

## BOOKS

## GLOBAL AFFAIRS

## Suffer not the children

OLIVIA WARD

What is innocence, and what is guilt?

Who is the aggressor, and who the victim?

Consider this passage from Roméo Dallaire's devastating new book, in which a fictionalized peacekeeper, defending an African village from a barbaric band of rebels, stops just long enough to look down at a guerrilla he has shot.

"The rebel with the blazing machine gun who had raced around the corner of the building firing away at anyone and everything, including me, now lay face up and dying in the mud, twisted, bleeding and barely able to breathe. But that was not the horror that instantly burned so many circuits in my brain that it ended up turning me into a casualty too.

that I had inflicted on her child body."

The passage follows an earlier chapter illustrating the life of an archetypal boy soldier: kidnapped, beaten, exposed to appalling brutality, drugged and forced to commit unspeakable acts.

Dallaire's *They Fight Like Soldiers, They Die Like Children*, written with Jessica Dee Humphreys, is not for the faint-hearted nor those seeking a quick horror hit.

**AT TIMES IT** is emotionally grinding at other times, didactic. But it is meticulously thorough, taking no prisoners among the politicians, militaries and aid agencies that

Roméo Dallaire has a blueprint to end and heal the pain of child soldiers; social critic Henry Giroux ponders how the world came to all this

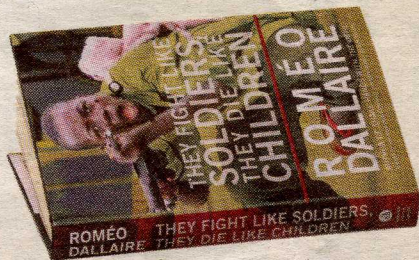
wrote the bestselling *Shake Hands with the Devil* (2003) on his experiences as a peacekeeper during the Rwandan genocide, when he commanded a hopelessly outnumbered group of United Nations troops who were forced to witness the slaughter of hundreds of thousands.

He has since worked with the child soldiers of Africa's wars and created a wide-ranging research program called the Child Soldier Initiative. That effort is an attempt to build the political will and technical capacity of military, human rights and aid organizations to stamp out recruitment and bring perpetrators to justice.



Dallaire has the street cred to nav-

"The torn uniform was there in the mud, and the machine gun, but the warrior had vanished. Lying in his place was a youth, a young teenager, at the most 13 or 14 years old. A child. A girl. . . I was observing the grossest of human indecencies . . . observing the transformation of a warrior back into a child and that child was now dying — of wounds



**They Fight Like Soldiers, They Die Like Children**  
by Roméo Dallaire  
Random House Canada,  
307 pages, \$34.95



have failed to . . . efforts to stop the plague of child recruitment that turns kidnapped children into mind-blown "weapons systems." When faced with the daunting prospect of restoring these traumatized young killers to society, those responsible have failed again.

Dallaire, now a Liberal senator,



**Hearts of Darkness: Torturing Children in the War on Terror**  
by Henry A. Giroux  
Paradigm, 131 pages, \$17.95



igate the tangled web of terror, brutality, guilt and deception that turns children into brain-addled murderers. His experience adds a unique dimension, that of the troops brought in to restore order but finding themselves unwilling executors of those young enough to be their children.

Guilt and innocence are again the central duality of *They Fight Like Soldiers*, which struggles to come to terms with the meaning of responsibility for evil, of punishment and restitution, and of the possibility of redemption. It advances the previous book's *cri de coeur* against the world's passivity in the face of horrific suffering, and lays the groundwork for averting future catastrophe. It is for those seeking real-world solutions rather than heart-tugging sound bites.

"Not being a developed adult has the intrinsic dimension of innocence, even in the legal sense," Dallaire said recently. "These children are trying to grapple with situations that are beyond the ability even of a mature adult to handle. When you throw them into this extreme scenario, their innocence is expanded, not reduced. Those traumas fry a part of their brain."

Some may find fanciful his ambitious long-term campaign. It demands the co-operation of such unlikely allies as the military, aid organizations, donors, civil society, politicians and the shattered



TORONTO STAR FILE PHOTO

**Teen militia members in Mogadishu, Somalia.**

communities in which the warrior children live. It's a jigsaw puzzle that needs infinite patience and determination — perhaps a half-century — to make whole, Dallaire admits.

**MCMMASTER EDUCATIONAL** philosopher and radical social critic Henry Giroux's new book, *Hearts of Darkness: Torturing Children in the War on Terror*, also takes a long view of damaged youth. His complex, disturbing analysis starts at the top. Giroux maintains that the George W. Bush administration set a tone of tolerance for torture whose logical conclusion was the infamous interrogation cells of Iraq's Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo Bay. He also cites what he calls the mock trial of Omar Khadr, in a military court that had no prohibitions

against testimony obtained from a wounded 15-year-old under conditions of alleged abuse, if not outright torture. Giroux doesn't let Barack Obama off that hook. "Obama appears to be legitimating, if not extending, many of the policies he inherited when he took office."

The mistreatment of captured children is a symptom of a much deeper disease, he argues. Pervasive moral nihilism has spread, swallowing children who are easily seen, even marketed, as the enemy. They include not only the children of combat, seized by American troops in foreign countries, but America's own poor whites and minority children.

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