

**MIDLANDS STATE UNIVERSITY
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DISSERTATION TOPIC:

Monsters or Victims: An analysis of the African child soldier as depicted in Chris Abani's *Song for Night*, Emmanuel Dongala's *Johnny Mad Dog* and Ieweala Uzodinma's *Beasts of No Nation*.

BY

KUDZAI CHINGWERE

REG NUMBER: R08401G

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SUPERVISOR: MR C. TAGWIREI

CHAPTER ONE: ITRODUCTION

Background to the Study

The issue of child soldiering is one of the most controversial issues as far as the history of the world is concerned and the controversy lies in the question: “are these children aggressors they turn out to be or are they simply passive victims of circumstances?” Children have either been violently abducted or coerced into volunteering to serve as soldiers in the American Revolution, World War 1 and World War 2 and as if that’s the growing trend, Africa has also adopted the system of child soldiering, especially West African countries like Congo, Sudan, Uganda, Sierra Leone and Nigeria. According to Drumbl (2002), not only have millions of children been forced to witness war and its atrocities, but many have also been drawn into these conflicts as participants.

Wessels (2006) asserts that civilians have grown to be the general target of today’s wars, mostly women and children, thereby indirectly making children soldiers of choice. Civilians are targeted in the sense that today’s wars use torture and terror, rape and murder, maiming and mutilation, destruction of homes, villages, schools and towns as a way of instilling terror. It is so unfortunate that children get intimidated more easily than adults; they get more traumatized and at the end of the day are forced to commit acts of atrocities against their family members, neighbours and adult civilian populations. Denov (2010) argues that this is because of the fact that children are small, weak vulnerable and far less mature to withstand the pressure of being abducted or forcibly recruited by certain military forces.

Wells (2009) postulates that child soldiers throughout the history of this world have been serving in these wars and conflicts as uniformed soldiers or camouflaged insurgents acting as combatants, spies, porters, human land-mine detectors, sexual slaves and so forth. The fact that not all these child soldiers are boys is very disgracing, upsetting and even barbaric in the eyes of most prominent scholars in this field and worse still humanitarian organisations. Nearly a third of them are girls and one can only imagine the dangers they face from pregnancy, child birth complications and the rejection they (both their babies and themselves), are later on subjected to.

A culture of impunity, moreover, and a world order in which International law is enforced selectively has so far provide a green light for many who have adopted this rather immoral system of child soldiering to do so without the fear of the consequences. Industrialized and former colonial powers, private military contractors, war lords, rebel forces and mercenary to mention but only a few have been relying on children trained to kill and maim as a key weapon to advance their selfless goals. As a matter of fact, International laws have rather failed to end this growing trend of child soldiering, according to UNICEF's Convention on the Rights of the Child, as of mid 2004, up to a 100, 000 children, some as young as nine were reported to be actively involved in armed conflicts, only in Africa.

The International law, influenced by the research of Jean Piaget (1896-1980) and his followers accept the fact that there is a link between chronological age and cognitive development. They accept the fact that there are stages in the development of cognitive thinking; especially the ability to make moral and correctly informed judgments and that it is at the age of eighteen that such development comes to a completion. Thus basing on this argument, being concurred by the

fact that all our child protagonists in the novels to be researched are all below the age of eighteen, one is then forced to answer the question: ‘Are these child soldiers aggressors or monsters as some of the prominent scholars in this field would like to argue or are they mere innocent, passive victims of circumstances?’” The reality lies somewhere in between the lines.

As the likes of the Oxford University Professor Jason Hart would argue, before the discussion of the recruitment of child soldiers, one should first attempt to understand the material conditions which often drive children into violence, that is, ‘profoundly asymmetrical power relations which give rise to systematic oppression of these children’(Denov 2010). But one would like to argue, is this point of view fair enough on children when it has been scientifically proven that the growth of the mind, the ability to make decisions comes to a completion at the age of eighteen? How can then one, the likes of Rosen (2005) argue that these children are not always passive victims but often make a rational decision that not fighting is even worse than fighting, that they are not victims of adult manipulation but thinking agents of their own destiny.

Statement of the Problem

There issue of child soldiering is rapidly becoming problematic. Not only has child soldiering tragically become a problem of the international world, thus the Europe but it also has become one and is now highly practiced in Africa. While some scholars would want to argue that child soldiering was unknown in pre-colonial Africa, Rosen (2005) surmises from the example of the Mende societies that the use of child soldiers was a pre-colonial African practice which dates back and is directly linked to slave trade. The number of child soldiers has significantly increased, especially in the new wars that are internal conflicts, often fought by the rebel forces or guerrilla forces and often target civilians as victims, Singer (2006) and Wells (2009). There is need to understand these issues from a literary perspective, that is, how literary works represent the issue of child soldiering.

Objectives of the Study

This research seeks to -:

- To explore the representation of the victim child soldiers in literary texts.
- To examine the treatment of child soldiers as perpetrators in literary texts.
- To explore the complexity of the subject of child soldiers in literary texts.
- To explore the major agreements and disagreements in the representation of child soldiers.

Significance of Study

The significance of this study lies in the analysis of the issue of child soldiering as it is represented in literary texts. There is need to understand ties between these children's past and also their present in these literary texts. Of central concern is the question of how these child soldiers find themselves in wars, not literary present but worse still partaking the evil of these wars, wars not originally theirs, the constraints they are subjected to, as well as their possible transition from the innocent children they used to be, thus before the war to the monsters they end up being. Thus viewed from this perspective this research is going to be highly significant to child soldiering literature since it will bring afore the answer to whether these children should be classified as victims or should rather be dismissed as monsters they at times turn out to be in literary texts to be analysed.

Literature Review

The prominent scholars in the field of child soldiering include Peter Singer, George Wessells, David Rosen and Myriam Denov. They all have points of divergence and convergence in their schools of thought but in line to what they all have postulated, child soldiering is the military use of young children below the age of eighteen in taking part in any kind of regular or irregular armed force or armed group in any capacity. Child soldiers are those children who fight in adult wars, missing out on the safe childhood that many of us take for granted, of which every child is entitled to a safe childhood. These child soldiers can either be boys or girls who perform a range of tasks including participation in combat, laying land-mines and explosives, scouting, spying, acting as couriers or guards, pottering, carrying out domestic chores such as cooking and the worst being held under sexual slavery (Wessells 2006).

The military use of children takes three distinct forms. Children can take part in hostilities, thus child soldiers, or they can be used for support roles such as porters and spies, messengers and cooks, or they can be recruited for sexual purposes (Singer 2005). The term child soldier refers to a child who is refused the privilege of his or her safer childhood to take part in a war or armed conflict. The general consensus about this issue of child soldiering is that child soldiers, whether violently abducted, coerced into signing up or volunteered to join an army because they have no safer alternative, are exposed to high levels of abuse and exploitation of which these children deserve special protection. A number of Non Governmental Organisations including Amnesty, Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldier, Save the Children and Human Rights amongst others are advocating for the gospel that this exploitative, unacceptable and rather immoral system has to come to an end. However all these campaigns by these

humanitarian organizations have proved to be fruitless, instead, the numbers of children who are being used militarily, has, since 2001 been reported in the ongoing or recent armed conflicts in almost every region of the world, with Africa inclusive.

Contradicting to what his other fellow scholars and humanitarians postulate concerning this issue of child soldiering, Rosen's (2005) argument is presumably not to promote the use of child soldiers but serves as a crusade against what he calls "muddle-headed humanitarians". He challenges the dominant humanitarian concept that child soldiers are simply vulnerable individuals exploited by adults who use them as cheap, expandable and malleable weapons of war and quite surprisingly comments on the zeal and positive energy that youthful soldiers bring to war. But, certainly, this discussion ignores the neurological development, which has been postulated by quite a number of anthropologists, the fact that the teenage brain is not fully wired to make rational choices or well informed decisions. Though he is also for the idea of "straight 18" as they call it, he quite overlooks the impact of war or that of an armed conflict upon the youthful mind.

Children are our future. In-as-much-as this phrase might be regarded by others as a cliché, it is nothing but the undiluted truth. These children are tomorrow's world leaders and the Nobel Peace prize winners but it is very unfortunate that they are today's ruthlessly recruited soldiers. Instead of learning, playing and exploring their options in life, many children are being uprooted from their homes to take part in African civil wars at a very tender age. According to United Nations (2011), children are currently in fifty-one armed groups, thus national armies and non-state armed groups in fourteen countries around the world including Sudan, Somalia, DRC and

Uganda to mention but a few. It is quite difficult to measure the exact number of child soldiers across the globe but recent estimates have placed it around 250,000. According to Singer (2005), the modern wars in which these children are involved in consist primarily of low intense warfare where direct targeting of civilians together with the commission of atrocities is a common place. As a result, children are often exposed to violence and in the end are denied many human rights guaranteed to them in international law and amongst these rights include education, health, recreation and worse still, the right to safe life.

Rosen (2005) argues that this increasing recruitment of child soldiers is due to technological advances in weaponry and the proliferation of small arms. The weapons which are now being invented are considerably lightweight, and thus making them very simple to operate. This in turn means that these weapons can be handled and used by children as easily as adults. The Soviet made AK 47 and the American M 16 which were introduced in the early 1950s can be used by a child as young as eight years of age. As if this is not enough risk upon the lives of these young ones, these guns are being manufactured in large quantities, thus making them cheaper and widely available.

Furthermore, Machel (2001) argues that this increasing use of child soldier internationally is also due to the fact that children who are born into and raised into a conflict zone over a range of time are more likely to be de-sensitized to violence as evidenced by series of civil wars in Africa. These children are also less likely to have been exposed to better opportunities such as education, jobs and so forth. It is the violence which they are brought up in that makes them opt for a rational decision and believe in the fact that not fighting is even worse than fighting, thus making

them thinking agents of their own destiny (Rosen 2005). As widely agreed upon by a number of scientists and anthropologists, these children are still growing; their mind growth only reaches a completion when they reach the age of eighteen. Thus, viewed in the limelight of the above arguments children are far too young to resist the pressure subjected upon them by this violence, they get orphaned, threatened and frustrated therefore ending up opting for fighting as a way of seeking revenge and soothing their heavily tortured and tormented souls.

For child soldiers, every day is a living nightmare when yet childhood should be carefree, playing in the sun and not living a nightmare in the darkness of the soul, argues Sonja (2012). This view is totally the opposite of what has been happening of lately. The blatant terror and savagery which is taking place in Africa, a situation where thousands of innocent children are being maimed, raped, killed and abused is definitely a microcosm of a problem affecting many parts of the world. The Lord's Resistance army in northern Uganda for instance, has for decades been committing crimes against humanity, infact, crimes against innocent children after ruthlessly recruiting them with girl soldiers not only being risked of long lasting physical and psychological wounds but also being placed at a greater risk of brutal sexual violence as well (Denov 2010).

Bennet (1998) and Rosen (2005) argue that the general response concerning this issue of child soldiering vastly over simplifies the child soldier problem. They claim that these children are not always the passive victims as many would erroneously believe. Besides forced recruitment, great numbers of children also volunteer to fight due to the fact that they have limited options for a livelihood in both a poverty and violent stricken land outside the armed organizations. During

times of wars, somehow the military or militia is ridiculously seen as a meal ticket and a place for safety and security of which this is an irony at its best. How can these armed groups, as ruthless as they are be seen as an appropriate place for safety and security, when they are the ones who would have perpetrated the violence which these children would be afraid of in the first place? This is the exact question and situation which this research seeks to address or redress.

According to BBC News, there is vital need for the outside world to reflect on what war can do to the psyche of its survivors. Thousands of soldiers who have managed to be rehabilitated have told stories of becoming de-sensitised to killing people after having been recruited at the tender age of nine. Recent scientific studies have proven that these children suffer from high rates of depression and anxiety. They are also highly victimized by the loss of a moral compass and social bonds, so much that they have even lost the ability to rationalise between right and wrong, thus causing long lasting damage to their psyche. These same children that have been exposed to long term violence as widely agreed among sociologists and anthropologists, are at a higher risk of psycho-somatic symptoms such as insomnia and nightmares and are prone to addiction and aggressive behavior (Machel 2001).

Embedded in this politics of age as Rosen and Wells call it is the fact that children should enjoy their childhood as long as possible, though one recognizes their agency; it is of vital importance that they be protected from and exploitation. With all this argument in mind, many campaigns have been held towards eradicating children from these armed groups. Since 2004, tens of thousands of children have been demobilized. The international community has endeavored to

protect all children affected by armed conflicts and also to help them rebuild their lives, thus enabling them to lead civilian lives as before. Quite a number of services have been rendered by Non Governmental Organisations such as United Nations, Human Rights, Save the Child and so forth so as to see this mission through include recruitment prevention strategies, rehabilitation and reintegration programmes.

However, all these scholars and humanitarian organizations have managed to grasp most of the important issues and facts concerning this issue of child soldiering as fairly evidenced by the arguments that have been brought forward in the above discussion but this research seeks to dig deep further into this chaos. Yes, these child soldiers might have committed acts beyond imagination, actions that no one in his sober mind would commit. They have been made to attack their own blood, their own neighbours, their own societies as a way of stigmatizing them, Wessells (2006). The other fallacy being the fact that these children would have been abducted at a tender age, beaten, drugged and trained to kill and maim, against their will the question that then comes to the fore is, 'Are these children the monsters, as many of us would erroneously dismiss them to be, or are they innocent victims of violent circumstances?' This is an obviously tricky question with answers which this research seeks to literarily unveil. The reality lies somewhere in-between.

Theoretical Framework

This research is going to be analysed in the context of the Framing theory and the New Sociology of Childhood theory.

According to Chong and Druckman (2007), the Framing theory postulates that an issue can be viewed in a variety of ways, thus depending on how it is articulated by a message-sender and how it is going to be interpreted by the message-receivers. Frames influence the perception of a certain topic by a certain audience, thus they do not only tell one what to think but also how to think about it. The issue of child soldiering can be viewed in a variety of ways, depending on how these children found themselves as part of these armed conflicts and also on how the outside world would like to interpret it. Goffman (1974) defines frames as representations, that is, words or phrases which are meant to help an individual label, identify or perceive circumstances or situations in the real world. Such frames as argued by Chong and Druckman can be used as an indirect way of mobilizing individuals behind a cause and motivate social action.

The concept of 'childhood' as a socially constructed domain is rather of vital importance when analyzing the phenomenon of child soldiers. As suggested by Wells (2009), and widely agreed upon by a number of sociologists and anthropologists such as Professor Jason Hart and Professor Susan Shelper, childhood is a socially constructed institution and lives of children are shaped by those constructions. The New Sociology of childhood theory as argued by James, Allison and Prout Alan (1990) is concerned with what a child is, the nature of childhood, the purpose or function of childhood and how the notion of childhood is used in different societies. The question that then comes afore is, 'What is a child?' or rather, 'What is childhood?' and the

answer is constructed depending on the agreed beginning and ending of childhood in different societies and also on how these children are raised and so forth. Wells argues that, within any particular historical and social context there is a normative and hegemonic concept of childhood against which children themselves are compared as individuals and collectives. Agreeing to this ideology the New Sociology of Childhood theory thus recognizes children's active agency and aims at incorporating these children into childhood studies and discourses. Thus viewed in the limelight of the above discussion, this Childhood theory is central for the analysis of the issue of child soldiers.

Research Methods and Designs

This research analyses the issue of child soldiering on the basis of three novels: *Johnny Mad Dog*, *Song for Night* and *Beasts of No Nation*. Textual analysis is the method that will therefore be used in this analysis.

Background literature is also of vital importance in analyzing the issue of child soldiers and that is when this research is going to use secondary sources such as material written by academic writers, books published by commercial and university publishers' articles that are published in scientific journals and also those from media houses such as the BBC News.

Author Biographies

According to www.goodreads.com/author/show/emmanueldongala/, Emmanuel Boundzeki Dongala the author of the novel *Johnny Mad Dog* is a Congolese chemist, novelist, short story writer and also a playwright. He was born in the year 1941 and was a resident of Brazzaville, the capital city of the Republic of Congo which before DRC attained its independence was referred to as French Congo until he left the country after a civil war broke out in 1977. He studied in the United States where he earned a BA in Chemistry from Oberlin College and MA from Rutgers University and left for France where he was awarded a PhD in Organic Chemistry. Currently he resides in western Massachusetts and teaches at Simon's Rock College of Bard where he holds the Richard B Fisher Chair in Natural Sciences. He is the author of a number of award winning French novels, later translated into English and these novels include *Johnny Mad Dog*, *Little Boys Come from the Stars*, *The Fire of Origins* and many others. The novel *Johnny Mad Dog* won him the 2004 Cezam Prix Litteraire Award and was selected by the Los Angeles Times as one of its books of the year, a film adaptation which was released in 2008. Emmanuel Dongala is also the founder and former president of the National Association of Congolese Writers.

According to Chris McLann (2007) Chris Abani the author of the novel *Song for Night* is a Nigerian poet and novelist. He was born in 1966, a year before the Biafran war. He published his first novel called *Masters of the Board* when he was sixteen and it won him awards and got him anointed as "Africa's answer to Fredrick Forsyth". It was this novel which got him thrown into jail, two years after it got published because the government believed that it served as the foundation for the failed coup attempt. He spent time in prison on three occasions for his

‘subversive’ writings, once in solitary confinement in Kiri Kiri Maximum security facility in which very few made out of it alive. *Song for Night* is Chris Abani’s fifth work and amongst others he is the one who wrote *The Virgin of Flames*, becoming *Abigail and Graceland*. He won many awards including the PEN USA Freedom-to-write Award 2008, Prince Claus Award and the Wright legacy Award 2004. Currently he resides in the USA and he is a professor of creative writing at the University of California.

According to www.fantasticfiction.co.uk/i/uzodinma-iweala/ Uzodinma Iweala was born in the year 1982. He graduated from Harvard University, where he was a Mellon Mays scholar and received a number of prizes for his writing. Amongst his prizes there is the Eager Prize, the Le Baron Brigs Prize and the Hoopes Prize awarded for his outstanding undergraduate thesis. He lives in Washington, D.C. His first novel *Beasts of No Nation* was one of the most acclaimed novels of the year 2005. Amongst other prizes it won him the New York Public Library Young Lions fiction award and the Los Angeles Times Art Seidenbaum Award for first fiction.

CHAPTER 2: CHILD SOLDIERS AS VICTIMS IN ABANI'S *SONG FOR NIGHT*

This chapter sets out to analyse the portrait of a boy who is holding on to the shreds of his innocence during a war that is deliberately and remorselessly working to yank it away. The main focus is on Chris Abani's *Song for Night*, a novel which dwells on the civil war, which even though it is not explicitly stated it is inspired by the events which took place in the Nigerian Biafran war of 1967 to 1970. Similarly, the civil war being narrated in the text has also lasted three years.

As some contemporary scholars in the field of child soldiering, the likes of (Rosen 2005) would like to argue, children are not always passive victims, but often make a rational decision that not fighting is worse than fighting, My Luck is not an exception. When the war begins My Luck is caught in a dilemma of whether to fight or not to fight. He explains that "We are simply fighting to survive the war. It is a strange place to be at fifteen...But we all wanted to join then: to fight...and having lost loved ones to them, we all wanted revenge" (p.9). From this narration, one can argue that these children are not monsters as often thought. How can one be said to have made a rational decision to join arms when yet he was only twelve and still believes this place to be strange even at fifteen? Despite the acceptance of the fact that many children do go on their own to join armed groups, there is disagreement on how much of these acts can be termed voluntary, or freely chosen (Singer 2005). How can such a decision at such a tender age be termed rational when quite a number of anthropologists such as Susan Shepler and Jason Hart argue that mind growth only come to a completion at the age of eighteen? The fact that My Luck still sees the war as a strange place to be though he has fought this battle for three years now

demonstrates that he is fighting for the sake of fighting. Given an option he would not think twice about opting out.

The novel *Song for Night* traces the story of a journey undertaken by the protagonist, My Luck, a fifteen year old, mute Igbo boy during an unnamed civil war in a bid to catch up with his lost fellow mute comrades. My Luck is the head of this platoon of young soldiers who have been chosen to be mine diffusers since they are light and thus less likely to set off these landmines that they are required to set off. He is separated from the rest of his troop after a landmine knocks him unconscious for quite some time, thus forcing his fellow comrades to leave him behind because they think he is dead. These children have all had their vocal chords cut earlier on during their training so that they would not scream and startle the others when one accidentally trips a mine. Much of the novel reads like a dream as the protagonist wanders around the war, scarred, while searching for his fellow comrades. This search concurrently runs with a search that travels into his past as My Luck seeks to understand his place in this horrific world. A world that is full of child soldiers, cannibalistic grandmothers and horrible cruelty which defies all attempts to describe it and thus he contains it. His search for his lost comrades, for his girlfriend who died in an explosion and for his dead family becomes a search for the meaning of his own life. After getting silenced, My Luck and his fellow comrades develop a sign language that would allow them to communicate and the chapters are titled with descriptions of that language such as ‘Truth is Forefinger to Tongue Raised Skyward’ and ‘Ghosts are a Gentle Breath over Moving Fingers’.

Protagonist as a victim of physical violence

The total silence to which My Luck and his other fellow comrades are subjected to is highly symbolic of how this cruel war and the violence it brings along has shattered any possible voice from these child soldiers who, given an option, might have advocated for their innocence. These children have had their vocal chords cut and literally they cannot speak and thus they have virtually lost their voices to object to whatever deed they might be forced to partake in by their leader John Wayne. The war has literally stolen their voices as well as their decision to opt out and speak against the violence they are being subjected to at such a tender age. The narrator notes that "...they must have known: that is why they imposed the silence. I finger the scar on my throat that ended my days of speech"(p.11) It is judging from this monologue that one can argue that though they had taken their voices, assuming that they had silenced them, they still could say enough in silence. They could still protest in that same imposed silence and this is why my Luck shot their leader, John Wayne. He had had enough of his brutality and just could not take it anymore; he just could not let him get away with it this time around. How on earth could John Wayne ever think of raping a seven year old saying, "This one is ripe. I will enjoy her"(p.31)? Thus in light of the above analysis, even if they had imposed this silence on him, it really did not stop him from protesting; he could say enough in this silence and given half the chance, if only he did not succumb to this unquenchable thirst to revenge the death of his parents, My Luck would opt out of this strange scene, this horrible war.

Protagonist as a victim of forcible recruitment

Embedded in this "politics of age" as (Rosen 2005) calls it, is the fact that children should enjoy their childhood for as long as possible, though one recognizes their "agency." They should be

protected from harm and exploitation. Most importantly, they should not be given duties or burdens that prevent them from going to school and learning for a better future. Chris Abani also uses *My Luck* as a tool to call out for readdressing this issue of child soldiering. *My Luck* narrates how this war, originally not theirs have deprived them of their rights when he says “I have never been a boy. That was stolen from me and I will never be a man – not this way...If it would help, I would cry, but tears are useless here.”(p.136). Not only has this civil war stolen from him what he could have enjoyed but also what he could become. The tone that is expressed in this phrase vividly portrays how Chris Abani is attacking the society in which *My Luck* grew up in. Instead of protecting the likes of him from harm and exploitation, this society has actually given up its role and has actually let *My Luck* fight an armed conflict at the age of twelve. As if that is not enough damage, it has deprived them of their past and neither can it offer them a promising future, certainly not after what their present is subjecting them to.

The novel *Song for Night* is highly symbolic of a young man’s search for self comprehension in the midst of a civil war. It is from this end that one would like to question the view of the likes of Machel (2001) who assert that children who are raised in a conflict zone are more likely to be desensitized to violence. The question that then is brought afore in this literary text is, ‘How valid is Machel’s view when yet *My Luck*, even though he is raised in a violent family, and is witnessing and partaking the worst atrocities still has a conscience?’ When *My Luck* is forced to rape a certain woman, old enough to be her mother after John Wayne had barked, “You are the only one who hasn’t raped yet!...Rape or die!”(p.77), he wants to ask him what all this raping, killing and destroying innocent villages has to do with their supposedly mission of defusing mines. Though he does not say these words for the known reason that he would die instead, the

fact that it actually crossed his mind shows that, even after witnessing violence at its worst, and sometimes even partaking in it, he was not desensitized to it and was still desperately holding on to the shreds of his innocence. Given half the chance, he would opt out of this terrible war.

Wells (2009) and Rosen (2005) postulates that this rapidly increasing use of child soldiers is due to the widespread distribution of considerably light arms which can be operated by children easily. Such weapons include the well known AK-47. In the novel *Song for Night My Luck* and his fellow comrades are, “Armed to the teeth with AK-47s and bags of ammo and grenades...”(p.18), but even though they are heavily armed, it does not necessarily make them aggressors as it might seem. They are forced to commit these atrocities. Given half the chance, My Luck shoots their commander John Wayne, though in silence this protest shows that these children have just had enough of his cruelty, they just could not take it anymore. My Luck confesses that “ I shot the sheriff...the man who was determined to turn us into animals.”(p.29) The fact that My Luck has seen and understands that some of the horrors they are forced to partake or witness are beyond human nature and can only be associated with animals shows that everything in him is just yearning to be out of this war. He just cannot allow this horrific war to take away the better of him, thus turning him into an animal which he is not.

Protagonist as victim of his own conscience

It is the sympathetic way in which My Luck narrates some of the atrocities they are forced to partake in which vividly forces the audience to feel pity for him. In-as-much-as the audience would want to believe these fellow child soldiers to be monsters, one is forced to sympathize with them and thus view them from a totally different perspective. My Luck confesses, “This is

the house where I shot my first and only pregnant woman, the minister's youngest wife. I wasn't aiming for her, but for husband, on John Wayne's orders, when she threw herself in front of me...we all cried when that woman died, except John Wayne..."(p.95) Not only did My Luck regret killing this pregnant woman, but it was not his own motive to shoot the husband in the first place. He was just following orders, orders that he was not in any capacity to question, lest his brains would be thrown out. Thus viewed from this angle, these children are not monsters, because if they were they would not cry over the death of this woman. It is only that they have been caught up in the struggle for survival, to either obey the orders and get saved or disobey them and get wiped off.

As the Noble Peace Prize winner Archbishop Desmond Tutu once argued, "It is immoral that adults should want their children to fight their wars for them...There is simply no excuse, no acceptable argument for arming children" (Brett and Stohl 2004). In the novel *Song for Night* there is complete vulnerability of these same children, the ones that by no means should be caught in the middle of these armed conflicts. There is nothing more vulnerable than a mute child, possibly shell-shocked, wondering around behind enemy lines, searching for his friends and yet his struggle is not only for survival but also with the idea of the possible transformation of what is possible. "This dirty will not wash off with water, not even in a river. What kind of God makes a world like this?"(p.131). This narration vividly captures how My Luck yearns to be out of this war, he understands the horrors he has seen and participated in and now he is yearning for his soul, if only it could be cleansed, thus allowing him to escape this terrific world and begin again with a clean soul.

Wessells (2006) postulates that the increasing use of child soldiers owes much to the fact that children, simply because of being children can more easily get traumatized, be intimidated and thus forced to commit war atrocities against their will. Concurring to this school of thought Abani uses his protagonist, My Luck to question and in a way mock the sense of morality of the society in which my Luck is brought up in. My Luck questions “If we are the great innocents in this war, then where did we learn all the evil we practice? Who taught us this? Who taught us to enjoy killing?”(p.135). It is from the analysis of the above narration which expresses uttermost regret that one can safely conclude that My Luck and his other fellow comrades are not the aggressors they literally seem to be but instead they are searching for the meaning of their lives which seems to be beyond their comprehension. Thus viewed in this context, Abani is attacking the society in which this novel was set. As if placing their children’s lives in danger by this senseless war is not enough, they have even gone an extra mile in allowing the transformation of these innocent souls into great monsters.

One does not necessarily need to run the risk of downplaying the violence children experience in the midst of war and its severe effects upon the body, mind and soul of these children and to even imagine the trauma that child soldiers are subjected to is highly tormenting Wessells (2006). Not only has My Luck found himself in horrendous situations, from forced rape, summary execution to cannibalism but he has also been subjected to severe psychological torture. The cemetery that he cuts on his forearm is highly symbolic of the psychological trauma that My Luck is caught up in. He explains that “I scratch the cemetery on my arm...I tell myself that this is only the shape of my guilt: guilt for all the lives I’ve lost or taken...guilt for losing my mother, for leaving her to die for me” (p.145). The above narration expresses uttermost regret. If only things could be

done the other way, My Luck would have opted for the better, he would have opted not to kill and not to blame himself for what fate has brought along for him. This whole search for self comprehension highly portrays the wounds that have been surged upon the soul of the helpless My Luck, and this is the worst trauma anyone, worse still a child can pass through. It is from this perspective that one can come to conclude that it is rather better to be wounded physically other than psychologically because psychologically, conquest is more permanent.

Protagonist as a victim of religion

Discrimination, perceived or real, is often a key motivating factor for children to join the armed groups. It is not unusual that many of the armed groups that recruit child soldiers are drawn from ethnic, religion, class and caste groupings that see their struggle in terms of discrimination and exploitation (Wells 2009). Chris Abani is in a way mocking the society in which My Luck and his other fellow comrades are raised into. Instead of holding up, as one people, people of the same nation, they are busy hunting down one another on the basis of who is a Muslim and who is not, who is an Igbo and who is not. Thus viewed from this perspective, My Luck and his fellow comrades are just caught up in the middle of a tribal and religious war thus directly making them victims of these unresolved grievances in their country. The question raised by a certain woman in this novel, “So are we down to killing children now?”(p.91) is highly symbolic of how Abani is attacking the evils of this society. As if the damage being advocated by this war is not enough, it has even made the elders of this society so heartless that they are determined to wipe off even children, as long as they do not belong to their tribe or their religion. The slogan seems to be: “Prove that you are one of us...Sing the call to prayer” (p.89). This situation in the novel can also be paralleled to that of the Biafran war in Nigeria which broke out as a result of the tribal

and regional tensions between the three main tribes in Nigeria, the Hausa who occupied the Northern region, the Igbo who occupied the Eastern region and the Yoruba who occupied the Western region.

Conclusion

In a nutshell, *Song for Night* offers a vivid and powerful impression of what it really is like to wander a veritable hell on earth, in a civil war which has left little for salvation. Tinged with hope and salvation reflected in statements such as “I am in the middle of a battle field. The Angelus rings and I stop and lower my head...Ijeoma and I mouth the prayer together, lips fold greedily around words we can never utter...” (p.137), My Luck and his other fellow child comrades do manage to find a grain of good amongst all the horror that fate has brought along their way. The next chapter is going to focus on Dongala’s *Johnny Mad Dog* with the intention of examining how child soldiers are at times portrayed as victimizers or perpetrators of violence.

CHAPTER 3: CHILD SOLDIERS AS VICTIMISERS IN DONGALA'S *JOHNNY MAD DOG*

This chapter sets out to analyse the novel *Johnny Mad Dog* exploring how in-as-much-as people would like to believe in the innocence of children, the struggle to survive during a civil war has turned them into real young monsters and perpetrators of the violence being experienced. Even though at times the novel portrays these child soldiers as victims of circumstances, this chapter will only focus on the instances in which they are portrayed as victimizers. This chapter is going to be divided into three sections, Firstly it is going to analyse these child soldiers as they view themselves, that is from their own perspective. Secondly it is going to analyse these children from the point of view of those around them, exactly what they take them for and finally it is going to analyse the significance of names as these children pursue their assumed identities and duties during this war.

As correctly reviewed by Los Angeles Times, the novel *Johnny Mad Dog* is set amid a civil conflict in an unnamed Western country and what transpires in this novel resembles recent conflicts in countries from Rwanda to Liberia. The government has been overthrown by insurgents who are moving into the capital as a result of the fuming racial-tribal tensions. The novel is presented from two points of view which are recounted in alternating chapters. One perspective is that of Laokole, a sixteen year old girl who is prepared to sit for her final exams at school and the other is that of Johnny, a same age rebel with a rudimentary education though he believes himself to be an intellectual and compared to his other fellow comrades, he practically is. The novel begins with Laokole hearing over the radio that there will be some looting and knowing what transpired before, in the looting which resulted in the death of her father, she

cleverly buries some valuables in the backyard, takes some with her and escapes with her crippled mother and younger brother Fofu, joining the other fleeing masses. In the meantime, Johnny and his other fellow rebels are enjoying their rampaging though not all the atrocities they partake in are entirely satisfying. Thus together they narrate a crossing of paths that has explosive results and in the end their storylines finally converge, bringing Dongala's protagonists together and even here it is violence that triumphs.

Child soldiers as they see themselves

The protagonist Johnny aged sixteen is unpredictable and very violent with little to no moral compass. He confesses "I am not a murderer," he says. "I fight wars! In war, you kill, you burn buildings, you rape women. That's normal. That's what war is all about-killing is natural!"(p.313). Johnny understands his role in the fighting and killing as that of leadership. His fourth grade education makes him believe to be more superior to his fellow comrades. As a result he takes up arms, and proudly tries to create a different social order which he believes will benefit his country through violence which is beyond imagination. To him, killing has become the natural order of life and has become his rightful duty; it is what is expected of him, because it is in a war and also because he thinks he understands the course of things better since he has been to school. Thus in the context of this argument, Mad Dog, unlike My Luck in the novel *Song for Night* has lost his moral compass. It has been drained down the war pipe line, and his conscience has succumbed to the war.

As correctly pointed out by Rosen (2005) and Bennet (1998), children in war are a difficult enemy, not only for emotional and moral reasons, but because they lack adult rationality and will

not only fight in hopeless situations but also in pointless ones. In the novel *Johnny Mad Dog*, the protagonist is portrayed accordingly. Not only is he fighting for the sake of fighting, killing for the sake of killing, it has rather gone out off way and he has now stooped to the level of killing innocent children arguing that he would not take chances in sparing the enemy. He professes that “These people didn’t know me. They thought I was a weakling whose heart would melt under the influence of tears and entreaties. But a Chechen is a Chechen-and a Mayi-Dogo kid, whatever his age, was a Chechen in the making” (p.227). The fact is that Mad Dog has grown so ruthlessly that he does not even think twice about killing innocent children this war. In one incident he narrates the level of his callousness: “...blam! I fired into the throat of the kneeling boy” (p.227). Considering the tone which Mad Dog is using, one can easily concur to what has been pointed out by Rosen (2005) and Bennet (1998). Mad Dog has become a very difficult soldier who is now fighting in pointless situations, and as if that is not enough he is even bragging about his whole merciless character despite the fact that he has just killed an innocent soul kneeling down before him, pleading to him to spare his life as if he was some kind of a god. Thus in light of the above analysis, one can safely argue that unlike My Luck in the novel *Song for Night* who constantly questions his morality in situations like these, Mad Dog is now left with little or no conscience at all.

In as much as the likes of Wessells (2006) and Singer (2005) would like to challenge the long held stereotypes of child soldiers as predators or as a long lost generation, the novel *Johnny Mad Dog* does present these child soldiers in a negative light. As if sexually violating their wives and daughters in front of their husbands and fathers respectively in pursuit of their greediness was not enough, Mad Dog narrates, “Then we searched the women, squeezing their tits, stroking their

bellies, feeling their asses.” Mad Dog and his fellow comrades proceeded to assault the oldest man in this group of fleeing victims, old enough to be their grandfather, simply because they had collected so little money from them. Even though he tried pleading with them, “My son...” It was just not his day, he had encountered merciless aggressors, Mad Dog proudly narrates how “Little Pepper shot him full in the chest before he’d even finished his sentence” (p.226). In light of the above analysis one can safely come to terms with the fact that these children have turned into young monsters, in as much as most humanitarians would like to dismiss them as innocent victims, their greediness has desperately turned them into this ‘lost generation’, they can do anything, worse still kill, as long as it is for money.

As correctly pointed out by Dominic Thomas (2008), in satirically attacking the consequences of the disintegration of the postcolonial state, Dongala explores the complicated path towards democratization, the path that has generated a civil and ethnic war and at the same time presenting Mad Dog and his fellow comrades as monsters. Though he is attacking the society that has engulfed Mad Dog and his fellow comrades in a senseless war for neglecting their respective roles and responsibilities as citizens the fact that this literary text poses these children as some kind of monsters cannot be overlooked. To emphasize this, Rosen (2005) argues that, just like in the case of Palestine, youthful militancy does not only energize the resistance but also enthralls the army with the seductive power of the child hero bearing arms. The question that then comes afore is: is this power really that seductive when in fact it is doing nothing but to corrode childhood innocence? In one instance Mad Dog callously says to Mr Ibara, one of victims, “We won’t kill you, Mr. Ibara. We’ll kill your wife if you don’t fuck her-right now, in this living room, while we watch. Make up your mind! Either fuck your wife or we will kill her”

(p.239)! The fact that these children now have the power to shamelessly order around their elders, like some puppets demonstrates that their childhood innocence has succumbed to the woes of this war. This war has really turned these children into monsters most would reluctantly want to believe.

Drumbl (2002) also challenges the dominant humanitarian concept that child soldiers are simply vulnerable individuals exploited by adults who use them as cheap, expandable and malleable weapons of war. In his view child soldiers are where they are because they made the rational decision that they had to be there. Johnny Mad Dog seems to subscribe to this view. Emmanuel Dongala's protagonist is not forcibly recruited into the absurd armed civil war which is explored in the literary text. He does not fight for the sake of revenge or anything along those lines. He admits that he had no personal issues with the people he later victimizes when he says, "...like the individuals who'd protested aloud and been beaten for their words, I didn't believe what he was saying, and for a very simple reason: until that day...we'd never had any problems with the Mayi-Dogos..." Nonetheless he rationally joins the armed struggle because he got impressed by the fact that the man who addressed them, advocating for them to fight against the Mayi-Dogos was an intellectual. He says "So believe me. If I were asked to take the word of a soldier, a businessman, a magician, or an intellectual, I wouldn't hesitate to put my faith in the intellectual. With so much knowledge in their heads, people like that couldn't possibly lie." Unlike My Luck in the novel *Song for Night*, Mad Dog does not take up arms as a way of seeking revenge, he is not stigmatized in anyway, he is not forced to commit any atrocities against his will. He is simply swept away in the glory of the war and has this unsustainable hunger to exercise his authority.

Unlike the child soldiers in Chris Abani's *Song for Night*, the ones that are being portrayed in this novel *Johnny Mad Dog* have let the inhuman situations which they have been subjected to remorselessly take the better of them and murderers have become their middle names even though Mad Dog sometimes ironically questions his new identity. He narrates, "From the various districts loyal to our new president came a stream of armed men-militia fighters, soldiers from the 'regular' army, and looters. But why bother saying...I should have said simply 'looters,' because that's what they are, jackals and hyenas coming out of their lairs, drawn by the smell of blood and plunder. Except for us, the Roaring Tigers" (p.223). Looters, is what they are. Even the Roaring Tigers, the group being led by Mad Dog. Johnny, earlier on laments, "Even if we looted them a thousand times, they would always manage to hang onto something..." But simply because it is now the remaining threads of conscience which are now talking, the remaining shreds of childhood innocence he is denying the identities they proudly assumed ever since the beginning of this civil war. But neither does that draw him backwards nor does he show any sense of regretion, ironically he continues to fight.

Mad Dog and his other fellow comrades are portrayed as the proud perpetrators of this violent experience during the unnamed African civil conflict, this senseless destruction of lives and property, an endless sequence of rape and death. Mad Dog is not sympathetic, and Dongala presents this fact so raw, without even attempting to excuse him or his actions. Thus he is vividly portrayed as the monster he has turned out to be. He confesses, "These people didn't know me. They thought I was a weakling whose heart would melt under the influence of tears and treaties...Shut up!" he yells at the mother who was begging him to save his son but to prove the fact that he was just not humane anymore, worse still a child anymore, he goes on to shoot the

young boy, despite the fact that his mother was crying for him to save this little soul. The fact that this young boy was on his knees crying did not even appeal to his conscience. Thus in context of this discussion, unlike My Luck in the novel *Song for Night* who killed because he was under the order that he would be killed himself if he fails to partake an atrocity, Johnny is totally different. The war has taken the better of him, and as he constantly tries to justify himself, he is only killing because that is what is expected of him, because it is a war.

Child soldiers from the perspective of those around them

(Cohn 1994) argues that humanitarian efforts to ban child soldiers in international law are ill-conceived because naively they fail to recognize that armed children are not victims of adult manipulation but thinking agents of their own destiny. In the novel *Johnny Mad Dog*, Mad Dog was not forcibly recruited into the armed conflict, he made his own decision after assessing what he thought were the valid reasons to join arms. It is after he decided his own destiny that he became a monster and thus everyone in his society sees him likewise. Accusations such as “It was Mad Dog, the militiaman who had ruthlessly gunned down the little fruit seller in the street...He was a beast. He was getting ready to strike the child again”(p.309) become commonplace. Unlike the child soldiers in *Song for Night*, these ones had become real monsters, swept up in the glory of the war. Mad Dog and his fellow comrades committed these atrocities in their own will. One of the refugees describes the excesses of the child soldiers by saying “I wasn’t raped in private-the crime was committed in public. Seven soldiers brutally violated me in front of about fifty people, including my daughter...She is twelve years old...” Bearing in mind that these child soldiers have stooped to the levels of raping their own mothers, shamelessly, one can then safely come to terms with the fact that, this war has managed to yank away childhood

innocence from them and thus they cannot be classified as innocent victims anymore, but rather shameful aggressors.

As correctly postulated by the Framing theory, this issue of child soldiering, just like any other controversial issues it can be viewed from different perspectives depending on how the message is articulated and also on how it impacts upon those who receive it. Unlike Chris Abani's *Song for Night* which poses its attack for the use of child soldiers merely on the society for generating a senseless war which has seen their sons being unfairly drawn into the armed conflict, Dongala's *Johnny Mad Dog*, though its brimming with violence, it literarily attacks the Western society for indirectly fostering ethnic tensions in Africa. When all is well, they want to be in Africa, exploiting her and repatriating profits to their own continents but when things go wrong, they yell "We are European citizens-some of us are even Americans. So show us some consideration...when I say we've got priority, we indeed have priority..." (p.151). As if being whisked back to their own continents and leaving Africa in its mess is not enough, animals are given priority over human beings, and a pet is saved in the general confusion. One of the US refugee showers sentiments towards the animal through statements such as "My little one! My darling! I have to find him" (p.160)! Ironically, poor innocent animals are worthy more than human beings. One of the International evacuating team unashamedly proclaims: "We are here to evacuate as many of them (gorillas) as possible, because they are being endangered by this stupid war. The factions are killing even animals-poor innocent animals" (p.282)! But is this being humane, when they are leaving a poor girl to rot alone in the midst of a forest, when Milanie's body is rolled over by the gigantic trucks thrice, only after the pet has been saved? Thus in context of this analysis, Dongala is arguing that before placing the blame upon Mad Dog and his

fellow comrades, the root of all this brutality lies in the hands of the West. If only it had intervened, as it ought to, Mad Dog and his fellow comrades would not have found themselves killing, raping and all but instead of prioritizing the lives of these children, the lives of the other citizens whose lives were at a greater risk, animals and pets are given the priority.

Significance of names in a civil war

As correctly pointed out by a number of scholars like Chinua Achebe, there is a lot behind a name. There is some kind of unforeseen force behind it. People do not adopt new names for the sake of adopting them but they do so as a way of applauding this unforeseen force behind certain names. In the novel *Johnny Mad Dog*, names being adopted by Mad Dog and his fellow comrades symbolize how this war has yanked away any form of childhood innocence in these child soldiers and has replaced it by some extreme form of brutality. The protagonist of this novel, Johnny changed his name thrice during the course of this war. In the early chapters, we encounter him as Lufua Liwa, a name whose significance he proudly acknowledges when he says “A name isn’t just a name. A name contains hidden power. It’s no accident that I’ve taken the name Lufua Liwa, which means ‘Kill Death’ or rather ‘Cheat Death’...”(p.9). As if cheating death is not enough damage upon childhood innocence, he later on adopts the name Matiti Mabe - a reference to some kind of poisonous weed - a name which everyone around him, including his commander, thought to be a stupid name in a war. Realizing that his name Matiti Mabe did not offer him the zeal he wanted as a leader, a name just pops up. He narrates the incident thus: “And wham! A name exploded in my brain...A strong, powerful name. A name that inspires the same gut-wrenching terror that a condemned man feels before firing the squad, a name that makes people tremble when they see it on a sign.”(p.98) Thus in the light of the above analysis, Johnny

cannot be termed a victim anymore, the war has turned him into a monster and the worst part of it is he proudly acknowledges the fact that he is now a monster; the fact that he has been swept up in the glory of the war.

Not only does Mad Dog keep on changing his names, even the military group that he joins keeps on changing from name to name and this strongly signifies the faith they had in names. Mad Dog, earlier on, still known as Lufua Liwa confesses, “It was no accident that we were called the Mata Mata-the Death Dealers-for we were completely fearless when killing others or when meeting death ourselves” (p.7). In the context of the above narration one can come to terms with how much names signified power during this war and also how it revealed the loss of childhood innocence. Not only is the child protagonist proud to be part of a group called ‘Death Dealers’, but the fact that he highly acknowledges that to him killing and dying was that normal at such a tender age demonstrates that these children had proudly assumed the role of perpetrating this violence. As the narration proceeds, Mad Dog, now the leader of the faction believes ‘death dealers’ alone does not truly reflect what the group represents. To him it is still humane, of which what they wanted was to be invincible. Consequently, he changes the group’s name to Roaring Tigers. He yells, “What’s our name?...The Roaring Tigers! They yelled in unison, without the slightest hesitation” (p.97). The fact that they have now acknowledged that their kind of brutality is beyond what can be considered to be human but can only be associated with animals clearly demonstrates that these children are nothing but victimizers.

Conclusion

In a nut shell the discussion above has problematised the notion of childhood which is postulated by the New Sociology of Childhood theory which states that one is a child up until the age of eighteen. That it is only when one is eighteen that he or she can make fully informed decisions. Before then teenage brains are not fully wired to make such decisions. The chapter has demonstrated that child soldiers do not easily fall into one category: victims. By making references to My Luck in *Song for Night*, the discussion has clearly shown that the subject of child soldiers is a complex one. The next chapter continues the discussion by projecting the complexity of this subject through demonstrating the fact that one child soldier can be both victim and victimizer.

CHAPTER FOUR: CHILD SOLDIERS AS BOTH VICTIMS AND VICTIMISERS IN IWEALA'S *BEASTS OF NO NATION*

This chapter sets out to analyse the novel *Beasts of No Nation* demonstrating the complexity of the subject of child soldiers through the portrayal of one child soldier as both the victim and the victimizer. It is going to emphasize on how the question of whether these children are victims or perpetrators has no obvious answer. This chapter is going to be divided into two major sections which are the portrayal of the protagonist as a victim and the portrayal of this same person as a victimizer.

As correctly reviewed by Emilie Crofton (2011) and Simon Baker (2005), the novel *Beasts of No Nation* follows the story of Agu, a young boy who is forced to become a soldier in an unnamed West African country where civil war is splitting up families and claiming lives. His father has been killed and like the other entire woman in the village, his mother and sister have long since fled. After being dragged from his hiding place, he is attacked by a boy about his age and is then offered a lifeline by the group's leader known simply as Commandant: if he will join their fight against the enemy – the enemy who killed Agu's father, they will leave him unharmed. In a sort of Pidgin English, Agu describes his horrifying experiences of war which happen in the aftermath and these include murder, mutilation, rape, cannibalism, starvation and thirst. Even though he commits unimaginable crimes, Agu fights to remember his previous self and the good son he once was before this war. The novel shifts between the present day's war torn atrocities and Agu's past life of living peacefully with his family: his love of books, his childhood friends, his village, his school-teacher father and his religious mother. It is by living through these memories that Agu tries to convince himself that he is not a 'bad boy.'

THE PROTAGONIST AS A VICTIM

Agu, the protagonist of this novel is portrayed as a victim of circumstances. He is a victim of identity crisis, sexual abuse, forcible attacks and as if all this is not enough, he is also subjected to extreme hunger and starvation and he confesses, "Hunger is attacking me because I am not eating anything since long..." (p.40).

The protagonist as a victim of identity crisis

This war has seen Agu being subjected to the problem of identity crisis. Neither can he associate himself with his previous innocent self nor can he accept his new identity as a soldier and monster he seems to be. He anxiously confesses, "I am not a bad boy. I am not a bad boy, I am soldier and soldier and soldier is no bad if he is killing...So if I am killing, then I am only doing what is right. I am singing song to myself because I am hearing too many voice in my head telling me I am a bad boy."(p.23) An analysis of the above narration shows that Agu is caught up in some form of uncertainty and confusion. As correctly pointed out by Machel (2001), identity crisis is one of the main effects of armed struggles upon the not yet fully developed neurological mind of children. If this psychological state can affect even adult soldiers, one can only imagine the acuteness of the anxiety it brings along on a teenage mind. Agu is now being haunted by his own conscience, his childhood innocence cannot let him escape with this kind of brutality and thus as a result he is now hearing voices in his head, voices which are constantly reminding him of the murderer he has tend out to be. The fact that he keeps on trying to justify his actions demonstrates that he really is a victim of identity crisis.

A onetime child soldier, Ishmael Beah, now the United Nations goodwill ambassador for children affected by war separated from his family at the age of twelve once confessed, “We went from children who were afraid of gunshots to now children who were the gunshots...”(Brett and Stohl 2004). This confession does not necessarily mean that he was celebrating his new identity. He is actually moaning about what he has become and this is exactly what is happening in the novel *Beasts of No Nation*. Agu is just failing to come to terms with his new identity as a murderer and thus he constantly reminds himself, “But they are screaming like Devil is coming for them. I am not Devil. I am not bad boy. I am not bad boy. Devil is not blessing me and I am not going to hell. But I am still thinking maybe Devil born me and that is why I am doing all of this...” (p.48). The fact that Agu keeps on reminding himself that he is not a bad boy, that he is only doing what ought to be done demonstrates that Agu has become a victim of identity crisis. He confesses “Anyway everything is not mattering too much because I am just following order and not have to do anything else...” (p.103). Thus in light of this analysis, just like My Luck in the novel *Song for Night*, Agu is a victim of this war.

Protagonist as a victim of sexual violence

As correctly pointed out by Denov (2010), armed conflicts create a new social structure in the livelihoods of those children who are either forcibly recruited or coerced into signing up. This social structure is characterized by extreme torture based on inhumanity, detachment and cruelty. Within this violent realm child soldiers are subjected to individual or worse still gang rape by their adult male counterparts. Agu draws the sympathy of the reader when he confesses, “...he is beginning to touch me all over with his finger while he is breathing even harder. But each time he is doing this to me, he is telling me, it is what commanding officer is supposed to be doing to

his troop. Good soldier is following order anyway...I don't want to be good soldier but I am not saying that" (p.84). As if this language is not raw enough for the reader to understand how horrible Agu's experiences were, he goes on to say, "...he was telling me to kneel and he was entering inside of me the way man goat is sometimes mistaking other man goat for woman goat and going inside of them." This narration vividly demonstrates how Agu's childhood innocence is being yanked away by this war, and as if that is not enough victimization, he confesses, "But me, I was not struggling because I am knowing that he will be killing me if I am struggling and since I am not wanting to die, I just let him to be moving back and forward even though it is hurting me so so much" (p.85). As if being sexually violated is not enough, the fact that Agu knows that in order to live through this misery he is not supposed to question an orders vividly demonstrates that he really is a victim of this war.

Furthermore, as correctly pointed out by Cohn (1994), children are forcibly recruited into armed conflicts because they offer adult soldiers services that they cannot be offered by their age mates and such services include sexual services. Simply because of the fact that they are young and cannot resist the pressure they are subjected to by the adult soldiers, child soldiers end up playing the role of sexual slaves to their masters. What hurts most is the fact that even boys are forced to offer such services to their male counterparts. Agu confesses, "I do not want to be taking off my clothes, but I am not saying so because Commandant is powerful more than me and he also sometimes giving me small small favor like more food or protection and other thing like shirt or trouser for doing this thing with him..." (p.83). An analysis of the above confession demonstrates how in as much as Agu does not want to play the role of a sex slave he just cannot say so because he is afraid of what the commandant would do to him since he is more powerful

than him. To imagine the fact that he is also docile to this kind of brutality simply because sometimes the Commandant rewards him with little favours hurt most. He is simply an innocent victim of circumstances and has to do whatever that ought to be done if he ever wants to survive in this war which is significantly posing a threat on his innocence.

Protagonist as a victim of forcible operations

It is the sympathetic way in which Agu narrates some of his experiences and atrocities they are forced to partake in which vividly forces the audience to feel pity for him. In as much as the audience would want to believe these fellow child soldiers to be monsters, one is forced to sympathize with them and thus view them from a totally different perspective. Agu narrates how Commandant forced him to partake in his first murder when he says “He is grabbing my neck and whispering into my ear, kill him now because I am not having the time oh. If you are not killing him, enh. Luftenant will be thinking you are a spy. And who know he won’t just be killing you” (p.20). Not only has he been forcibly recruited after virtually being left without an option, Agu is now being forced to murder against his own will. If only he was sure his life would be spared even after sparing this so called enemy of his, one can safely argue that with the childhood innocence well versed in him, he would not have thought about it twice, but simply because it is the quest of his own survival, he is left with no option other than killing.

As correctly argued by Magdalena Czyz (2008) children’s individual perceptions of reality are shaped by their developmental processes as well as the environments they are brought up in. Sometimes the environment potentially plays a role in sending messages putting forth pressures

that direct them towards taking part in violence. This view is captured in Agu's narration when he says,

So we are playing all this game then and thinking that to be a soldier was to be the best thing in the world because is looking so powerful and the men in the movie are looking so powerful when they are killing people, but I am knowing now that to be a soldier is only to be weak and not strong, and to have no food to eat and not to eat whatever you want, and also to have people making you do thing that you are not wanting to do...p.31

The first part of the above narration vividly demonstrates how as a child, Agu grew up looking forward to be a soldier. To him being a soldier used to be everything a man would aspire to be and all this notion of his thinking is as a result of the environment he grew up in. It is with the uttermost regret in which he expresses the last part of the above narration which almost draws the reader to tears, the fact that he only knows now that to be a soldier is to be victimized, that it is only to have people ordering you around in partaking atrocities beyond imagination that hurts most. By being a soldier he has literally lost a voice in his own life.

THE PROTAGONIST AS THE PERPETRATOR OF VIOLENCE

As correctly pointed out by Singer (2005) feelings of revenge and a sense of humiliation often drive children into armed groups. Seeing their parents killed or humiliated, their sisters raped and their community attacked is a powerful motivating force. This often results in adding to the cycle of violence, with revenge leading to counter-revenge and children of ten becoming perpetrators. This view is portrayed in Agu's narration then he says, "AYIIIEEE! Woman is just looking at me and screaming. And I am shouting, SHUT UP!...This woman is enemy. She is killing my family

and burning my house and stealing my food and making my family to scatter” (p.51). It is because of the burning up feelings of revenge which Agu is failing to contain that see him becoming an aid in the cycle of this violence. The question that then comes afore is that is this woman really the enemy that Agu is going after or has she simply fallen to be an innocent of circumstances? In light of this analysis, one can safely conclude that Agu is not only a victim as it might have solely appeared to be in the discussion before this one, he has also become a selfish victimizer.

Contrary to the New Sociology of Childhood theory which stipulates that a child is a child till the age of eighteen and before then he or she cannot make rational decisions, Denov (2010) argues that the fact that commanding officers of armed conflicts such as the Revolutionary United Front in Sierra Leone found it necessary to administer these child soldiers with alcohol and drugs in order to ensure that they follow orders vividly portrays that children of all ages were able to make judgments on the orders they were given and were capable of deciding whether or not to follow through with a certain order. This view is projected in Agu’s narration when he says, “But everybody is getting gun juice. Everybody is always wanting gun juice because it is drug and making life easy easy. Gun juice is making you to be stronger and braver...I am struggling to get my own so I can be putting it in my mouth” (p.43-44). Agreeing to what Denov has said Iweala also seems to be blaming these child soldiers for their own actions. It seems as if he is arguing that people should not simply dismiss them to being passive victims of this war, the fact that Agu is even struggling to get drugged even after he has shown that he knows the consequences of being drugged shows that he has made the decision to fight. If this is the

argument then Agu is not only a victim in this war, he also has grown to be the perpetrator of this violence.

The general portrayal of children in these circumstances rarely tells the whole story; these guys as correctly pointed out by Rosen (2005) are often rational actors. They have made the decision that not fighting is even worse than fighting. The way Agu feels excited by the carnage when he says, “ I am raising my knife high above my head. I am liking the sound of the knife chopping KPWUDA KPWUDA on her head and how the blood is just splashing on my hand and my face and my feet.”(p.51) vividly portrays the fact that is no longer an innocent victim most would like to believe. Unlike My Luck in the novel *Song for Night*, his childhood innocence has been yanked away by this war, his morality has succumbed to the woes of this cruel war. Thus in light of this analysis, Agu is not merely a victim of this war, he is also now an aiding agent in the cycle of this violence.

Conclusion

In a nutshell, judging from the arguments that rose above, this question of child soldiering as portrayed in Iweala’s *Beasts of No Nation* is a very complex one and as correctly pointed out by the Framing theory, it can have a number of different answers, it all depends on how the message is passed along and also on how the recipients articulate it. Even though these children are pulled into war, transmogrified and forced to become soldiers at a tender age, they are not merely passive victims and neither are they flat out ruthless killers. Infact, as hard as it is, they might very well fall into both categories. As evidenced in the argument above, one child soldier can be both victim and victimizer at the same time.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

Summary

Analysis of the previous chapters was centered on how the question of whether children, be they forcibly recruited or coerced into taking part in armed conflicts should either be held responsible for their own actions or should simply be dismissed as passive or innocent victims. The analysis of Chris Abani's *Song for Night* focused on the portrayal the child protagonist My Luck as an innocent victim. No matter how hard the war works on yanking away his childhood innocence, he tirelessly keeps his grip on the few shreds of his childhood which are left. Contrary to chapter two, the analysis of Emmanuel Dongala's *Johnny Mad Dog* in chapter three focused on the portrayal of the child protagonist Johnny as a 'monster' he literally seems to be. In as much as some literary critics such as Machel (1996) and anthropologists such as Professor Jason Hart would like to believe in childhood innocence, Johnny's innocence has succumbed to the woes of this war. The analysis of Uzodnma Iweala's *Beasts of No Nation* in chapter four overallly tried to address the question of whether these children should be classified as monsters or victims of which it was proven that one child soldier, as evidenced by the child protagonist Agu's experiences can fit in both personas. This chapter brought out the complexity of the subject of child soldiers.

Conclusion

The New Sociology of Childhood theory tries as much as it can to shift blame from these child soldiers and place it on the adult society for not assuming their supposed roles of protecting their children by arguing that the neurological development of the human mind only reaches a completion at the age of eighteen. This childhood theory postulate that it is only when one is

eighteen that he or she can be in a position to make what can really be termed as a 'rational' decision. It is then from this point of argument that one then is forced to view these children from the point of view of innocence. But then one would like to argue if this point of view literally cleans the soul and the mind. If one kills, he literally becomes a murderer, if one rapes, he literally becomes a rapist, what then is the point of dismissing them as innocent victims when in actual fact they have committed unimaginable crimes?

However, to solely dismiss them as 'murderers', 'rapists', 'thieves' and so forth would also be quite unfair on them. The fact that some if not most of these child soldiers, are forcibly recruited should count in dismissing them as innocent victims. Furthermore, the fact that these children are more often than not forced to partake in these atrocities at the bargaining prize of their lives should also make the world more lenient towards their aggressive behaviour. People should try and imagine themselves in their shoes. Given such a dilemma of choosing between your life and someone else's, whether you should die so that the next person lives, or the next person should so that you live, naturally, most would opt for their lives to be spared at the expense of the next person's. Viewed in light of this analysis, these children cannot solely be dismissed as victimizers but also as passive victims of circumstances, who only did what had to be done. Otherwise they did what the adults did not have the guts to do and simply because they are children failed to resist the pressure mounted on them.

In a nutshell, the subject of child soldiering is a very complex one. Children cannot solely be dismissed as innocent victims and neither can they be held responsible for their own actions. It all depends on who sends the message, how the message impacts on the listeners and what they

choose to conclude, and if this is the case, this question of child soldiering has unlimited answers. Basing on the arguments raised through the analysis of the novels *Song for Night*, *Johnny Mad Dog* and *Beasts of No Nation*, this research would like to conclude that basically, child soldiers fit both personas, that is flat out ruthless killers, which is the 'monsters' class and that of passive innocents, which is the 'victims' class.

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