

Sudan (the list of acknowledgements reads like a who's who of Sudan scholarship) and should also be of interest to scholars of state–society relations and traditional authorities in other parts of Africa as it challenges key assumptions about the evolution of chieftaincy in the colonial period and beyond.

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Transitional Justice for Child Soldiers: Accountability and Social Reconstruction in Post-Conflict Contexts by KIRSTEN J. FISHER

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The victories of international human rights law (namely, more law – particularly at the global level – protecting more classes of people) may prevail without much critical thinking about whether these victories actually help the declared beneficiaries. Such is the case with many of the legal and policy developments prompted by the aching transnational concern for the child soldier. These developments root themselves in universalised portrayals of the child soldier that ooze narratives of helplessness and incapacity. They also tend to depict the children as little more than dehumanised tools of war and as damaged goods in the war's aftermath. This imagery is personified through the physicality of a prepubescent boy barely able to hold an AK-47 and, thereby, skips over the reality that the majority of such children are in the 15–18 age cohort and that roughly 40% are girls. These portrayals, moreover, are deeply Africanised notwithstanding the fact that child soldiery is a global phenomenon.

In this book, Kirsten Fisher joins a chorus of critical voices from diverse disciplines who contest the universalisation of these portrayals as well as the essentialisation and exoticisation of child soldiers into other images much more sinister in tone (for example, that of a crazed irredeemable bandit). Fisher, however, takes specific aim at what she calls the 'unhelpful and deceptive' narrative of child 'non-responsibility', according to which 'no person under the age of 18 can possess the capacity to be responsible for acts of atrocity they commit as a member of an armed force or armed group'. Drawing from ethnographic studies, she observes the occluding effect of this image. She notes the problematic fact that the reintegration experience of child soldiers who have committed acts of atrocity is tricky and unsettled. Fisher argues that attributing responsibility to these specific children would serve justice needs and also enhance the durability of their social reintegration.

Fisher tracks the pre-existing critical literature and its source material quite closely. In this sense, her book reinforces the salience of this emergent literature, which is beginning to get traction within global civil society. Law- and policy-makers need to think hard about how to recognise juvenile agency, how to support the best interests of youth in the post-conflict period and how to build an active culture of juvenile rights and citizenship.

Although Fisher's book unpacks much of what has already been written, she also makes some thoughtful and original additions. She references her own fieldwork in northern Uganda, although this aspect of the book could perhaps have been brought out more. Fisher, moreover, parts company with other

scholars with her support of criminal prosecutions, including under international institutions, for former child soldiers. Hence, Fisher at times interchangeably discusses culpability and responsibility. She does not see such prosecutions as appropriate for the majority of child soldiers, but wishes for this option to be added to the table in certain limited cases where the youthful fighters have engaged in systematic human rights abuses. In this regard, Fisher has the grit to challenge one of the central goals of many child rights' activists, namely, to categorically preclude the possibility of such trials. For Fisher, such trials serve retributive and expressive goals. Herein lies her justification for retaining them as a policy option.

Fisher's proposal for criminal trials is well-delivered. Ultimately, however, she may not persuade. It remains very debatable that criminal trials can attain her goals of resocialisation; they may, in fact, impede this objective by stigmatising the child. Fischer would fetter these trials with so much procedural protection for the juvenile defendants (and so many defences) that, for all intents and purposes, the retributive/expressive aspects of the process—her very justification—would evaporate. So, why bother? Why not simply proceed with alternative methods of justice that are not retributive in nature? The focus on exogenous international institutions, moreover, might come to supplant the development of the local bottom-up approaches—customary ceremonies, for example, and reciprocity oriented service projects—that research indicates offer the kinds of reintegration, rehabilitation and restoration measures that best promote justice and citizenship for former child soldiers.

Fisher's book is a valuable contribution to the discourse. She gracefully connects debates over child soldiers with very wide-ranging discussions as to the merits of international criminal prosecutions. Her writing is rigorous and accessible to a broad audience. Fisher makes a bold argument; she challenges orthodoxies and reveals many of them to be shibboleths. Her book is essential reading for anyone, regardless of discipline, concerned about coming to terms with and preventing child soldiering.

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Whispering Truth to Power: Everyday Resistance to Reconciliation in Postgenocide Rwanda by SUSAN THOMPSON

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For twenty years the government of Rwanda, led by the ruling party the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), has embarked on an ambitious modernisation programme to refashion Rwandan politics, society and economy. The vision to transform the small African state into a middle-income country by 2020 follows years of elite-dominated divisive politics that culminated in economic collapse, extreme poverty and the 1994 genocide and civil war. Although the RPF has been praised and criticised for its choice of development interventions in almost equal measure, little is known about how Rwandan citizens respond