

## BOOK REVIEW/ COMPTE RENDU

**J. Marshall Beier ed.** 2011. *The Militarization of Childhood: Thinking Beyond the Global South*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan. 297 pp. \$95.00 Hardcover (978-0230115767).

A significant portion of children in the world today face impacts posed by the militarization of childhood. Theoretically, the militarization of childhood has two broad meanings. First, it refers to the recruitment of children in state or non-state forces, represented most obviously through child soldiering. Secondly, it refers to children's "involvement in preparation for war" (63); this might include exposure to "militarist ideologies" or a normalization of violence more generally. In the current global world, it is becoming increasingly difficult to ignore the militarization of childhood, partly due to numerous high-profile campaigns aimed at preventing child soldiering in the global South; these have attracted some attention from the international society, especially academics in anthropology and political sociology. The scholarly literature on this phenomenon, however, is largely one-sided. Although child soldiering in the global South has drawn significant attention, there has been little discussion about the militarization of children in the global North.

*The Militarization of Childhood* challenges this asymmetry within the academic literature on militarized childhood. This timely collection of analytical essays corrects the major deficiencies in existing literature on child soldiering (an extreme aspect of militarized childhood) in the global South (especially Africa and Latin America). Academics have been mostly divided on why and how children get involved in armed conflict and take on the adult role of armed combatant. Whereas most works use a primarily "rights-based framework" (7) to explore child soldiering in the conflict-affected areas of the global South, showing less concern for theoretical exploration of the connections between militarization and childhood generally, Beier's volume explores everyday militarized childhood across a range of global contexts. Among other things, it highlights the impacts of militarist ideologies and the normalization of violence in the global North.

Beier's edited volume consists of an introduction and twelve chapters, written by established and emerging scholars from multiple disciplines, including: international political sociology, childhood studies, gender studies and international relations. In my view, this interdisci-

plinary collection succeeds in filling much-needed gaps in the literature of militarized childhood. It includes analyses of the factors that create militarized childhood in the global North and reviews of the many negative consequences of militarized childhood. Additionally, the contributions provide useful comparisons of militarized children in the global South and North.

The diverse contributors highlight various militarist ideologies and form of violence normalization in the global North. For example, in the view of Helen Brocklehurst, “military literacy” (e.g. War on Terror) has been presumed through educational material in the global North. Along similar lines, J. Marshall Beier argues that “militarized pedagogies operate through aspects of everyday life in ways both visible and unseen” (109). In the case of the United States, comic books and Hollywood movies play important roles in the militarization of childhood, especially the latter. In the view offered by Lori A. Crowe, popular superhero movies (most of which are ultra-violent) increasingly focus on deadly military weapons, which are “seemingly celebrated, glorified, and made downright sexy” (120). Many digital war games, especially MMORPG (massive multiplayer online role-playing games) encourage participants to think of war and killing as entertainment; indeed, this has become an important element of the normalization to violence in everyday life for many children. In the opinion of Nic Crowe, the most significant example might be the world-known MMORPG entitled *Warhammer 40K*, which is produced by Games Workshop — a British game production and retailing company.

The editor and contributors to this volume consider militarized childhood in the global South as well as the global North. In the case of Cypriot childhood and its militarization, Anna M. Agathangelou and Kyle D. Killian argue that militarized childhood appears in Cypriot ethnic conflicts, which originate from the nationalist discourses of Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot. It’s worth noting that there are some similarities between the child soldiers in the South and the youth gangs in the North. For example, militarization could provide the two groups of children with “alternative family and community structures” (52) and meet the need for protection to some extent. In addition, Victoria M. Basham suggests that child soldiers and youth gangs have some notable similarities when it comes to identities and rituals.

This thought-provoking volume leaves three issues under-explored and open to future research. First, the cases discussed in the chapters stress the common scenarios of militarized childhood in both the global North and South. For instance, superhero movies, digital war games and school shootings are common in both contexts. In my opinion, a

case such as “Boy Scouts,” one of the largest youth organizations in the world, could be explored to effectively contextualize militarized childhood in the North. Second, potentially positive cases of militarized childhood could be addressed, alongside the negative ones. Again, I note the example of “Boy Scouts,” an organization that attracts millions of youth in the global North. While members receive quasi-military training (e.g., wilderness survival and the use of firearms), the overwhelming majority do not become school shooters, members of violent street gangs, or child soldiers. Third, as this volume demonstrates, militarized childhood affects some children in the North, but not all children. How do most children avoid the negative influences of militarist ideologies? Are there any existing institutional arrangements that effectively reduce the negative impacts posed by militarist ideologies? If the editor and contributors would take these issues into account, their arguments would be more inclusive.

Overall, *The Militarization of Childhood* is a solid collection of scholarly essays that contributes to the literature of militarized childhood from multifaceted perspectives. As a whole, the collection succeeds in revealing the significance of childhood to militarization globally, while providing insightful considerations of militarized childhood in the global North. This edited volume would serve academics, policy-makers and students interested in the militarization of childhood and international relations. It deserves a wide and global readership.

Zhejiang University

Kai Chen

**Kai Chen**, Ph.D., is a Post-doctoral Research Fellow at the Center for Non-Traditional Security and Peaceful Development Studies, College of Public Administration, Zhejiang University, China. From November 2013 to May 2014, he holds the position of visiting scholar at East Asian Institute, National University of Singapore. His current research focuses on international relations, international security and geo-strategic relations in East Asia, especially Southeast Asia and China. He is the author of *Comparative Study of Child Soldiering on Myanmar-China Border: Evolutions, Challenges and Countermeasures* (Springer 2014).

