of women as sexual objects as a concern for gender equality: A critical study."*Verbum et Ecclesia*, 31,1 (2010):5-6

Bawarshi Anis, "The Genre Function." *College English*. 62. 3 (2000), 335-360.

Bazié, Isaac. "Écritures de violence et contraintes de la réception: *Allah n'est pas obligé* dans les critiques journalistiques française et québécoise." *Présence francophone,* 61, (2003): 84–97.

Beah, Ishmael. *A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier*, Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2007.

Bekerley, Bill. *The graves are not yet full: race, tribe and power in the heart of Africa*, New York: Basic Books, 2001.

Bennett, T.W., *Using Children in Armed Conflict: A Legitimate African Tradition? Criminalizing the Recruitment of Child Soldiers*, Institute of Security Studies Monograph Series , No. 32, December 1998.

Beti, Mongo. *Le pauvre Christ de Bomba*. Paris : R. Laffont, 1956

_____ *Mission Terminée*. Paris: Buchet/chastel, 1957.

_____ *Remember Ruben*. London: Heinemann Continents Press, 1980.

_____*Remember Ruben*. Paris: Union Générale D'éditions, 1974.

_____ *Ville cruelle.* Paris: Présence africaine, 1971(First published in 1954 under the pseudonym Eza Boto).

Beyala, Calixthe. *C'est le soleil qui m'a brulée.* Paris, Stock, 1987.

_____ *Le petit prince de Belleville.* Paris, Albin Michel, 1992.

_____. *Maman a un amant.* Paris, Albin Michel, 1993.

_____*Tu t'appelleras Tanga*. Paris*:* Editions Stock, 1986.

_____*Femme nue, femme noire*. Albin Michel, 2003.

Bhabha, Homi. "How newness enters the world: Postmodern space, postcolonial times and the trials of cultural translation." In *The Location of Culture*. New York: Routledge (1994): 212 - 235.

Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin. *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader.* Routledge, 2006.

Blair, Dorothy S. *African Literature in French: A History of Creative Writing in French from West and Equatorial Africa.* New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981.

Borgomano, "Etre enfant en Afrique" dans : *Mots Pluriels*, nº 22 septembre, 2002.

Browning, Christopher. *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland.* New York: HarperCollins, 1992.

Bowers, Maggie A. *Magic(al) Realism*. New York: Routledge, 2004.

Cairns, Ed. *Children and Political Violence*. Blackwell, Cambridge, 1996.

Camara, Laye. *L'Enfant noir*, edited by Joyce A. Hutchinson. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966.

_____ *Le Maître de la parole.* Paris: Lon, 1976.

Carpentier, Alejo. "On the Marvellous Real in America." *Magical Realism*: Theory, History, Community. Ed. Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy Faris. Durham: Duke UP, 1995.

Castellanos, Gabriela. *Laughter, War, and Feminism: Elements of Carnival in Three of Jane Austen's Novels.* Peter Lang Pub., 1994.

Cazenave, Odile. "Writing the Child, Youth, and Violence into the Francophone Novel from Sub-Saharan Africa: The Impact of Age and Gender." *RAL* 36.2 (2005): 59-71.

Chevrier, Jacques and Richard Bjornson. Williams Sassine. *Research In African Literature*. 23, 4, (1992):133-136.

_____*William Sassine écrivain de la marginalité*. Paris: Éditions du Gref, 1995.

Clark, John F. Ed. *The African Stakes of the Congo War*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2002.

Coetzee, J.M. *Disgrace.* London: Vintage, 1999.

Coly, Ayo Abiétou."Neither Here nor There: Calixthe Beyala's Collapsing Homes" *Research in African Literatures*, 33, 2 (2002):34-45

Conrad, Joseph, *Heart of darkness: an authoritative text, backgrounds and sources, criticism*, New York: Norton, 1988.

Cooper, Brenda. *Magical Realism in West African Fiction: Seeing with a Third Eye* (London and New York): Routledge, 2001.

Corti, Lillian. "Colonial violence and psychological defences in Ferdinand Oyono's: Une vie de boy." *Research in African Literatures* 34.1 (2003)*:*44-57.

Couao-Zotti, Florent**.** *Un enfant dans la guerre*. Lomé:Haho-ACCT, 1996.

Couloubaly, Adama. "Le recit de guerre : une écriture du tragique et du grotesque," Littérature, philosophie, art et conflits. *Ethiopiques* n°71.2ème semester, 2003.

Coundouriotis, Eleni. *Claiming history: Colonialism, Ethnography, and the novel*. New York: Colombia University Press, 1999.

Dadié, Bernard Binlin. *Le pagne noir***.** Paris: Présence Africaine, 1955.

_____ *Climbié*. Paris: Séghers, 1956. (Trans. by Karen C. Chapman. London: Heinemann, 1971.

_____ *The Black Cloth* (Hatch, Karen C. Preface. trans. Hatch Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1987.

D'Almeida, Irène AssibaFrancophone *African Women Writers: Destroying the Emptiness of Silence*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1994.

Dally, Bridget and Jenny, Vaughan. *Children and War*. London: Macdonald, 1988.

Danow, David. *The Spirit of Carnival*. Kentucky: UP of Kentucky, 1995.

Diallo, Bakary. *Force-bonté*. Dakar : Les Nouvelles Éditions Africaines Agence de Coopération Culturelle et Technique, 1985 (First published in 1926.

Diop, Boubacar Boris, *Le cavalier et son ombre*. Paris, Stock, 1997.

Domenach, Jean-Marie, *Le retour du tragique*. Paris, Éditions du Seuil, coll. Esprit. La condition humaine , 1967.

Donald, James. *Fantasy and the Cinema***.** London*:* British Film Institute*,* 1989.

Dongala, Emmanuel. *Les petits garçons naissent aussi des étoiles*. Paris: Le Serpent à plumes, 1998.

Duerden, Dennis *and* Pieterse, Cosmo (eds). *African Writers Talking***:** *A Collection of Interviews*, London*:* Heinemann, 1972.

Edgerton. Robert B**.** *Warrior Women*: *The Amazons of Dahomey and the Nature of War***.** Boulder, Col: Westview Press, 2000.

Edise, F and Sichel, N (eds). *Unrooted Childhoods: Memoirs of Growing up Global*. London: Nicholas Brealy Publishing, 2004.

Effa, Gaston Paul. *Tout ce bleu.* Paris: Grasset, 1995.

_____ *Cheval-roi*. Paris: Éditions du Rocher, 2001.

Elisabeth Boa and J.H. Reid (1972 *Boa*, *Elizabeth* and *Reid*, *J. H. Critical strategies: German fiction in the twentieth century*. London: Edward Arnold, 1972.

Elshtain, Jean Bethke, ed. *Just War Theory*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1992.

Erickson, John D. *Nommo, African Fiction in. French South of the Sahara*.York [South Carolina]: French Literature Publications Co., 1979.

Essomba, Jean-Roger. *Le dernier gardien de l'arbre.* Paris: Présence africaine, 1998.

Ezeigbo Akachi. *Fact and Fiction in the Literature of the Nigerian Civil War*. Lagos: Unity Publishing and Research Co. Ltd., 1991.

Fanon, Frantz. *Les Damnés de la terre*. Paris: Découverte, 1961.

Finnegan, Ruth. *Oral Literature in Africa*. Oxford: Clarendon. Press, 1970.

Flores, A. 1955, "Magic Realism in Spanish American Fiction", in L. P. Zamora and W. B. Faris (eds) *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community.* Duke University Press, London, (1995):109-119.

Forde, Daryll, and Phyllis Mary Kaberry eds. *West African Kingdoms in the Nineteenth Century*. London: Oxford University Press, 1967.

Fornari, Franco. *War*. Bloomington, Indiana University Press, [1974], 1975.

Forsdick Charles and Murphy David (eds)Francophone *Postcolonial Studies: A critical Introduction*. Oxford University Press, New York, 2003.

Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish*: The Birth of the Prison. Vintage, New York,1979.

Francis, Donette A. "'Silences too Horrific to Disturb': Writing Sexual His-tories in Edwidge Danticat's *Breath, Eyes, Memory*." *Research in African Literatures* 35 (2004):

75–90.

Franz Roh, “Magic Realism: Post-Expressionism” (1925). *Magical Realism* edited by L.P. Zamora &W. B. Faris. Durham: Duke UP, 1995.

Fraser, John. *Violence in the Arts.* NY, Cambridge University Press**,** 1974.

Fraser, Morris. *Children in conflict.* Norwich: Norfolk Pelican Book, 1973.

Frye, Northrop. *Anatomy of Criticism*: Four Essays. Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press,1957.

Furley, Oliver (ed). *Conflict in Africa.* London: I.B. Taurus, 1995.

Fussel, Paul. *Wartime: Understanding and Behavior in the Second World War*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1989.

Garbarino, James and Dubrow, Nancy.eds. *Children in danger*. Library of Congress, 1992.

Gassama, Makhily. *La langue d'Ahmadou Kourouma ou le français sous le soleil d'Afrique*. Paris: ACCT/Karthala, 1995.

Gasster-Carrierre, Susan. “Allah n’est pas obligé.” *French Review* 75.4 (2002):826–27.

Gatheru, Mugo. *Child of Two Worlds*. 1964. rpt. London: Heinemann, 1966.

Gérard, Albert (ed). *European-Language Writing in Sub-Saharan Africa*, (2) Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 19861986.

Gikandi. Simon. *Reading the African Novel.* London: James Currey, 1987.

_____ *Encyclopedia of African Literature.* London: Routledge, 2003.

_____ *Reading Chinua Achebe*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1991.

Goodwin-Gill, Guy S and Cohn, Ilene. *Child soldiers: the role of children in armed conflict.* Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1994.

Gomis, Aimé. “De l'enfance tragique dans Allah n'est pas obligé de Kourouma: entre guerre et représentation littéraire de l'horreur.” *DOCT-US*, 1, (2011):104-118

Gourevitch, Philip. *We wish to inform you that tomorrow we will be killed with our families, Stories from Rwanda*. New York: Farrar Straus and Giroux, 1998.

Graham , Lucy Valerie. 2005. “Reading the Unspeakable: Rape in J M Coetzee's *Disgrace*.” In: *Body, Sexuality and Gender,* edited by Veit-Wild, Flora and Naguschewski, Dirk. Amsterdam & New York: Rodopi, 2005.

Greenberg, Jay. *Oedipus and Beyond*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991.

Griffiths, Gareth. *African Literatures*: *East and West*. Harlow: Longman, 2000.

Gurtueva, Tamara. “Man in the ontological space of the newest time.” *Consciousness, Literature and the Arts,* (Archive), 3, 3, (2004)

Gysin, Fritz. *The Grotesque In American Negro Fiction*, [s.l.]. Francke, 1975.

Hargreaves, John. “French West Africa in the First World War” reviewed work: *L'Appel à l'Afrique. Contributions et Réactions à l'Effort de guerre en A.O.F. (1914-1919)* by Marc Michel. *The Journal of African History*, 24, 2, (1983):285-288.

Harpham, Geoffrey Galt**.** *On The Grotesque: Strategies Of Contradiction In Art And Literature.* Princeton: Princeton U.P., 1982.

Harrow. Kenneth. *Thresholds of change in African literature: the emergence of a tradition*. Portsmouth, N.H: Heinemann, 1993.

Hazoumé, Paul. *Doguicimi*. Paris: Larose, 1935.

Henderson, John Graham Wilmot. *Fighting for Rome: Poets and Caesars, History and Civil war*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

Hochschild, Adam. *King Leopold's Ghost: A Story of Greed, Terror, and Heroism in Colonial Africa*. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1998.

Hogg, Garry. *Cannibalism And Human Sacrifice***.** London: R. Hale, 1958.

Honwana, Alcinda.“Negotiating post war Identities: Child soldiers in Mozambique and Angola.” *CODESRIA Bulletin*, 1 and 2, 1999.

_____Honwana, Alcinda and De Boeck, Filip (eds). *Makers & Breakers: Children & Youth in Postcolonial Africa*. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2005.

_____ *Child Soldiers in Africa*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006.

Huannou, Adrien. “La technique du récit et le style dans Les Soleils des indépendances.” *L'Afrique Littéraire et Artistique* 38.4 (1975):31-38.

Hutcheon, Linda. "Historiographic Metafiction Parody and the Intertextuality of History" *Intertextuality and Contemporary American Fiction*. Ed. O'Donnell, P., and Robert Con Davis. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, (1989): 1-32.

Ignatieff, Michael. *The Warrior's Honor: Ethnic War And The Modern Conscience*. Vintage, 1999.

Ilboudo, Monique, *Murekatete*. Bamako/Paris: Le figuier/Fest'Africa, 2000.

Inggs, Judith Anne. *The role and development of Soviet children's literature during perestroika***.** PhD Dissertation**.** University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, 1997.

Irele , Abiola. *The African experience in literature and ideology.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, cl990.

_____ *The Cambridge Companion to the African Novel*. Cambridge University Press, 2009.

Jones, E.D., Jones, M. and Gikandi, S., eds. *Childhood in African literature: a review***.** Trenton N.J: Africa World Press, 2002**.**

Jones, Eldred D."Childhood before & after Birth." *African Literature Today* 21 (1998):1-8

Julien, Eileen. *African Novels and the Question of Orality*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press,1992.

July, Robert. W. *A History of the African People*. New York, 1970.

Kane, Cheikh Hamidou**.** *L'Aventure ambiguë.* Paris: Julliard, 1961**.**

Kadim, Youcef. *L'Ecriture du tragique dans* "Les chemins qui montent" *de Mouloud Feraoun.* Mémoire élaboré en vue de l'obtention du diplôme de Magister dans l'option: Science des Textes littéraires. Université de bejaia / Abdarrahmane Mira, 2008.

Keïta, Fatou. *Rebelle*. Paris: Présence Africaine, 1998.

Kenyatta, Jomo. *Facing Mount Kenya*. London: Heinemann, 1980.

Keown, Michelle. *Postcolonial Pacific Writing: Representations of the Body***.** London; New York: Routledge, 2005.

Kesteloot, Lylian Lagneau. *Black Writers in French*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1974.

Kimathi, G., *Your marriage and family*.Wetenskaplike bydraes of the PU for CHE, Series F2 no. 58, Potchefstroom, IRS, 1994.

King, Adele. *The Writings of Camara Laye*. London: Heinemann, 1980.

Korhonen, Kuisma (ed). *Tropes for the Past: Hayden White and the History/Literature Debate*. New York: Editions Rodopi B.V,2006.

Kourouma, Ahmadou. *Les soleils des indépendances*. Paris: Seuil, 1970.

_____ *Monnè, outrages et défis*. Paris: Seuil, 1990.

_____ *En attendant le vote des bêtes sauvages*. Paris: Seuil, 1998.

_____ *Quand on refuse on dit non.* Paris, Seuil, 2004.

Kunene, Mazisi. *Emperor Shaka the Great*. London: Heinemann, 1979.

Laband, John (ed). *Daily Lives of Civilians in Wartime Africa from Slavery Days to Rwandan Genocide*. Westport, CT, USA and London: Greenwood Press, 2007; Pietermaritzburg, South Africa: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2007.

Larnaudie, Suzanne. *Paul Vale'ry et la Grèce*. Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1992.

Larson, Charles, "Heroic Ethnocentrism. The Idea of Universality in Literature", The American Scholar 42,3 (1973). *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, Helen Tiffin [eds.] (Routledge: London and New York (1995):62-65

Leal, Luis. "Magic Realism in Spanish American Literature", In: L. P. Zamora and W. B. Faris (eds) *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community* Duke University Press, London (1995).

Lee, David. *Competing discourses: Perspective and ideology in language*. London: Longman, 1992.

Levi, Primo, *The drowned and the saved,* New York: Vintage International, 1989

Levin, Harry. "On the Dissemination of Realism," in *Ground for Companion.* Cambridge, Mass., 1972.

Losambe, Lokangaka. *An introduction to the African prose narrative*. Trento, NJ: Africa World Press, 2004.

Mabanckou, Alain. *Les petits-fils nègres de Vercingétorix*. Paris: Le Serpent à plumes, 2002.

_____ *Les petits-fils nègres de Vercingétorix*. Paris: Le Serpent à plumes, 2002.

Machel, Graça. *The impact of war on children : a review of progress since the 1996 United Nations report on the impact of armed conflict on children.* London: C. Hurst, 2001.

Malonga, Jean. *Coeur d'Aryenne*. Paris: Présence Africaine, 1954.

Mamdani, Mahmood. *When Victims Become Killers: colonialism, Nativism, and the Genocide in Rwanda*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001.

_____ *Citizen and Subject.* Princeton: University of Princeton Press, 1996.

Maran, René. *Batouala*: *véritable roman nègre*. Paris: Albin Michel, 1921

Mazrui, Ali Al Amin. "The Re-invention of Africa: Edward Said, V. Y. Mudimbe, and Beyond." *Research in African Literatures* 36, 3 (2005):68-82.

_____ "Soldiers as Traditionalizers: Military Rule and the Re- Africanization of Africa." *Journal of Asian and African Studies* (Leiden), 12, 1-4 (1977): 236-258.

Mbembe, Achille. "Provisional Notes on the Post colony." *Africa*, 62, 1 (1992) 3-37.

_____ *On The Post colony*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001.

_____ "Necropolitics". *Public Culture*, 15, 1 (2003):11-40
(Trans by Libby Meintjes)

McElroy, Bernard. *Fiction of the modern grotesque*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989.

McIntyre Angela (ed.) *Invisible Stakeholders: Children and War in Africa*. Institute for Security Studies, Pretoria, 2005**.**

Michelman, Fredric, "The West African Novel Since 1911." *Yale French Studies* 51

(1976): 29-44.

McKerracher, G. ed. 2005. "Mad Dog professor hits town", *Otago Bulletin: Fortnightly Newsletter for University Staff*, Marketing and Communications, University of Otago, Issue 16, 12, 2005.

McNeil, David. *The grotesque depiction of war and the military in eighteenth-century English fiction.* Newark*:* University of Delaware Press*;* London*;* Cranbury, NJ *:* Associated University Presses, c1990.

McRobbie, A. (2004) '*Notes on Post feminism and Popular Culture*. Bridget Jones and the Methuen, 1986.

Miller, Christopher. *Nationalists and Nomads: Essays on Francophone African Literature and Culture*. Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1998.

Minga, Katunga Joseph. *Anticlerical literature through Tutuola's* "The Palme-wine Drinkard": *A cultural Problem*. Mémoire de licence en Pédagogie Appliquée. Université du Zaïre / ISP Kananga, 1996.

_____ *Ideology in the French translation of Ngugi wa Thiong'o's children's books.* Thesis (MA**).** University of the Witwatersrand, 2005.

Mofolo, Thomas. *Chaka: an historical romance.* London: Oxford University Press for the International Institute of African Languages and Cultures, 1931.

Monénembo, Tierno. *Les crapauds-brousse*. Paris: Seuil, 1979.

_____ *Les écailles du ciel*. Paris: Seuil, 1986.

_____ *Cinéma*, Paris : Editions du Seuil, 1997.

_____ *L'aîné des orphelins.* Paris: Seuil, 2000.

Mongia, Padmini**.** *Contemporary postcolonial theory*: *a reader***.** London: Arnold, 1996.

Moudileno, Lydie. **"**Magical Realism: "Arme miraculeuse" for the African Novel?" *Research in African Literatures* - 37, 1, (2006):28-41

Mudimbe, Vumbi Yoka. *The Invention of Africa***.** London: James Currey, 1988.

_____ *Shaba Deux*. Présence Africaine, 1989.

_____ *Parables And Fables: Exegesis, Textuality, And Politics In Central Africa.* Madison: University Of Wisconsin Press, 1991.

_____ *History Making In Africa*. USA: Wesleyan University, 1993.

_____ *The Idea Of Africa*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994.

Muponde, Robert '"Child of the Rose": Children as Agents of History in African Fiction'" *Journal of African Children's and Youth Literature*, 15, 16 (2004):106-118.

_____ *Childhood, history and resistance: a critical study of the images of children and childhood in Zimbabwean literature in English***.** Thesis (PhD). University of the Witwatersrand, 2005.

_____ 'Opinion, Dialogue, Review. Unhappy Family, Unhappy Children and the End of Childhood in Dambudzo Marechera's "The House of Hunger."' *Childhood*, 13, 4, (2006):519-532.

Muriungi, Colomba Kaburi. *Emerging Trends In Kenyan Children's Fiction: A Study Of Sasa Sema's Lion Books*. Thesis (PhD). University of the Witwatersrand, 2005.

Musila, Grace Ahingula. *Kenyan and British social imaginaries on Julie Ward's death in Kenya*/ Grace Ahingula Musila**.** Thesis (PhD). University of the Witwatersrand, 2009.

Mutisya, Masila. "Demythologization and Demystification of African Initiation Rites: A Positive & Meaningful Educational Aspect Heading for Extinction." *Journal of Black Studies (*1996): 94-103.

Nancy A. Walker. *Feminist Alternatives: Irony and Fantasy in the Contemporary Novel by Women*, Jackson, Miss.: University Press of Mississippi, 1990.

Nazi, Boni. *Crépuscule des temps anciens*. Paris : Présence Africaine, 1962.

Ndiaye, Christiane. "Kourouma, the myth: the rhetoric of the commonplace in Kourouma criticism." *Research in African Literatures*, 38, 2 (2007):95-108.

Nettleton, S., & Watson, J. Eds. *The Body in Everyday Life*. London: Routledge, 1998.

Ngalasso, Mwatha Musanji. "De Les soleils des indépendances à En attendant le vote des bêtes

sauvages: quelles évolutions de la langue chez Ahmadou Kourouma? ” *Littératures francophones: langues et style*. Paris: L'Harmattan, (2001):13-47.

Ngate, JonathanFrancophone *African Fiction: Reading a Literary Tradition*. Canada: Africa World Press, 1988.

Ngugi wa Thiong'o: *Decolonizing the Mind: The politics of language in African literature*. Heinemann, 1986.

_____ *Njamba Nene and the Flying Bus*. Nairobi, Heinemann, 1986.

_____ *Njamba Nene's Pistol*. Nairobi, Heineman, 1986.

Niane, Djibril Tamsir. *Soundjata ou l'épopée Mandingue*. Présence africaine, Paris, 1960.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Beyond Good and Evil*. 1886. Trans. Walter Kaufmann. New York: Vintage, 1989.

Nkashama, Pius Ngandu La *Délivrance d'Ilunga*. Paris: P-J. Oswald, 1977 (théâtre).

_____*Le fils de la tribu.* Paris: Neas, 1983

_____ *La malédiction*. Paris: Silex, 1983.

_____ *Bonjour Monsieur le Ministre*. Silex-L'harmattan, Paris, 1983 (théâtre).

_____ *Le pacte de sang.* Paris: L'Harmattan, 1984.

_____ *Littératures Africaines De 1930 À Nos Jours*, Editions Silex, 1984.

_____ *La Mort faite homme*. Paris: L'Harmattan, 1986.

_____ *Les Étoiles écrasées.* Paris: Publisud, 1988.

_____ *Des mangroves en terre haute*. Paris: L'Harmattan, 1991.

_____ *L'empire des ombres vivantes*. Lansman, Carnières–Morlanwelz, 1991 (théâtre).

_____ *Les Enfants du Lac Tana*. Hurtubise, La Salle-Québec, 1991.

_____ *Un jour de grand soleil sur les montagnes de l'Ethiopie*. Paris: L'Harmattan, 1991.

_____ *May Britt de Santa Cruz*. Paris: L'Harmattan, 1993 (théâtre).

_____ *Le doyen marri*. Paris: L'Harmattan, 1994.

_____ *Yakouta*. Paris: L'Harmattan, 1994.

_____"The Golden Years of the Novel" In: *European-language Writing In Sub-Saharan Africa*. Budapest: Akademiai Kiado, Nkashama, N.P., (1986); 512-539.

_____*Ruptures et écritures de violence*. Paris: L'Harmattan, 1997.

_____ « Les "enfants-soldats" et les guerres coloniales. A travers le premier roman africain» dans *Etudes littéraires,* 31,1, (2003):29-40.

Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1957
O'Neil, John. *Five Bodies: The Human Shape of Modern Society*. Ithaca, NY, and London: Cornell University Press, 1985.

Nuttall Sarah. "Subjectivities of Whiteness."*African Studies Review,* September, 24, 2, (2001): 115-140.

_____"Biographies: Writing the Body in Arthur Nortje", in McLuckie C. & Tyner R. (eds), *Arthur Nortje: Poet and South African*, UNISA Press, Pretoria, 2004.

_____"Girl Bodies" *Social Text* -78. 22,1 (2004):17-33.

Obiang, Ludovic. "Sans père mais non sans espoir: figure de l'orphelin dans les écritures de guerre," In : *Notre Librairie* 148 (2002): 31-35.

Obinaju, Joseph "Images and Symbols in Tchicaya U Tam'si's poetry". In: *Themes in African Literature in French: A Collection of Essays*. Ibadan, Nigeria: Spectrum Books, 2000.

Ocaya-Lakidi, Dent (1977). "Manhood, Warriorhood and Sex in Eastern Africa: Perspectives From the 19th and 20th Centuries."*Journal of Asian and African Studies*, 12(1977):1-4.

Ogike, Uche A. "Children in Francophone West African Novels: The Power of Childhood". In Ikonne, C., Oko, E. & Onwudinjo, P. eds., *Children and Literature in Africa*. Ibadan: Heinemann, 1992.

Ogude, James. Ngugi's Concept of History and Character Portrayal in his Post *Colonial Novels.* PhD Thesis. University of the Witwatersrand, 1996.

Ojo, Sam Ade, and Olusola Oke. *Themes in African Literature in French: A Collection of Essays*. Ibadan, Nigeria: Spectrum Books, 2000.

_____*Introduction to Francophone African Literature: A Collection of Essays.* Ibadan: Sprectrum Books, 2000.

Orchardson, Ian Q. *The Kipsigis.* The Eagle Press, Nairobi, Kenya, 1961.

Ouologuem, Yambo*. Le devoir de violence*. Paris: Seuil, 1968.

Ousby, Ian, ed. *The Cambridge Guide to Literature in English*. Rev. ed. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1993. 52.

Oyono, Ferdinand. *Une vie de boy*. Paris : Julliard, 1956

_____ *Le vieux nègre et la médaille*. Paris: Julliard, 1956

_____ *Chemin d'Europe*. Paris: Julliard, 1960.

Palmer, Eustace. *Growth Of the African Novel*. London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1979.

Pepetela. *Ngunga's Adventures: A story of Angola.* English trans by Chris Searle, Harare: Zimbabwe, 1988.

Perraudin, Pascale. "From a Large Morsel of Meat to Passwords –in-Flesh': Resistance through Representations of the Tortured Body in Labou Tansi's *La Vie et Demie*" *Research in African Literature,* 36, 2. (2005):72-84.

Priebe, Richard."Literature, Community, and Violence: Reading African Literature in The West, Post-9/11." *Research in African Literatures,* 36.2 (2005): 46–58.

_____ "Transcultural Identity in African Narratives of Childhood " In: *African Literature Today* 25 (2006): 41-52.

Quay, Herbert.C**.** *Children's behavior disorders: an enduring problem in psychology*. Princeton, N.J.: D.Van Nostrand, 1968.

Quayson, Ato. *Postcolonialism: Theory, Practice or Process*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2000.

Randall, Catharine. *Building Codes: The Aesthetics of Calvinism in Early Modern Europe*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999.

Riegel, Léon. *Guerre et littérature*. Paris: Klincksieck, 1978.

Riesz, János. "The *Tirailleur Sénégalais* who did not Want to be a *Grand Enfant*: Bakary Diallo's *Force-Bonté* Re-considered." *Research in African Literature,* 27,4 (1996):157–79.

Ruth Amossy. "Du témoignage au récit symbolique. Le récit de guerre et son dispositif énonciatif" , *Ecrire la guerre.* Etudes réunies par Catherine Milkovitch-Rioux (Clermont-Ferrand: Presses universitaires Blaise Pascal), (2000):87-101.

Sadji, Abdoulaye. *Maïmouna, la petite fille noire***.** Paris: Présence Africaine, 1953.

Said, Edward. *Orientalism.* New York: Pantheon, 1978.

Saro-Wiwa, Ken. *Sozaboy: a novel in rotten English*, London: Longman Group, 1994.

Sassine, Williams. *Wirriyamu*, Paris: Présence Africaine, 1976

_____ *Le Jeune homme de sable*. Paris: Présence Africaine, 1979.

_____*Le zéhéros n'est pas n'importe qui*. Paris : Présence Africaine, 1985.

_____ Sassine, Williams. *Mémoire d'une peau*. Paris: Présence Africaine, 1998.

Scarry, Elaine. *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1985.

Schill, Janne, *Deconstructing perspectives: a practical guide to the area of study*. Sydney: Sapientia, 2003.

Schipper, Mineke "Toward a Definition of Realism in the African Context." *New Literary History* 16. 3 (1985):559-75.

Sembène, Ousmane. *O pays, mon beau peuple!* Paris: Le Livre contemporain, 1957.

_____ *Les Bouts de bois de Dieu.* Paris: Presses Pocket, 1960.

Senghor, Léopold Sédar. "Chaka, poème dramatique à plusieurs voix" In *Ethiopiques*. Paris, Seuil, 1958. English translation in *Selected poems* by John Reed and Clive Wake, London, Oxford University Press, (1964):67-77

Sewanou Dabla, Jean-Jacques. *Nouvelles écritures africaines. Romanciers de la seconde génération*. Paris, L'Harmattan, 1986.

Shands, Kerstin W(ed.). *Neither East Nor West: Postcolonial Essays on Literature, Culture and Religion*. Stockholm: Södertörns Academic Studies 36/English Studies 3, 2008.

Sherry, Vicent. *The Cambridge Companion To The Literature Of The First World War*. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

Shihab Nye, Naomi. *19 Varieties of gazelle: Poems of the Middle East*. New York: Green willow Books, 2002.

Shorter, Aylward. "Nyungu-ya-Mawe and the Empire of the Ruga-Rugas." *Journal of African History*, 9, 2 (1968): 235–259.

Silver, Anna Krugovoy. *Victorian Literature and the Anorexic Body*. Cambridge University Press. Place of Publication: Cambridge, England, 2002.

Singer, Peter Warren. *Children at War*. Books, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006.

Sironi, Françoise. *Bourreaux et victimes. Psychologie de la torture*. Paris: Éditions Odile Jacob, 1999.

Slade, Joseph W. *Pornography and Sexual Representation: A Reference Guide.* 3 vols. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2001.

Smaldone, Joseph. *Warfare in the Sokoto Caliphate: Historical and Sociological Perspectives*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977.

Smith, Eric D. "I Have Been a Perfect Pig": A Semiosis of Swine in "Circe" *Joyce Studies Annual* 13, (2002):129-146.

Sony, Labou Tansi*, La Vie et demie,* Paris: Seuil, 1979

_____ *L'anté-peuple***. [**Paris] : Éditions du seuil, 1983.

Sora-Wiwa, Ken. *Sozaboy*. Port Harcourt, Nigeria: Saros International, 1985.

Sow, Alioun**e.** "Forbidden Bodies Relocation and Empowerment in Williams Sassine's novels" In: *Body, Sexuality and Gender,* edited by Veit-Wild, Flora and Naguschewski, Dirk. Amsterdam & New York: Rodopi. 2005.

Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "Can the subaltern speak? " In: Nelson, Cary and Grossberg, Lawrence (eds). *Marxism and the interpretation of culture*. University of Illinois Press (1988):271–313.

_____ *Post-Colonial Critic*. New York: Routledge, 1990.

Spleth, Janice. "Narrating ethnic conflict in Zairian literature."*Research in African Literatures*. 29,1 (1998):103-123.

Stallybrass, P. & White, A. *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*. London: Methuen,. 1986.

Stephen, Arnold H (ed). *Critical Perspectives on Mongo Beti*. Boulder, Colo: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., 1998

Tadjo, Véronique. *L'ombre d'Imana*. *Voyages jusqu'au bout du Rwanda*. Paris: Actes Sud, 2000.

_____ *Reine Pokou*, Actes Sud, 2005.

_____"albinism could also be understood as a symbol of racial difference" (personal communication, November 3, 2008).

Tal, Kali. "The Mind at War: Images of Women in Vietnam Novels by Combat Veterans."*Contemporary Literature*, 31, l (1990):76-96.

Tchak, Sami**.** *Place des Fêtes*. Paris, Gallimard, 2001

Tcheuyap, Alexie. "Pius Ngandu Nkashama: Sixty Years Of Existence And Dissidence". *The Ponal Magazine*, 1, 2, (2007):1-3.

_____"African cinema and representations of (homo) sexuality". *Matatu Journal for African Culture and Society*, 29, 30, (2005):143-154.

_____ "Présentation- Écrire rouge. De la guerre perpetuelle en Afrique francophone." *Études littéraires,* 31,1, (2003):1- 8.

_____ "Le littéraire et le guerrier : typologie de l'écriture sanguine en Afrique." *Études littéraires*, 35, 1, (2003):13-28.

Thomas, Nigel. *From Folklore to Fiction: A Study of Folk Heroes and Rituals in the Black American Novel*. Westport, Ct.: Greenwood Press, 1988.

Thompson, John. "Studies in the Theory of Ideology." *Polity Press,* 1984.

Todorov, Tzvetan. *Introduction à la littérature fantastique.* Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1970.

Tollerson, Marie. *Mythology and Cosmology in the Narratives of Bernard Dadie and Birago Diop*, 1984.

Trenaman, Joseph. *Out of Step***:** *A Study of Young Delinquent Soldiers in War Time: Their Offences*. London, Methuen. 1952.

Veit-Wild, Flora. *Writing Madness: Borderlines of the Body in African Literature*. Oxford: James Currey; Harare, Zimbabwe: Weaver Press; Johannesburg, South Africa: Jacana Media; Hollywood, CA: African Academic Press, a Tsehai Publishers imprint, 2006.

Wa Nyatetu-Waigwa, Wangari. *The Liminal Novel: Studies in the Francophone African Novel as Bildungsroman*. New York: Peter Lang, 1996.

Wall, Barbara. *The Narrator's Voice: The Dilemma of Children's Fiction*. New York: St Martin's Press, 1991.

Walsh, John. "Coming of Age with an AK-47: Ahmadou Kourouma's *Allah n'est pas obligé*." *Research in African Literatures 39.1* (2008):185-197.

Walter, E. V., 1969. *Terror and Resistance: A study of political violence, with case studies of some primitive African communities*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Warner, Marina (ed). *Cinema and the realms of enchantment: lectures, seminars, and essays***.**
London: British Film Institute, 1993.

White, Hayden. *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism*. Baltimore and London, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978.

_____ White, Hayden. The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical *Representation.* Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1987.

Zins, H.S. "Joseph Conrad and British critics of colonialism." *Pula: Botswana Journal* of *African Studies,* Vo1.12, Nos.1 & 2 (1998):58-68.

b) Internet resources

Aapengnuo, C. M."Misinterpreting Ethnic Conflicts in Africa", Africa Security Brief no. 4, *Africa Center for Strategic Studies*, United States Department of Defense (2010):13-17) **(**http://africacenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/04/AfricaBrief-4.pdf)

Abomo-Maurin, Marie-Rose. *Senghor et Tchikaya La réécriture de Chaka, une épopée* bantoue: *Ethiopiques* n°69. 'Hommage à L. S. Senghor', 2ème semestre 2002. Retrieved from http://ethiopiques.refer.sn/spip.php?article20

Anon. "Magic Realism: A Background Reading/Primer for Teachers of Fourth – Eighth Grade Students" PDFeBook. Retrieved from http://www.seattleschools. org/schools/ hamilton/iac/magic/magic_primer.pdf

Anon. "Creative writing in the aftermath of the genocide in Rwanda: The project "Rwanda – Écrire par devoir de mémoire": A Paper presented at the Third international and interdisciplinary Trauma Research Net Conference 2006 "Trauma – Stigma and Distinction: Social Ambivalences in the Face of Extreme Suffering", St. Moritz, Switzerland, 14-17 September 2006 Retrieved from http://www. univie.ac.at/afrika/ mitarbeiterinnen/kopf04.pdf

Aweda, Sam. *The Abuse & Insult On The Black Race, Who Is To Blame? An Inward, Honest Examination,* 2009. Retrieved from: http://www.nigeriavillagesquare.com/ articles/sam-aweda/the-abuse-a-insult-on-the-black-race-who-is-to-blame-an-inward-honest-examination-part-3.html

Borgomano, Madeleine "Being a child in Africa" in *Mots Pluriels*, No 22. September 2002 Retrieved from http://www.arts.uwa.edu.au/MotsPluriels/MP2202edito2.html
Caitucoli, Claude. "L'écrivain africain francophone, agent glottopolitique: l'exemple d'Ahmadou Kourouma." Glottopo 3 (3 janv. 2004). Retrieved from http:// www.univ-rouen.fr/ dyalang/glottopol.

Chitour, Marie-Françoise. "L'enfant colonial ... dans le roman post-colonial." *Mots pluriels* 22 (2002). Web. 20 Dec. 2007. Retrieved from http://motspluriels.arts. uwa.edu.au/MP2202mfc.html

Christian L. Labadie. "Nkosi Johnson loses fight to HIV/AIDS." Posted by *Sap* on Fri, 1 Jun 2001. Retrieved from from http://www.afronets.org/archive/200106/msg00003.php

Complete Review of Ahmadou Kourouma's Allah is not obliged . Retrieved from http://www.complete-review.com/reviews/congo/dongala2.htm

Corcoran, Patrick. "'Child' soldiers in Ken Saro-Wiwa's "Sozaboy" and Ahmadou Kourouma's "Allah n'est pas oblige." *Mots Pluriels*, No. 22. (2002) Retrieved from http://www.arts.uwa.edu.au/MotsPluriels/MP2202pc.html d'Ahmadou Kourouma." Glottopo 3 (3 janv. 2004) Retrieved from http://www.univ-rouen.fr/ dyalang/glottopol.

Dormion, Marine. Article / *Charly en guerre*. Retrieved from http://jeunesse.lille3. free.fr/article.php3?id_article=385.

Engwete, Alex. *Kuluna and Kuluneurs in Kinshasa: A low-intensity urban insurgency?* http://alexengwete.blogspot.com/2010/02/kuluna-and-kuluneurs-in-kinshasa-low.html

Flannigan, Arthur. "The Eye of the Witch": Non-Verbal Communication and the Exercise of Power in *Une Vie de Boy*" *The French Review*, 56, No. 1 (Oct., 1982): 51-63 Published by: American Association of Teachers of French. Stable URL: Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org/stable/392282

Fulgence Swai. *The child soldier to a small politician: The use of the powerful tool of resilience* (2001). Retrieved from http://www.courses.umass.edu/educ870/PostConflict/papers/ Child_Soldiers.htm

Gadjigo, S. and Miller, C., Teaching Francophone African Literature in the American Academy. *Yale French Studies*. Yale University Press, 103, (2003): 33-40. Available from: http://www.jstor.org/stable/3182532pdf. [Accessed 10 October 2008]

Garnier Xavier. "Les formes « dures » du récit: enjeux d'un combat ». *Notre Librairie. Revue des littératures du Sud.* N° 1 4 8, (2002) : 54-59. Penser la violence. (juillet - septembre 2002):2-7 Retrieved from http://www.culturesfrance.com/librairie/derniers/pdf/nl148_3.pdf).

Georges-Louis Hingot. "Le Blanc en ProcèsAuthor" African Arts, Vol. 2, No. 4 (Summer, 1969), pp. 52-56. Published by: UCLA James S. Coleman African Studies Center. Retrieved from table URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/3334380. Available at .http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp

Guardian News & Media, 2008 Retrieved from http://www.buzzle.com/articles/214034.Html

Gurtueva, Tamara. "Man in the ontological space of the newest time." *Consciousness, Literature and the Arts* 5,3 (2004). Retrieved from http://blackboard.lincoln.ac.uk/bbcswebdav/users/dmeyerdinkgrafe/archive/gurtueva.html

Jack Wintz, *A Retreat With Pope John Paul II: Be Not Afraid* (2002) Retrieved from http://www.americancatholic.org/messenger/Jul2002/Feature3.asp

Kamalakkannan, M. "Confluence of Magic, Realism, and Fantasy: A Study of Kafka's The Metamorphosis". *The Indian Review of World Literature in English*, 2, II, (2006). Retrieved from http://worldlitonline.net/july-06/confluence.pdf

Keenan, Thomas. *Fables of Responsibility* in *Global Media*. Retrieved from http://www.watsonblogs.org/globalmedia/literature_reviews/

Kyoor, Pascal Kyiiripuo. "History, Political Discourse, and Narrative Strategies in the African Novel: *Allah n'est pas obligé" Sea Breeze, a quarterly electronic Journal of Contemporary Liberian Writings* (2004) Retrieved from http://archives-one.liberiaseabreeze.com/paschal-kyoore.html [accessed on 10 May, 2009]
Magun, Artemy. "Tragedy as the Self-Critique of Spectacle" *Newspapers* of 07- 3:

Tragedy or farce? Auto-critique of a Leaflet distributed by Stan Evans at the London Learning Play organised by Chto Delat (September 2010) Retrieved from http:// www. chtodelat. org/ index. php?option=com_content&view=category&layout=blog&id=233 &Itemid=425&lang=en

Malón, Agustín. The "Participating Victim" in the Study of Erotic Experiences between Children and Adults: A Historical Analysis. *Archives of Sexual Behavior (*2009):1-30 Retrieved from http://www.unizar.es/riesgo/archivos/1270052714PV-articulo.pdf [accessed on 27 June, 2011).

Marx, Karl. *18th Brumaire of Louis Bonapatre*.1852. Retrieved from http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1852/18th-brumaire/ch01.htm

McClelland in *Shambhala Sun*, a Buddhist magazine, 2008. Retrieved from http://www.shambhalasun.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=3599&Itemid=0

McNee, Lisa. "Monénembo's L'Aîné des orphelins and the Rwandan Genocide" *Comparative Literature and Culture* 6.2 (2004): Retrieved from http://docs.lib. purdue.edu/clcweb/vol6/iss2/2

Monénembo. » *Mots pluriels* 22 (2002). Web. 12 Sept. 2008. Retrieved from Paravy, Florence. « Enfance et contestation. Le parcours romanesque de Tierno *Mots pluriels* 22 (2002). Web. 20 Dec. 2007. Retrieved from http://motspluriels.arts.uwa.edu.au/MP2202mfc.html

Moore, Lindsay. "Magical Realism." *Magical Realism.* Emory, 1998. Web. Retrieved from http://www.mrhoyesibwebsite.com/Prose%20Texts/Chronicle/Critical%20Articles/Magical%20Realism%20-%20Lindsay%20Moore.htm

Murray Andrew. With Christ in the School of Prayer. Christian Classics Ethereal Library (2001) URL**:** http://www.ccel.org/ccel/murray/prayer.html

Orthofer, M.A. 2009. *Complete Review*. Available at: http://www.complete-review.com/reviews/congo/dongala2.htm <Accessed: 3 January, 2010>

Ousmane Sembène & Thierno Faty Sow. *Camp de Thiaroye* (1987) on Region 1 DVD through New Yorker Films. Synopsis posted by Acquarello on 26 November 2008 and retrieved from http://mubi.com/notebook/posts/now-on-dvd-camp-de-thiaroye-ousmane-sembene-and-thierno-faty-sow-1987

Paravy, Florence. "Enfance et contestation : le parcours romanesque de Tierno Monenembo" , no 22. septembre 2002. MotsPluriels/Retrieved from http://www.arts.uwa.edu.au/MotsPluriels/MP2202fp.html

Rachid Bouchareb. **"**The Colonial Friend" (L'ami y'a bon), (Algeria, 2004). Filed under New York African Film Festival. Synopsis posted by Acquarello on May 01, 2006 and retrieved from http://www.filmref.com/journal/archives/2006/05/the_colonial_friend_2004.html

"Rebelion." *Webster's Revised Unabridged Dictionary,* published 1913 by the C. & G. Merriam Co. Last edit in 1998. Retrieved May 8, 2010, fromhttp://www.websters-online-dictionary.org/definitions/Rebellion?cx=partner-pub-0939450753529744%3Av0qd01-tdlq&cof=FORID%3A9&ie=UTF-8&q=Rebellion&sa=Search#906

"Sadism." *Longman dictionary of contemporary English,* published in 1978. London: Longman. Retrieved May 1, 2010, from http://www.ldoceonline.com/dictionary/sadism

Swai, Fulgence. *Child soldier to small politician: the use of the powerful tool of resilience.* Learning in Post-Conflict- Spring, 2001. Retrieved from http://www.courses.umass.edu/educ870/PostConflict/papers/Child_Soldiers.htm

Taylor and Francis. Ngandu Nkashama, Pius" in *Encyclopedia of African Literature*, 2003 Retrieved from http://www.bookrags.com/tandf/ngandu-nkashama-pius-tf/
The project "Rwanda – Ecrire par devoir de mémoire". Retrieved from http://www.univie.ac.at/afrika/mitarbeiterinnen/kopf_04.pdf

Timm, T.H. John. "A Study of the Grotesque in Cesário Verde's *Sentimento dum ocidental*" *Luso-Brazilian Review,* 9, No. 2 (winter, 1972): 78-86 URL: Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org/stable/3512749
White, T. 1999. "Operation Jonathan" Available at: http://www.specwarnet.net/miscinfo/entebbe.htm <Accessed: 12 April, 2009>

Zamora, Lois Parkinson; Faris, Wendy B. *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*. Duke University Press Books, 1995. Retrieved from http://www.suite101.com/content/magic-realism-a-historical-and-cultural-perspective-a234270#ixzz1CikzoYGB
www.seattleschools.org/schools/hamilton/iac/magic/magic_primer.pdf)

Zao (Casmir Zoba), *Ancien-combattanT (*1984) taken from http://www.justsomelyrics.com/1274169/Zao-Ancien-combattant-Lyrics.

Zhang Kai-Ying, Thérèse. *Enfants-soldats d'Afrique Imaginaires de guerre, images du continent et écriture de la dénonciation.* Retrieved from http://www. Uclouvain.be/sites/interferences/2009

c) Miscellaneous

Blood Diamond, a drama film co-produced and directed by Edward Zwick and starring Leonardo DiCaprio, Jennifer Connelly and Djimon Hounsou., 2006 (movie).

Boys of Mass Destruction By Katie Vandever, United Nations., 2008 (movie).
Hayford, Jack W., Litt.D. (Gen. Ed), *Spirit Filled Life Bible, New King James Version*, Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville 1991 (Bible).

Staff of the University of Otago de Carle. Interview with Dongala, Emannuel on12 Aug 2005. Retrieved from the Fortnightly News letter for the university Staff- *News Briefs*