

Child Soldiers in Africa: A Singular Phenomenon?
On the necessity of a historical perspective
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The much publicized figure of the child soldier in Africa is placed in context in this historiographical survey: the author ties it to the general subject of children in war – which has affected America and Europe at different times – and reveals the necessity of developing a history of child status in Africa.

In the case of the African conflicts, the issue of children in war was initially the prerogative of humanitarian organizations. Moreover, interest in this issue is relatively recent. In the 1990s, sub-Saharan Africa was marked by a long series of civil conflicts (in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Burundi, Rwanda, Congo-Brazzaville, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Sudan, Ivory Coast, *etc.*). In international opinion, the heavy use of child soldiers constitutes one of the principal characteristics of these post-Cold War African crises. Indeed, the image of the African child bearing a Kalashnikov bigger than himself has come to symbolize a typically African brand of violence, to Western eyes a barbaric violence beyond the bounds of the acceptable and the rational.

NGOs such as Human Rights Watch, Save the Children, or the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers have led active campaigns against the use of child soldiers. Though these organizations have drawn attention to the participation of children in conflicts from Latin America (Colombia) to the Near East (Palestine) and even Asia (Burma), Africa is often presented as the continent hardest hit by this “unacceptable practice”. Seven out of nine reports put out by Human Rights Watch on the use of child soldiers in the last ten years concern sub-Saharan African countries.

These humanitarian campaigns have encouraged and supported the international community’s adoption of conventions restricting the recruitment of minors in wartime and more generally (re-) affirming the rights associated with childhood. If special protection has been granted to children in wartime since the Geneva Convention of 1949, the child soldier did not make its way into international humanitarian discourse until 1977, with the introduction of additional protocols. It was not until 1989 that the United Nations General Assembly finally adopted the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which today is one of the documents most widely ratified by member states. This body of international conventions underwent its first serious test during the conflicts that marked the African continent in the 1990s. It served as a legal foundation for the conviction of several parties and armed movements who resorted to the use of minors. The most recent such group is the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA), whose leaders, after nineteen years of fighting in Uganda, were accused by the International Criminal Court (ICC) of war crimes, notably the kidnapping and recruitment of thousands of child soldiers. This indictment could create a precedent and serve the Ugandan army as legal backing toward capture of the rebel leaders, currently refugees in Southern Sudan. International law on children in war is one of the tools that has made the reconstruction of international relations after the Cold War

possible.

Humanitarian and juridical discourses have also influenced the production of knowledge about children in war. They have essentially skewed it toward imperatives of denouncing those behind the violence and the victimisation of children. These discourses are themselves shaped by the prescriptive and normative approaches underlying the actions of humanitarian organisations in the field: how to reintegrate children into the social and economic fabric as well as an educational structure; how to help care for their psychological disorders; how to restore childhood to those deprived of it.

These humanitarian intentions toward children in war must however be placed back in the context of a broader discursive field. A great part of the discourse on the African conflicts of the last few decades put forth by actors on the international scene has tended to treat these crises as criminal undertakings whose primary, if not only, motivations were predation and the accumulation of riches. In this context, denouncing the use of child soldiers as a barbaric and criminal practice can be seen as part of a trend toward the depoliticisation and criminalisation of the nature of the African conflicts. By pointing out this connection, I do not seek to discredit the findings of “experts” with ties to the humanitarian world. It seems useless and even a bit dishonest to denounce, as others have done, the simplicity or caricatural character of the studies carried out by these humanitarian organizations. It appears that on the one hand they are influenced to a great extent by short or medium-term imperatives to action and that on the other, they fit into a programme of criminalising African violence.

The object of this article is above all historiographical. It does not develop any specific case for study, nor does it unveil any new approach to the issue of child soldiers. It intends more modestly to show the extent to which a knowledge of history and, more generally, of the social sciences, can nurture, supplement, and revise humanitarian discourse on the issue of child soldiers. In doing so, it also sheds light on darker corners or unconsidered areas of contemporary historical knowledge and calls for new research on the problems of children in Africa. This historian, seeking to set back in context the use of child soldiers as part of a longer development and to integrate it into a more accurate and precise history of childhood, seems, in this case at least, to have something to say. Beyond the question of child soldiers, this contribution to the dialogue calls on historians to look into a series of issues which have been but superficially addressed and which today merit all our attention.

Cross-examining the histories of Africa and the West permits us first to deconstruct the discourse that makes the child soldier a foreign category, exclusively the product of contemporary African crises. By considering more deeply the entire span of the continent’s history, we can seek to understand the characteristics of the recourse to children in contemporary conflicts. It is an opportunity to call for a historical enquiry that will re-establish continuities between times of peace and those of war.

The Child Soldier: A Brutality of the Other?

The child soldier has become the symbol of an African continent adrift, a “heart of darkness” decidedly alien to Western modernity. It has become the object of a new “humanitarian crusade” and a Western neo-interventionism with many moralistic similarities to the civilising missions of preceding centuries. The sincerity of humanitarian commitment aside, it must be understood that children constitute a central issue in efforts to legitimise Western interventions in Africa. The international community’s massive military and financial intervention in Sierra Leone, which today has led to the country being made a United Nations protectorate, was founded in part on the necessity of aiding child victims of the conflict.

Does the African continent really have a regrettable monopoly on the use of child soldiers, an intolerable brutality against which Western neo-interventionism justifies itself? Here the historian may introduce into the debate on children in war comparative heuristic perspectives. Humanitarian discourse, anchored in the present, makes the child soldier a symptom of postcolonial African crises. It has difficulty perceiving the unfortunately almost “commonplace” nature of the “instrumentalization of children” in times of war. Child warriors are no more the prerogative of the African continent than they are simply the expression of crises today affecting Southern countries in their transition to modernity.

To corroborate this, it is not even necessary to go back as far as the Children’s Crusade of the 13th century. Sabina Loriga reminds us that in Prussia, the “*Kantonsystem* introduced in 1733 by Frederick Wilhelm the First, the Soldier-King, required all male subjects to undergo military training two or three months per year from the age of 10 onwards” . Historians of Western civilization have also highlighted the fact that in the great conflicts of the 19th and 20th centuries, the child was at once the author and the specific victim of wartime violence. In the course of their respective works, Eleanor Bishop, Emmy Werner and Dennis Keese have often emphasized the role of “soldier boys” in the American Civil War. In France, the findings of Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau on the First World War showed how many children were victims of directed acts of violence quickly passed over in silence to avoid heightening any resulting trauma. In Germany, Guido Knopp wrote a very interesting monograph on the use of children in the Nazi army. From these different works emerges the idea that in times of conflict, children are sometimes at once victims and agents of violence. Historian Tara Zahra has brought to light how, in the context of a more covert conflict, the nationalisms of Czechs and Germans competed for children during the two world wars, ready to tear them from their families in the name of the nation’s right to property. In Africa itself, colonial violence also made the child a target of choice. During pacification campaigns, French officers took care to capture children, preferably the offspring of local leaders, in order to send them to school and convert them to the coloniser’s creed. In French Sudan (now Mali), one of the first schools founded by the colonial administration long went by the name of the “School of Hostages” before being rechristened the “School of the Sons of

Chieftains” after the conquest. During the first years of colonization, while the “pacification campaigns” still raged, compulsory schooling by administrative conscription was frequently seen as kidnapping. Thus, in his memoirs, former teacher and Nigerian politician Boubou Hama tells of how his own mother experienced his forced departure for school as an occasion for bereavement.

Colonial suppression of revolts or protests has sometimes targeted children in a very violent manner. In Namibia, at the beginning of the 20th century, German soldiers received the order to spare no one among the Hereros: German General von Trotha had expressly commanded his troops to execute any Herero child or woman who ventured from the Kalahari Desert in an attempt to return to colonized lands. In 1950s Kenya, a policy in the suppression of the Mau Mau uprising was specifically aimed at Kikuyu children, who were imprisoned in camps where special rituals were to cleanse them of their Mau Mau indoctrination. To ensure a return to a more lasting colonial order, the British authorities agreed on the idea of “preserving” and “cleansing” the younger generation of Kikuyu. The Mau Mau movement had enrolled young children, initiating them from 8 years of age into the rites of their oath and later assigning them diverse tasks (reconnaissance, domestic chores in the camps, and sometimes combat) .

Recruitment or targeting of children in times of war is not therefore uniquely African, but constitutes a widespread phenomenon. The almost sadly commonplace character of the instrumentalization or targeting of children in periods of conflict must nevertheless not keep us from calling attention to and understanding a certain number of characteristics linked to the history of the African continent.

Toward a Long View of the History of Children in Africa

Our detour via the histories of Western societies and colonial periods allows us to see that violence done to children during African conflicts has nothing very unique about it, or at least that it in no way indicates any barbaric atavism exclusive to African societies. Nevertheless, children, whether agents or victims of violence, seem to play a more central role in the conflicts of post Cold War sub-Saharan Africa than in others. If the existence of child soldiers is not a new event, it holds a more significant place in Africa than elsewhere.

This fact is, however, contested by a certain number of authors who justly point out that the phenomenon of child soldiers is not unique to Africa. What changes instead is the discourse surrounding the children. During the American Civil War or the First World War, the participation of child soldiers was promoted and perceived through a very specific discursive register, that of the child hero. The actions of these children were “heroicised” and their eventual deaths seen as sacrifices in the name of a greater good, often the nation’s. Conversely, the participation of child combatants in the African wars is always perceived in a negative manner, through the registers of the victimised child and the stolen childhood. No higher value or greater good can

legitimise resorting to children, whose involvement in war is essentially viewed as the result of violence or manipulation on the part of adults. The work of Paul Richards and Peter Krijn has however shown that African child soldiers possess a political consciousness and their enlistment, even under coercion, sometimes reflects a strategy to ensure their own survival or that of their loved ones. What is more, while European societies have largely obliterated acts of violence done to children from historical memory, such acts are often foregrounded in African conflicts. Their condemnation thus participates in legitimising the interventionist temptations of a readily moralistic West with a short memory. When reintegrated into the long history of the Western gaze on the continent, this kind of discourse contributes to rekindling the image of a barbarous Africa, the dark reflection whose image reassures Western societies in their conviction of representing a more advanced civilisation. Though this kind of critique makes sense, it is not however exclusive of other explanations that take into account the use of child soldiers with reference to certain characteristics of contemporary African history.

The international organisations involved in conflict resolution have also tried to understand the significance of child soldiers in sub-Saharan African conflicts. The widespread distribution of light arms is frequently presented as one of the chief means of recruiting child soldiers: the possibility of easily acquiring firearms as “light” and destructive as the AK-47 explains the recourse to children, suddenly capable of being transformed into killing machines no matter their physical strength. This premise has nevertheless been brought into question by specialists who call attention to the fact that contemporary firearms are not necessarily lighter than those of the 19th century. Another line of reasoning maintains that children do not feel fear due to a lack of awareness, and it is easier to obtain absolute loyalty from them. This theory, whose pertinence is not always obvious, nevertheless fails to explain why child soldiers are turned to more often today than before in Africa.

Obviously, a historical perspective is needed to restore a diachronic dimension in which the use of child soldiers in the conflicts of sub-Saharan Africa takes on another meaning. More specifically, it seems that we cannot understand the phenomenon of child soldiers without re-contextualising it in the larger frame of a middle-to-long historical view of children in African society.

It is first of all necessary to remind ourselves that children are not simply a biological group, but constitute a social group whose history differs depending on whether we are in Europe or Africa. Philippe Ariès maintained that the perception of childhood as a state of innocence and as a condition separate from that of adulthood was a relatively recent one peculiar to Western society. Despite recent challenges, his work has had the merit of suggesting that children were a group whose historicity should be restored. The notion of a legal age, as central to Western societies as to the international agreements prohibiting the use of child soldiers, still struggles to be applied in African societies. This notion probably began making its way into these societies during the colonial period, but there has been a shortage of studies measuring the changes provoked by the juxtaposition of multiple models of

childhood. African societies have developed and often preserve their own models of childhood. The work of such anthropologists as Marian Ferme has made it clear that childhood in sub-Saharan Africa is often considered a moment of ambiguity, a hybrid and unstable state. Similarly, the relationship of children to warfare did not undergo the same developments in the West as in Africa. According to Sabrina Loriga, the question of a legal age for soldiers in the West was only raised in the second half of the 17th century, for two essential reasons: the increased mortality rate among younger soldiers, and officers' difficulties in controlling their younger charges. In the 19th century, "in a few years all over Europe, children would be expelled from the army in favour of a separate premilitary preparatory system [...]. The association between war and the 'manliness' of youths thus evolved slowly over the course of the 19th century, to spread and gain force only in the first decades of the 20th." Beyond Europe, this renewed relationship between children and war in the West was largely responsible for the drafting of international conventions on child status. Nothing, however, leads us to believe that this recent Western phenomenon, which experienced severe violations during the conflicts of the 20th century, affected the African continent.

The difference between the histories of childhood in Africa and in the West cannot simply be expressed in terms of diverse perceptions of the nature of childhood. The economic structures of each also integrate the child in very different ways. Since the end of the 19th century, Western societies have tended to remove children from systems of production to shape them as consumers in their own right. In African societies, children represent a significant part of the workforce that it is important to know how to mobilise. Among other studies, the work of Sara Berry on economic transformations and the notion of transmission in Yoruba societies clearly shows that relations between children and parents have developed, but that the perception of the child as a potential part of the workforce still remains quite strong.

Historians are also interested in the specificities of mobilising children as a workforce in African societies. Some authors stress that the slave trade deprived many societies of their workforces and forced them very early on to resort not only to female labour, but also that of young children to meet the community's needs. The slave trade's terrible toll could therefore explain why African societies have made the child an important resource, a source of labour that could be mobilized in times of peace and war alike. This argument is far from being accepted by all historians studying the slave trade. Aside from the fact that slavery affected different African societies neither in the same way nor to the same degree, some historians have remarked that children were themselves victims of the trade. David Eltis estimates, for example, that between one-quarter and one-third of the slaves exported to the New World were children under fourteen. For Paul Lovejoy, gender more than biological age formed the dividing line between exported slaves and those for local use. He estimates that in the 19th century, the victims of the transatlantic trade were 70% male, with a rising number of children. The development of slavery in Africa itself, whether partnered or

not with the transatlantic trade, made the child a target of choice in the tactics of capture and mobilisation of the workforce.

The work of Rosalind Shaw on memories of slavery in Sierra Leone showed that oral traditions and tales were full of stories of children being kidnapped by animals of the bush. These narratives doubtlessly reflect the fear of having one's child abducted by traders. The impact of the slave trade, and to a greater extent that of pre-colonial slavery, on the child's place in African societies and its possible link to the logic of the instrumentalisation of children in times of peace or war must, however, be studied in a more detailed manner. Distinctions will likely have to be made according to the society and how the trade affected it. We must also ask ourselves whether the abolition of slavery at the moment of colonisation constituted a genuine rupture for child slaves.

According to historians of labour, the abolition of slavery, far from being the simple expression of humanitarian will toward Africa, allowed for the establishment of other forms of mobilisation and exploitation of the African workforce, forms better adapted to the new colonial economies. Beverly Grier emphasizes that during the colonial period in Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), recourse to child labour was a key link in the colonial economy, in part linked to structures of patriarchal society, and also facilitated by colonial legislation. Hamilton Siphon Simelane arrived at similar conclusions in the case of colonial Swaziland. These two studies are unfortunately relatively isolated and only concern specific cases from southern Africa.

Studies on the history of children in pre-colonial and colonial African societies are lacking. Aside from a few works on specific groups and topics, such as people of mixed-race, or the place of children in colonial propaganda, the historian is confronted by a historiographical void. The topic of youth arouses a certain growing interest among Africanist historians, but they even less often include studies specifically on children. This dearth of works permits considerable imprecision and many generalisations on the history of children in war in Africa. Thus, while Oliver Furley, focusing on his study of the Masai, asserts that the phenomenon of child soldiers was unknown in pre-colonial Africa, David Rosen surmises from the example of Mende societies that using child soldiers was a pre-colonial practice linked to the slave trade. In a report carried out for the Institute for Security Studies, Tom W. Bennet produced one of the few studies that interrogate the use of child soldiers from an explicitly historical perspective. His article, mainly based on secondary sources, reassesses the idea that child soldiers represent an ancient "African tradition." Limited by his sources, the author nevertheless struggles to distinguish the categories of young adult, adolescent, and child, which seriously restricts the reach of his work. In all cases, the authors previously cited based their works on anthropological or historical studies that did not specifically treat the issue of children in war. References to history by contemporary experts appear quite approximate due to the same lack of detailed studies. Aside from the issue of child soldiers, there is an urgent need for history on the topic of children in Africa.

Postcolonial dynamics are perhaps a bit better known, especially in the cases of countries in armed conflict. The role played by young combatants and child soldiers in these countries has in fact encouraged sociologists, anthropologists, and political science specialists to question recent history. The works of Abdullah Ibrahim and Patrick Muana on the political mobilisation of the young in Sierra Leone are extremely interesting in this regard. They demonstrate that the recruitment of the young in Sierra Leone during the civil war was in keeping with the consequences of a political culture of violence and the mobilisation of the young by political elites since the 1970s. According to them, the recruitment of child soldiers by politico-military contractors retains similarities with the mobilisation of a child and quasi-submissive workforce in the Sierra Leone diamond mines during peacetime. These works encourage us to tie the issue of child soldiers to a longer history of child labour in colonial and postcolonial African economies.

The omnipresent figure of the child soldier, perceived as an aberration of modern times, prevents us from seeing the continuities in the violence perpetrated on children in times of peace as well as war. Even today the figure of the child miner, exploited in the pit mines of Sierra Leone or the East Congo, does not arouse the same international mobilisation as do child soldiers. However, there are close ties between these two figures of an African childhood.

Finally, we must point out a promising vein of research of gaining ground in political science and anthropology, but which has not really made its way into historical discourse. Researchers like Paul Richards attempt to step outside the discourse of the “victimisation” of child soldiers. While these researchers intend to denounce violence done to children in wartime, they seek as well to show that children are actual agents, capable of deploying their own strategies within the constraints imposed by the dynamics of war. Taking for example the heroes of the film *Turtles Can Fly*, set in a refugee camp in northern Iraq, children appear to be active agents whose margin of manoeuvre proves in the end to be greater than that of older generations. Wartime is marked by reversals through which the elders lose their hold on the young and entire towns pass into the hands of adolescent bands not always kept in line by their leaders. From earlier works such as those of Christian Geffray, it may be seen that for a section of Mozambican youth, involvement in armed movements provides a means of escaping the marginalisation of a society in which social and economic integration has broken down. Such armed movements were a veritable “social warrior corps” in which youths could climb the grades from captive to soldier, a hierarchy of well-defined roles and ranks. Alcinda Honwana extends this reasoning to the younger categories of combatant. Without denying the effects of domination and coercion, she highlights the fact that the young combatants “occupied interstitial social spaces between the adult and juvenile worlds, which conditioned their lifestyles. In these ambivalent spaces, they were not stripped of their capacities for action. Innocent and guilty at the same time, they were more tactical actors.” Indeed, in reading the fiction of Ahmadou Kourouma or Ken Saro Wiwa, we are made aware that child soldiers, in spite of violence they might suffer, are not without powers of reason. This is doubtless a still shadowy corner of study, delicate and difficult to explore, but one in

which perhaps a better understanding of the involvement of children and adolescents in contemporary Africa is at stake. Today, there is a real need for history for those interested in the issue of children in war in sub-Saharan Africa. A critical look is needed to break with the denunciatory and prescriptive approaches of humanitarian organisations, an approach that has its place but which sometimes obscures the full scope of the phenomenon. A historical approach allows us first of all to relativise the allegedly unique aspects of the African conflicts and to emphasize, unfortunately, the tragic ordinariness of the instrumentalisation of children in war. The historian must also take account of the roles and the particular forms of action taken by child soldiers in the conflicts of the 1990s. We have a long way yet to go in this field and this article has only been able to highlight the timidity of historical works on children in contrast with those on youths, a topic attracting increased inquiry. We are still too ill-equipped to measure the impact first of the slave trade and then colonisation on sub-Saharan Africa. We can, however, put forward the hypothesis that the study of child soldiers would have greatly benefited from being put back in the context of a longer view of history: the distinction between times of peace and those of war perhaps obscures an understanding of the role and of the instrumentalisation of children in African societies. In this sense, the historian can draw the interest of humanitarian consideration by pointing out the surprising continuities existing between the figure of the child soldier in war and that of the child miner in peacetime.

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See, for example, Ilene Cohn, *Child Soldiers. The Role of Children in Armed Conflicts*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1994 ; Peter W. Singer, *Children at War*, New York, Pantheon Books, 2005 ; or Graça Machel, *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, Hurst, 2001.

By this term we mean to include international institutions, such as United Nations agencies, as well as non- governmental organisations, the media, or even “experts”.

See especially the critique of the paradigm of “neo-barbarism” in Paul Richards, *Fighting for the Rain Forest : War, Youth and Resources in Sierra Leone*, Oxford, James Currey & Heineman, 1996.

On the contrary, a number of these studies were based on on-site investigations whose example many historians of Africa might do well to follow.

See, for example, Jean-Hervé Bradol, “L’ordre humanitaire cannibale” [The Cannibalistic Humanitarian Order], in Fabrice Weissman (dir.), *À l’ombre des guerres justes* [In the Shadow of “Just Wars”: Violence, Politics, and Humanitarian Action, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2004], Paris, Flammarion, 2004.

Such historians as Georges Duby et Philippe Ariès feel that the “Children’s Crusade” consisted above all of a peasant class marginalised and labelled with the Latin term *pueri*, which then designated people in a situation of dependency.

Sabina Loriga, “L’épreuve militaire” [The Military Experience], in Giovanni Levi et Jean-Claude Schmitt, *Histoire des jeunes en Occident* [History of Youth in the West], Paris, Seuil, 1996, p. 21.

Eleanor C. Bishop, *Ponies, Patriots and Powder. A History of Children in America’s Armed Forces, 1776-1916*, Del Mar, The Bishop Press, 1982.

Emmy E. Werner, *Reluctant Witnesses. Children’s Voices from the Civil War*, Boulder, Westview, 1998.

Dennis Keese, *Too Young to Die. Boy Soldiers in the Union Army 1861-1865*, Orange, Publisher's Press, 2001.

See Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau, *L'Enfant de l'ennemi 1914-1918* [The Enemy's Child], Paris, Aubier, 1995 ; et *id.*, *La Guerre des enfants 1914-1918. Essai d'histoire culturelle* [The Children's War: An Essay in Cultural History], Paris, Armand Colin, 1993.

Guido Knopp, *Hitler's Kinder*, Munich, Bertelsmann, 2000.

Denise Bouche, *L'Enseignement dans les territoires français d'Afrique occidentale* [Schooling in the French Territories of Western Africa], Lille, Service de reproduction des thèses, vol. 1, 1977.

See the autobiography of Boubou Hama, *Kotia Nima*, Paris, Présence Africaine, vol. 1, 1969. The story recalls that of Breton peasants who cut their children's hair and put them in coffins before their departures for military service (Sabina Loriga, *op. cit.*, p. 29).

Caroline Elkins, *Imperial Reckoning. The Untold Story of Britain's Gulag in Kenya*, New York, Henry Holt & Cie, 2005.

Tabitha Kanogo, *Squatters and the Roots of Mau Mau 1905-1963*, Londres, James Currey, 1987.

For such historians, it is not a matter of denying any recourse to child soldiers in Africa. However, they believe that the Western outlook and taste for sentimentality tend to exaggerate the phenomenon's statistical reality. See, among others, the estimates of Stephen Ellis, *The Mask of Anarchy. The Destruction of Liberia and the Religious Dimension of an African Civil War*, New York, New York University Press, 1999, p. 132.

Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau, *La Guerre des enfants...*, *op. cit.*, chap. 3.

Peter Krijn and Paul Richards, "Youths in Sierra Leone: 'Why We Fight' ", *Africa. Journal of the International African Institute*, 68 (2), 1998, p. 183-210.

Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau, *L'Enfant de l'ennemi...* [The Enemy's Child], *op. cit.*

Here we must place the discourse of violated African childhood in the broader narrative of the Western gaze on African societies. According to Patrick Brantlinger, racist and humanitarian discourses of the 19th century in the West concur, despite all their differences, in their description of a radical African otherness. This supports the West in its certitude of being the most advanced civilisation. Patrick Brantlinger, "Victorians and Africans: the Genealogy of the Myth of the Dark Continent", *Critical Enquiry*, 12, 1985, p. 166-203.

A rough and ready assault rifle, produced in great numbers, and sold through out the world during the Cold War by the U.S.S.R. and the countries of the Warsaw pact.

The Kalashnikov is slightly heavier than the rifles widely used in the American Civil War. See David M. Rosen, *Armies of the Young. Child Soldiers in War and Terrorism*, New Brunswick, Rutgers University Press, 2005, p. 15.

In order to take it into account, one may consult the documentary by Jonathan Stack and James Brabazon on the war in Liberia (*Liberia: An Uncivil War*, Gabriel Films, San Francisco, 2005). In certain scenes shot in July 2003 during the assault on Monrovia, the commanders of the rebellion whipped their soldiers, children or young adults, to make them advance. Fear could be seen on all the combatants' faces, no matter their age. See also the role played by lack of discipline in the behavioural strategies of child soldiers in Alcinda Honwana, "Innocents et coupables : les enfants soldats comme acteurs tactiques" [The Innocent and the Guilty: Child Soldiers as Interstitial and Tactical Agents], *Politique africaine* [African Politics], 80, 2000, p. 58-78.

Philippe Ariès, *L'Enfant et la vie familiale sous l'Ancien Régime* [Centuries of Childhood], Paris, Seuil, 1973.

Mariane Ferme, *The Underneath of Things. Violence, History and the Everyday Life in Sierra Leone*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2001, p. 197-198.

In an interesting way, this suggestion is inverted in the case of African child soldiers by the affirmation that it is quite easy to keep them in line. In reality, there is a lack of accurate studies to support these different hypotheses.

Sabina Loriga, *op. cit.*, p. 28 et 43.

Sara Berry, *Fathers Work for their Sons. Accumulation, Mobility, and Class Formation in an Extended Yoruba Community*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1985.

Paul E. Lovejoy, "The Impact of the Atlantic Slave Trade on Africa. A Review of the Literature", *The Journal of African History*, 30 (3), 1989, p. 365-394.

The question provoked intense debates between David Eltis and Paul Lovejoy in the early 1990s.

Rosalind Shaw, *Memories of the Slave Trade. Ritual and the Historical Imagination in Sierra Leone*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2002.

See Frederick Cooper, *From Slaves to Squatters. Plantation Labour and Agriculture in Zanzibar and Coastal Kenya, 1890-1925*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1980. See also Cooper's contribution, in Frederick Cooper, Thomas C. Holt et Rebecca J. Scott., *Beyond Slavery : Explorations of Race, Labour and Citizenship in post-emancipation Societies*, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 2000, p. 107-150.

Beverly Grier, "Invisible Hands: The Political Economy of Child Labour in Colonial Zimbabwe, 1890-1930", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 20 (1), 1994, p. 27-52.

Hamilton Siphosimelane, "Landlords, the State and Child Labour in Colonial Swaziland 1914-1947", *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 31 (3), 1998, p. 571-593. In a similar vein of research, see Wiseman Chijere Chirwa, "Child and Youth Labour on the Nyasaland Plantations 1890-1953", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 1993, 19 (4), p. 662-680.

Owen White, *Children of the French Empire. Miscegenation and Colonial Society in French West Africa 1895-1960*, Oxford/New York, Clarendon Press/Oxford University Press, 1999.

Ruth Ginio, "Marshal Pétain Spoke to Schoolchildren. Vichy Propaganda in French West Africa 1940-1943", *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 33 (2), 2000, p. 291-312.

See the work of precursors collected by Odile Goerg and Hélène d'Almeida-Topor, *Le Mouvement associatif des jeunes en Afrique noire francophone au XXe siècle* [The Associative Movement of Youths in 20th Century Francophone Africa], Paris, L'Harmattan, "Cahiers Afrique noire – 12", 1989. See also Achille Mbembe, *Les Jeunes et l'ordre politique en Afrique* [Youths and the Political Order in Africa], Paris, L'Harmattan, 1986.

Here as well the difference between youth and childhood is only delicately distinguished, the province of conventions or perceptions. This article does not mean to draw the line between these two groups in African societies. The works consulted do not, moreover, agree, on the age at which child soldiers can be told from adolescent combatants: some choose 7 years, others 12, even 16 years of age.

Oliver Furley, "Child Soldiers in Africa", in Oliver Furley, *Conflict in Africa*, Londres, Tauris, 1995, p. 28-45.

David M. Rosen, *Armies of the Young*, *op. cit.*

Tom Bennet, *Using Children in Armed Conflict. A Legitimate African Tradition?*, South Africa, Institute for Security Studies, « Monograph – 32 », décembre 1998.

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