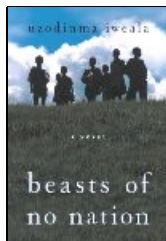


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Book Review
Beasts of No Nation
by [Uzodinma Iweala](#)

Reviewer: [Geoff Wisner](#), Staff Reviewer
Posted: February 17, 2006

Beasts of No Nation is a short, taut novel about a child soldier. Like most child soldiers, this one fights not for a government army but for a band of rebels. The book takes place in a West African country: unnamed, though the iroko tree and the names of people point to Nigeria. (The title, too, comes from an album by the legendary Nigerian musician Fela Kuti.)

The son of a schoolteacher, Agu is smart and studious. Then one day his village is attacked, and a man breaks into his house ♦ a man with a yellow eye and ♦ one big belly and leg thin like spider's own. ♦ This man drags him outside by the leg, ♦ pulling it so hard that it is like it will be coming apart like meat. ♦ Agu's nightmare begins.

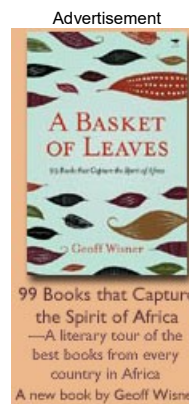
The first-person narrative captures the shock and disorientation of being kidnapped as a child and forced to witness and then commit acts of savage violence. It captures, too, the undeveloped nature of a child's conscience, which makes children with guns so frightening. ♦ I am not bad boy, ♦ Agu tells himself. ♦ I am soldier and soldier is not bad if he is killing. I am telling this to myself because soldier is supposed to be killing, killing, killing. ♦ Soon he doesn't need to tell himself even this much.


Strangely, although the people and places are believable, and the point of view is consistently that of a traumatized boy, the language does not seem quite authentic. Agu's narration seems to be converted from standard English by a few tricks, such as making every verb a present participle and turning plurals into singulars. ♦ The sun is just jumping up up into the sky so quickly that we are not even having any time before we are just sweating sweating everywhere. There are many tree around us, but they are all too far away to be giving any shade. ♦ Though I am not a Nigerian, this seems unconceiving as rendering of West African speech, and it is quite different from the patois narration of a book like Ken Saro-Wiwa's *Sozaboy*.

After a few pages the constant repetition of *ing, ing* becomes distracting and annoying. Keep reading, though, and the effect fades into the background. Though the book might have been even better if translated back to standard English, it is a impressive debut and a memorable glimpse of hell.

About the Reviewer

[Geoff Wisner](#) is a freelance writer and staff member of Indigocafe.com. He is the author of [A Basket of Leaves: 99 Books That Capture the Spirit of Africa](#). Visit his website at www.geoffwisner.com.



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