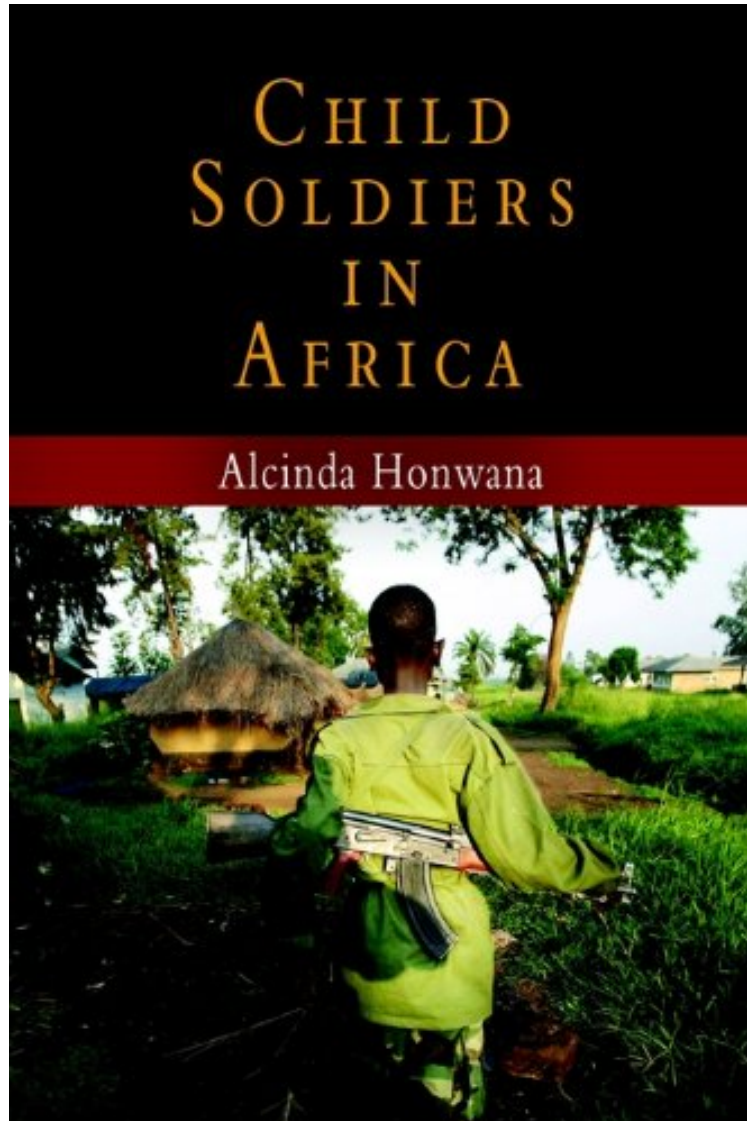


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## Child Soldiers in Africa (The Ethnography of Political Violence)

*Alcinda Honwana*

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**Alcinda Honwana : Child Soldiers in Africa (The Ethnography of Political Violence)** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Child Soldiers in Africa (The Ethnography of Political Violence):

1 of 5 people found the following review helpful. First Step Get EducatedBy Luisthis is a great source of information in what happened and still happening in a war torn region.If you want to make a difference in the world, the first step is always to get educated, this is a great step for a Christian desiring to be part of the healing.

Young people have been at the forefront of political conflict in many parts of the world, even when it has turned violent. In some of those situations, for a variety of reasons, including coercion, poverty, or the seductive nature of violence, children become killers before they are able to grasp the fundamentals of morality. It has been only in the past ten years that this component of warfare has captured the attention of the world. Images of boys carrying guns and ammunition are now commonplace as they flash across television screens and appear on the front pages of newspapers. Less often, but equally disturbingly, stories of girls pressed into the service of militias surface in the media. A major concern today is how to reverse the damage done to the thousands of children who have become not only victims but also agents of wartime atrocities. In *Child Soldiers in Africa*, Alcinda Honwana draws on her firsthand experience with children of Angola and Mozambique, as well as her study of the phenomenon for the United Nations and the Social Science Research Council, to shed light on how children are recruited, what they encounter, and how they come to terms with what they have done. Honwana looks at the role of local communities in healing and rebuilding the lives of these children. She also examines the efforts undertaken by international organizations to support these wartime casualties and enlightens the reader on the obstacles faced by such organizations.

"Mandatory reading for anyone who wants to embark on the difficult task of understanding more fully the complex realities of child soldiering in Africa and elsewhere." *Modern African Studies* "What Honwana eloquently reminds us in *Child Soldiers* is that there are millions of children around the globe whose lives have been hijacked to serve the egotistical purposes of adults too caught up in their own self-centered agendas to care what happens to future generations." *PsychCRITIQUES* (American Psychological Association) "Groundbreaking." *PsycCRITIQUES* "This well-structured and multifaceted analysis of child soldiering would be useful reading for researchers and scholars." *Journal of Peace Research* About the Author Alcinda Honwana is Professor and Chair in International Development, The Open University. Excerpt. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved. Introduction The issue of children's participation in armed political conflict has captured the attention of the world during the past ten or fifteen years. Images of boys carrying guns and ammunition flash across television screens and appear on the front pages of newspapers. Less often but equally disturbingly, stories of girls pressed into the service of militias surface in the media. An unprecedented number of children have been drawn into active participation in warfare. Many children are coerced into fighting; others are pushed into it by poverty and crises in their communities; some may be seduced by promises of glory or excitement. Children as young as eight or ten are transformed into merciless killers, committing the most horrendous atrocities with apparent indifference or even pride. Children's involvement in armed conflict is not a recent phenomenon. In the past, young people have been at the forefront of political conflict in many parts of the world, even when it has turned violent. Today, however, the problem has grown to such magnitude that it has attracted public notice. What is new is not just the visibility of civil wars but also that children are more deeply involved; in some places, they form a substantial proportion of combatants. Analysts of war have pointed out that most contemporary civil wars represent a "total societal crisis." Social order is almost entirely disrupted, and defenseless civilians, especially women, children, and the elderly, are particularly vulnerable. Reports of children taking human lives are increasingly infiltrating public awareness, not only from conflict zones but also from societies in peacetime. Almost any newspaper or nightly news show in the United States includes a litany of youthful victims and perpetrators of inner-city violence; some cities keep a running tally of the death toll. Isolated cases that occur in white, middle-class settings seem more shocking, such as the Columbine school shootings or the murder of a Dartmouth College couple by two Vermont teenagers. Even younger children can commit murder: for example, three-year-old James Bulger was killed by two ten-year-olds in the United Kingdom. Incidents of children killing children are troubling. The systematic, organized use of children to wage war is even more appalling. Children get caught up in armed conflict in a whole host of ways. Often, those who manage to avoid becoming soldiers are maimed or killed in attacks on civilian areas. Children are separated from their parents, orphaned, and uprooted from their communities. The displaced may have to seek refuge in other territories. Those children who remain in war zones are subjected to various forms of violence and exploitation. Some are injured by landmines while playing or working. Children are turned into spies or gunrunners, or they work as guards, cooks, cleaners, and servants in military camps. Particularly damaging for future generations is the impact of war on girls. Disadvantaged even in peacetime, girls experience sexual abuse, rape, enslavement, and other tribulations during war. Children to witness terrible atrocities and suffer from trauma. Children are deprived of education and basic healthcare. Wars and other forms of armed conflict have profound and lasting effects on younger people. These developments have not gone unnoticed. In recent years, the impact of armed conflict on children has moved to the forefront of political, humanitarian, and academic agendas. The international community has taken several significant steps to address the problem. In 1990, the United Nations established the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which contains important provisions for children affected by armed conflict. In 1994, the UN General Assembly commissioned the Machel study on the impact of armed conflict on children. In 1996, Graa Machel presented a ground-breaking report which made specific recommendations for action. Based on Machel's recommendations, the General Assembly created the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary General for Children and Armed Conflict in 1997. This office was commissioned to raise awareness and promote the collection of

information about the plight of children affected by armed conflict as well as to foster international cooperation to promote respect for children's rights amid such conflicts. Many humanitarian organizations have launched specific programs to address the issue of children affected by armed conflict and promote protection and support. The issue became a topic of interest in academic circles as well, producing significant research and publications. The participation of children in war has even become a theme for novels. The dramatic shift of social roles and responsibilities of children brought about by war is intrinsically linked to the breakdown of societal structures and long-standing moral matrices in contexts of extreme social crisis. Children's involvement in war defies established and generally accepted norms and values with regard to the fundamental categories of childhood and adulthood, as well as the international conventions of modern warfare. In modern societies, childhood is usually associated with innocence, weakness, and dependence upon adult guidance and nurturance. Soldiers, in contrast, are 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. The paradoxical combination of child and soldier is unsettling. 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 yet adults. The possession of guns and a license to kill removes them from childhood. But child soldiers are still physically and psychologically immature; they are not full adults who are responsible for themselves. They live in a twilight zone where the two worlds of childhood and adulthood "rub against each other in uneasy intimacy." Child soldiers live between a world of make-believe child's world of games and fantasy, of playing with guns and reality where the playful becomes shockingly lethal and the game turns deadly. Here the ludic is transformed into the grotesque and the macabre. Efforts to theorize the place occupied by child soldiers are not entirely satisfactory, however, for this position is inherently unstable, without sanctioned cultural definition, embodying a societal contradiction, and entirely embedded in conflict. Bhabha suggests that such interstices provide the terrain for the emergence of new strategies of selfhood and identity. The role-related and ritually defined boundaries between childhood and adulthood that existed in Angola and Mozambique before the onset of civil war were broken down by extreme social crisis. As the social order was disrupted, roles between adults and children were displaced. Children actively create and recreate their roles according to the situations presented to them, and when their communities become engulfed in civil war, they assume roles that under normal circumstances would be filled by adults. In Angola and Mozambique, many children became active soldiers, committing the most horrific atrocities. This dramatic shift is intrinsically linked to the breakdown of society's structures and morality in a crisis such as war.

**Outline of Argument** This book focuses on the involvement of children in civil wars in Mozambique and Angola, conveying the experiences of children directly involved in these armed conflicts. It centers primarily on children in military camps: child combatants, sexually abused girls, and other children living within the confines of the military. However, it also discusses children who were victimized by armed conflict in their villages and communities, such as orphans and landmine victims. Although this study is based on field research from these two countries, its scope extends beyond the borders of Mozambique and Angola. Comparative analyses of various cases highlight their similarities and differences as well as offering broader analytical perspectives on the impact of war on children. In sum, this study situates the phenomenon in Mozambique and Angola within the context of a more far-reaching exploration of these issues. The book makes four main arguments: (1) the involvement of children in war does not constitute a new phenomenon but has gained new dimensions because of changes in the nature of warfare and current understandings of childhood; (2) children affected by conflict both girls and boys do not constitute a homogeneous group of helpless victims, but exercise an agency of their own, which is shaped by their particular experiences and circumstances; (3) the healing and reintegration of children affected by armed conflict needs to be embedded in local world views and meaning systems in order to be effective and sustainable; and (4) social reintegration of children affected by armed conflict must go hand in hand with larger strategies of social development and the eradication of poverty. The book outlines the histories of political conflict in Mozambique and Angola and the context in which the involvement of children in the protracted civil wars took place. It also considers issues of research methodologies and the ethical challenges associated with conducting research in conflict and postconflict situations with vulnerable groups, particularly children.

Chapter 2 discusses the connections between children and war historically and socially, and the changes in warfare that have influenced the present situation, and factors such as childhood development and poverty. Child soldiers find themselves in a position that breaks down dichotomies between civilian and combatant, victim and perpetrator, initiate and initiated, protected and protector. With these multiple, interstitial positions, child soldiers epitomize the condition of simultaneously having multifaceted identities and utterly lacking a permanent, stable, and socially defined place. In this way, they occupy a world of their own. We must go beyond the clear-cut demarcations between child and adult, and between innocence and guilt, to examine the intricate ways in which the condition of the child soldier cuts across established categories. Warfare is a profoundly gendered phenomenon. It is not just that men become soldiers while women work and wait at home, a popular image based on two relatively well-organized twentieth-century world wars. In European international and civil wars, as well as in African wars, women in the civilian population become targets of recruitment and sexual violence perpetrated by soldiers that is designed to demoralize, humiliate, and immobilize an enemy. Women and girls are raped in front of their male relatives.

Sometimes, but not always, rape ends in murder. Young women and girls are kidnapped and held in military camps where they are used as laborers, servants, and sexual slaves. In some cases, young women become armed combatants in order to defend themselves or avenge the wrongs done to their kinswomen. This gendered and sexualized dimension of warfare is seldom understood as a fundamental and pervasive feature of armed conflicts. It comes to public attention primarily in particularly dramatic instances, especially those involving the systematic extermination of combat-age men as well as the rape of women in the target group. Female survivors of wartime sexual abuse and exploitation seldom speak of their suffering, since it is often shameful as well as traumatic. This book examines the situation of girls and young women affected by war. Boy soldiers and girls forced to serve militias represent anomalies and contradictions. They inhabit an autonomous world with its own rules and relations of power. Yet they come from a civil society ordered by family, kinship, gender, and generation and, after peace returns, they must reenter a world whose fundamental tenets they were made to violate and whose categories they have defied. How are young women and men who have served and fought with the militia groups to be assimilated back into society? How can they make an orderly transition from child militia member to adult civilian? They have been traumatized by their experiences, by the murders and other acts of violence and violation they have committed, witnessed, and feared or suffered themselves, and by the sudden and total sundering of their previous ties to kin and community. Civilians lost more than their sons and daughters to the military forces; they lost homes, village, and livelihoods as well. Repeated attacks on civilians in places with no military significance have been a fundamental feature of postcolonial civil wars. In both Mozambique and Angola, substantial numbers of rural residents were displaced, forced to seek sanctuary in more stable regions of their own country or to cross borders to find refuge. Few remained there for the duration of the conflict; most returned home as soon as local conditions permitted. The injuries and displacement they suffered were compounded by the devastation they encountered on their return. In Angola, as rural residents tried to resume their lives, rebuilding burned villages, cultivating the fields, and traveling to market, many people especially children and young people were injured by the landmines that combatants had left behind. For them, the war continued even in the absence of soldiers. In Mozambique and Angola, war is generally conceptualized in opposition to society, as a state in which people are rewarded for breaking fundamental norms and social codes. People who have been directly involved in war are not easily accepted back into society, for they are considered to be polluted by the "wrong doings of the war"; they are regarded as contaminated by the spirits of the dead and carriers of their anger. Those individuals who killed or saw people being killed are potential contaminators of the social body. Danger and pollution are attached to all war-affected persons; being a witness to murder or an unwitting collaborator in atrocities is also dangerous. War pollution is considered a threat to society, so young women and men who served and fought in militias must undergo a process of cleansing as they make the transition from the state of war back into normal society. This reintegration is accomplished with local practices, which differ profoundly from Western psychotherapeutic approaches. In the context of the civil wars in Mozambique and Angola, reconciliation goes beyond the process of restoring communication and resolving differences among oppositional groups nonviolently; it also encompasses the process of restoring intimate ties that have ruptured, reintegrating war-affected persons into local communities, and resuming normal life. Civil wars have long-lasting effects on whole societies as well as on individuals. The economic underdevelopment that is both cause and consequence of warfare narrows the opportunities available to young people to attain the occupational and family positions that signify full adulthood. The book ends by exploring governmental and nongovernmental programs for demobilization, rehabilitation, and social reintegration of war-affected children.