

obviously admiring portrait of a woman of action. More precision in the citing of sources and a rather more critical approach to Clara Barton, to whom the author tends to ascribe only good qualities, would make for a more satisfying second volume.

At a time of growing awareness within the ICRC, the League and a number of National Societies that women must take part not only, as has always been the case, in the actual work of the Movement but also in the planning and supervision of that work, books like this are an opportune reminder to the public of the qualities of women who have dedicated their lives to the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement in the past.

*Marion Harroff-Tavel*

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## GOSSES DE GUERRE

*Children for whom war is not a game  
but a daily reality\**

Alain Louyot, foreign correspondent for the French magazine *L'Express*, has reported for the past twenty years from most of the hot spots of the world. In the course of his career he has been deeply affected by the faces of child combatants – in Beirut, Belfast and Gaza, in Mozambique and Angola, in the mountains of Eritrea and the ghettos of South Africa.

According to a UN study quoted by the author, there are today over 200,000 combatants under the age of fifteen, often forcibly enlisted and indoctrinated, who kill, torture and fight side by side with adults.

Family and social pressure, the author points out, are enough to convince children to enrol as combatants. This is because they can easily be manipulated and often view bearing arms as a rite of passage on the road to adulthood. Drawing on interviews with psychologists, soldiers, nurses and parents, the author explains how children become combatants and how this experience affects them permanently.

*Gosses de guerre* consists mainly of personal stories, such as that of Ali, a child taken prisoner when he was 13 years old. Ali's memories of his childhood, a time adults brought up in normal circumstances usually recall as care-

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\* Alain Louyot, *Gosses de guerre (Youngsters in War)*, Robert Laffont, Paris, 1989, 245 pp.

free, are coloured by fear and shame. Some of his fellow combatants were as young as nine when they were thrust into the heat of battle or taken prisoner. The author gives numerous such examples, pointing out that children so young, because they are unaware of danger, can be entrusted with far more hazardous assignments than adults and thus be used as a particularly lethal weapon.

Yet children can be spared such first-hand experience of combat, the author points out, if only the rules of international humanitarian law (IHL) intended to protect them in time of armed conflict are respected. These rules are contained in the 1949 Geneva Conventions and also in their Additional Protocols, which are, as the author rightly notes, a major step forward in that they urge States to refrain from recruiting children under 15 into their armed forces and to ensure that they do not take a direct part in hostilities. He goes on to say that this is "a kind of pious wish since, unlike the ICRC's original draft, the Protocols... require the States to do so only to the extent that it is 'feasible'... moreover, the recruitment of children under the age of 15 years is tolerated provided it is voluntary". However, in his chapter on the rules of IHL relating to child combatants, the author does not take into account the fact that IHL does go even further since it prohibits any participation whatsoever of children under 15 years of age, whether direct or indirect, in internal conflicts.

The author also mentions the new Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted on 20 November 1989, which was still being discussed at the United Nations when *Gosses de guerre* went to press. He notes that the Convention, which is based on international human rights instruments, was the outcome of ten years of negotiations and that the provisions it contains on child combatants are not as forceful as certain countries, European ones in particular, would have liked. By signing the Convention States agree only to "take all feasible measures to ensure that persons who have not attained the age of 15 years do not take a direct part in hostilities" (Art. 38, para. 2). However, it should be added that the Convention also points out the obligations of States under IHL, which contains no less than 25 provisions affording special protection to children in armed conflict, not to mention those that protect them as civilians not taking an active part in hostilities.

*Gosses de guerre*, a collection of heart-rending stories about children for whom war is not a game but a daily reality, leaves a lasting impression. The publication of this moving work was especially timely since 1989 witnessed the adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, the thirtieth anniversary of the Declaration of the Rights of the Child and the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Child.

*María Teresa Dutli*