

# Child Soldier as Saint: A Ugandan Peacebuilding Paradox

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## Abstract

This paper examines the paradoxical elevation of the child soldier to the status of a folk hero in Ugandan popular culture, drawing parallels with the veneration of the Ugandan Martyrs, particularly Saint Kizito. It analyzes how the historical narrative of the martyrs, celebrated for their heroic resistance and ultimate victim-to-victor transformation, inadvertently provides a cultural framework for interpreting the figure of the child soldier during the National Resistance Army (NRA) era of the 1980s. The study explores the dissonance between the image of the child soldier as a symbol of national resistance and the grave reality of child rights violations inherent in their recruitment. By contextualizing this phenomenon within the age-old cult of saints and creative peacebuilding efforts in Uganda, the discourse argues that the child soldier, much like the young Saint Kizito, is perceived as a victim-victor by virtue of age. The paper also touches upon the varied experiences of boy and girl child soldiers, highlighting their shared victimhood and challenging conventional notions of warrior capabilities while probing the effectiveness of the security ostensibly offered by guerrilla life in the broken communities of the time.

*Keywords: Child soldier, Uganda, Ugandan Martyrs, National Resistance Army (NRA), popular culture, Saint Kizito, peacebuilding*

## Introduction

In Ugandan popular culture, the story of the Martyrs of Uganda, the Roman Catholic proselytes who were executed in the 1880s and were later canonized in 1964, has the paradox of heroism in resistance against apostasy and of victimhood that was transposed into victory in their afterlife. However, that story has hardly been explained in context of the age-old cult of saints contemporaneous to creative peacebuilding in Uganda. With such a context, the cult of Saint Kizito, which was popularized in the country after the canonization of the Ugandan Martyrs in 1964, could be seen in the brighter light of the denotation of a brazen image of a National Resistance Army (NRA) child soldier that emerged into a folk hero in the 1980s, albeit with its connotation as a grave violation of rights of the child.

The child soldier was a victim of contested incompatibilities in Uganda, which led

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to the armed conflict of the time, and was a Saint Kizito-like victim–victor by virtue of age. ‘It [was] not only boys who [were] recruited as child soldiers. Although fewer in number and given gender-specific responsibilities, girls [were] recruited, either voluntarily or through coercion, into fighting forces too.’<sup>2</sup> Whether voluntarily or involuntarily recruited, they were victims of the conflict. As child soldiers, they both lacked physical toughness and mental agility of warriors when placed in harm’s way. Their adaptability to unconventional circumstances of the Ugandan liberation struggle such as living a warrior life of the guerrilla was, arguably, buttressed in the NRA as a form of expected security to them, having come from communities broken by civil strife. How far was that expectation of their security met?

This discourse conjures the memory of a thirteen-year-old child martyr in Saint Kizito, who was subsequently revered as a young local hero in the Roman Catholic Church. In similar vein, the story of the NRA child soldier who emerged during the armed conflict in the 1980s has the paradox of victimhood from the contested incompatibilities in the struggle for power and control in the country that turned them into local heroes. Both categories of heroes had common attributes that defined them despite living almost a century apart. However, Saint Kizito became revered in the diachronic, unlike the NRA child soldier whose reverence as a local hero remained only during the Ugandan Bush War of the 1980s and its aftermath, with that acclaim for the child soldier subsequently called into question. ‘Within weeks of the UPC’s [Uganda People’s Congress] victory and formation of the second Obote government [after the presidential elections of 1980], the country was at war again: Museveni and his allies [disputed the elections and] had kept their promise to “go to the bush.”’<sup>3</sup> The Uganda National Liberation Army (UNLA) was part of the state which the NRA fought against. The 1981-86 civil war in Uganda was famously known as the Uganda Bush War since ‘the war zone was characterized by thick impenetrable forests that were suitable for launching guerilla movement’ in the marshlands...The forests provided a cover for the guerillas to launch attacks on government forces and later retreat,’ creating tactical advantage for territorial control.<sup>4</sup> ‘When armed groups pursue sovereignty by establishing territorial control, the mobility of the population is a key concern of armed groups.’<sup>5</sup> In light of memory work, the cults of Saint Kizito as a child martyr and that of the NRA child soldier developed in Ugandan popular devotion and popular culture, respectively, as plausible agency for creative peacebuilding in the country.

This discourse shares common ground to the claim of the heroism of Saint Kizito and that of the NRA child soldier in popular culture as they astutely faced up to the identity crisis to triumph over adversity as heroes, whose heroism emerged and contributed to the paradox of creative peacebuilding in Uganda. The following image which the Australian Professor of Cultural Studies, Graeme Turner, portrayed

2 Paul A. Hare, Anna Costin, and Herbert H. Blumberg, *Peace Psychology: A Comprehensive Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 43.

3 Frederick Golooba-Mutebi, *Collapse, War and Reconstruction in Uganda: An Analytical Narrative on State-Making*. Crisis States Working Paper Series No. 2. (London: LSE Destin Development Studies Institute, 2008), 14.

4 Samuel Mwesigwa, *Luwero War in the Eyes of a Witness: A Civilian Narrative of People’s War* (Kampala: T I Consortium, 2023), 5.

5 Corinna Jentzsch and Abbey Steele. ‘Social Control in Civil Wars,’ *Civil Wars* 25, no. 2-3 (2023): 452-71.

of the hero befits both the NRA child soldier and the cult of martyrs: ‘The hero is faced with a threat, a challenge, or a need which has to be met or satisfied. Those forces which will inhibit the meeting of the threat or challenge, or satisfaction of the need, are seen to be in opposition (enemy-like) to the viewer who identifies with the hero.’<sup>6</sup> That viewer may be one who identifies with the cult of Christian martyrs, or one who identifies with the cult of heroes or of a secular martyr. In the Ugandan Martyrs, African Christian believers got popular saints of their own whom they celebrated as heroes. They grew in popularity because the stories of their martyrdom resonated with the local populace. Believers knew the families from which the martyrs came, the clans into which they were born, and the roles they played in society and in the *kabaka*’s palace. In a broader context, they were Africans and their cult easily developed in popular devotion although it was promoted from above by clerics. The same could be said about popular devotion for the NRA child soldier, whose cult was promoted from below by the ordinary people.

The youngest of the Ugandan Martyrs was the thirteen-year-old Kizito who was promoted, in the cult of saints, as a patron for children and primary schools. ‘The cult of saints was born in Antiquity from the cult of martyrs, itself a form of the cult of the dead. Local churches honoured certain of their members who had fallen victim to persecution,’ argued the sociologist Pierre Delooz.<sup>7</sup> The cult of the martyrs was related to the life of the people as victims in challenging the status quo in society. The veneration of the Martyrs of Uganda was approved by Pope Benedict XV (1854-1922) after their beatification on June 6, 1920. ‘There was also need for Papal approval of the cult of the Martyrs of Uganda as saints. It came from acknowledging miracles of healing from a plague [bubonic plague which broke out in Uganda in 1941] which was an instance of [petitionary] prayer influencing belief and vice versa.’<sup>8</sup> Yves Tourigny wrote that: ‘The miracles [in 1953] whose recognition by the tribunal justified this final verdict concerned two Sisters of Our Lady of Africa (White Sisters): Sr. Rechildis Buck and Sr. Mary Aloyse Cribet. Both of them had contracted the plague while attending to Sr Philothly, of the Bannabikira, who had caught it herself in similar circumstances.’<sup>9</sup> When the Roman Catholic Church recognized the Uganda Martyrs as saints, and subsequently canonized them, it contributed to situating sainthood in the recollection of the local church community.

Beyond the boundaries of indigenous veneration accorded to the Martyrs of Uganda, Kizitonian devotion extended to Botswana with a school named after him, St. Kizito Catholic School, a middle school in Francistown, Botswana, a Roman Catholic-founded private secondary school which became a success story. Contrasting that success story, there was one in Kenya, St. Kizito Secondary School in Akithii, Meru County, which was established in 1968 but was closed in 1991 after the rape

6 Graeme Turner, *Film as Social Practice* (London: Routledge, 1990), 74-75.

7 Pierre Delooz, ‘Towards a Sociological Study of Canonized Sainthood in the Catholic Church,’ in *Saints and Their Cults: Studies in Religious Sociology, Folklore and History*, ed. Stephen Wilson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 191.

8 Jude Kateete, ‘Ugandan Christian Devotional Images at the Crossroads: A Case History of Dedications for Parish Churches in the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Kampala, 1879-1997,’ (PhD thesis, Nkumba University, 2019), 53.

9 Yves Tourigny, *So Abundant a Harvest: The Catholic Church in Uganda, 1879-1979* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd., 1979), 175.

of seventy-one girls and the murder of nineteen when they declined to take part in a strike which was organized by boys at the same school.<sup>10</sup> It was a failure story, a failure of living up to the values for which Kizitonian devotion stands. However, the cult of Saint Kizito in Uganda, the cradle of such devotion, is an exemplar devotion. It serves as a model in creative peacebuilding in the country as it emerged from the 1981-86 civil war which ended when the NRA captured Kampala. In the euphoria of the time, '[p]eople were astonished that the rag-tag guerrillas with their *kadogos* (boy soldiers) had routed the UNLA [Uganda National Liberation Army] and the factions supporting it.'<sup>11</sup> The expression, *kadogo*, comes from Kiswahili, the widely spoken Bantu language in eastern and southern Africa, and literary means 'youngster or small one.' Arguably, the *kadogos* became folk heroes and a worthy subject in memory work in the zeitgeist of the late 1980s in Uganda.

In 1987 a local parish church near Kampala City Centre, in Bwaise, was dedicated to Saint Kizito whose youth was very near to the lives of children and one that would empathize with them in their trials. In popular devotion, that dedication became a significant effort for creative peacebuilding in post-war Uganda albeit the epochal glorification of child soldiers as new heroes and heroines that synchronized with the centennial celebrations of the more popular Uganda Martyrs. It mirrored what was happening in Ugandan civil society at the time in trying to address the plight of children.

In this discussion, framed by the paradox of creative peacebuilding in context of the cult of Saint Kizito as patron of children, the following four sections are handled to obtain an improved understanding of the plight of the NRA child soldiers and the significance of Kizitonian devotion to their story. The first section establishes how the cult of Saint Kizito would be understood in context of the archetypal image of an NRA child soldier of the 1980s. The second part of the discussion reflects on the cult of Saint Kizito in context of creative peacebuilding in Ugandan civil society. The third shows how the victim-victor paradox of creative peacebuilding in post-war Uganda is demonstrable in context of the cult of Saint Kizito and of the NRA child soldier. The last section concludes by discussing the essence of the NRA child soldier in Ugandan collective memory and situates the cult of Saint Kizito in Ugandan creative peacebuilding.

### **Saint Kizito and the NRA Child Soldier Archetype**

The NRA child soldier of the 1980s followed the archetype of Saint Kizito as patron of children. The child soldier and the child martyr were synonymous with the dichotomy of victim-victor that emerged in post-conflict Ugandan popular tradition. The adversity they confronted provoked them to stand up with courage for their self-identities in the archetypal image of the hero and demon. In neo-analytic theory, the archetype that represents a strong force that does battle with the enemy in order to

10 Susan F. Hirsch, 'Interpreting Media Representations of a "Night of Madness": Law and Culture in the Construction of Rape Identities,' *Law & Social Inquiry* 19, no. 4 (1994): 1023-1056; Chris Youé, 'Review of Gender Violence and the Press: The St. Kizito Story,' *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 31, no. 3 (1997): 584-586.

11 William Pike, *Combatants: A Memoir of the Bush War and the Press in Uganda*. Self-published (William Pike, 2019), 142.

rescue another from harm is the hero, and that which embodies cruelty and evil is the demon.<sup>12</sup> For example, in Christian iconography, the image of Saint George fighting the dragon or Saint Michael the Archangel fighting some evil forces maps into the hero and demon archetypes. In Uganda, the cult of martyrs typifies a similar narrative in the national interest of peace through popular devotion. The martyrs became local heroes in devotional lives of the believers who were widely able to identify with them. There was a positive correlation between the Western cult of images which African believers embraced in Uganda and the Jungian archetypal images of the hero and demon. Arguably, Ugandan Roman Catholics treated devotional images as surrogates for archetypal images because they found something appealing to sanctity in their themes and subjects. The following discussion provides an insight into the significance of those images during mission evangelism in the country:

Missionaries used them to communicate their knowledge, thoughts, and imaginations to the believers and to redefine the intellectual values of visual piety in the Ugandan society. They had a task to make the sacred stories believable by making them concrete. What was concrete was also easy for believers to remember. In designing the devotional images, they left out what did not make meaning to the sacred story in order to fix the impression by creating moralizing mythos and mythos that illustrate moral problems.<sup>13</sup>

Reading into the above, there was also a moralizing mythos in Ugandan Christian visual piety which would be associated with designing the devotion to Saint Kizito based on what made meaning to the sacred story around his martyrdom as a child that would fit into according him an indigenous devotional role as patron of children. That devotion became instrumental during the Ugandan Bush War, also known as the Luweero Triangle War, and its aftermath. Children were some of the main victims during that armed conflict, and in the Ugandan cult of saints, divine succour was redirected to Saint Kizito their intercessor. ‘One salient feature of the story that recurs in the accounts of the religious devotion of the people in the [Luweero] Triangle is the loss of confidence in the traditional cult of the *Balubaale* [traditional gods] during the latter period of the war, as contrasted with the increased devotion to Christianity.’<sup>14</sup> Thus, there was some change in the cult of images during the Ugandan Bush War and its aftermath. In Ugandan popular devotion, the Christian martyrs were accorded more patronage roles for devotional focus in place of the worship of ancestral spirits and traditional African gods which had been subjects for indigenous devotion.

Saint Kizito was the youngest martyr. He was burnt alive on June 3, 1886. After his canonization with twenty-one other Uganda Martyrs in 1964, he was promoted as a patron saint for children and primary schools. In 1986, with the notable transition

12 Howard S. Friedman and Mariam W. Schustack, *Personality: Classic Theories and Modern Research* (London: Pearson, 2012), 110-111.

13 Kateete, ‘Ugandan Christian Devotional Images at the Crossroads,’ 701.

14 S. K. Kyakulagira, ‘The Work of the Church in Luweero COU Archdeaconry, Uganda during the Guerrilla War 1981-1986,’ (Diploma thesis, Makerere University, 1988), 20.

from victim to victor after the civil war brought Yoweri K. Museveni to power, a new hero for Ugandans was created with the heroism accorded to the child soldiers in the country.

Two questions come in mind *sine qua non* in establishing a cogent understanding of the archetypal image of a child soldier in the cult of Saint Kizito as patron of children in the victim-victor model: First, whose victimhood? Second, whose victory? In addressing those questions, the following paradoxes emerge: On the one hand, there was the thirteen-year-old Saint Kizito's victimhood because of his conversion to the Christian faith that brought him on collision course with Kabaka Mwangi II (1868-1903) of Buganda Kingdom. His execution in 1886 with over twenty other proselytes on the orders of the *kabaka* was subsequently considered martyrdom. They were all accorded victory in the celebration of their afterlife, and twenty-two of them were canonized on October 18, 1964 by Pope Paul VI (1897-1978). That Pontiff was also later canonized on October 14, 2018 and in the cult of saints he is revered as Pope Saint Paul VI. The canonization of the Uganda Martyrs inspired devotion to the cult of martyrs in Ugandan popular culture. On the other hand, concerning the questions of whose victimhood and whose victory, the child soldier was a victim of the 1981-86 armed-conflict between the Ugandan government forces, the UNLA, and the NRA rebels who, among other rebel groups in the country, took up arms against the Milton Obote regime. The disputed presidential elections of 1980 returned Milton Obote (1925-2005) to power to serve a second presidency and the disputation sparked a guerrilla war which became known as the Ugandan Bush War. The role of the child soldier in that armed struggle was paradoxically celebrated in Ugandan folk memory. It was also a paradox of victory in victimhood.

The 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child defined a child as any human being under the age of eighteen, unless the age of majority is attained earlier under national legislation. Ugandan law maintains that above definition.<sup>15</sup> 'Before 1989, the concept of children's rights had often been framed in terms of beliefs about their nature and needs, and about adults' responsibilities towards them.'<sup>16</sup> In 2002, the Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict also stipulated that state actors 'shall take all feasible measures to ensure that persons below the age of eighteen do not take a direct part in hostilities and that they are not compulsorily recruited into their armed forces.' The plight of children subsequently took centre stage from the late 1980s onwards, most especially after the armed conflict theatres around the world had reawakened global interest in protecting them from getting directly involved in hostilities.

The Ugandan Bush War which brought Yoweri Museveni to power in 1986 and the victory processions and parades of the victorious NRA had child soldiers among its rank-and-file. In Uganda, they were famously referred to as *kadogos*. Those *kadogos*, or youngsters, were brazenly celebrated in Uganda as new heroes of the war. In April 1986, there was a mobilization of Kampala City traders to organize a victory

15 The Children Act [Uganda], 2019.

16 Chiara C. Montà, Lucia Carriera, and Elisabetta Biffi, 'The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child: A Milestone for a Pedagogical Reflection on the Meanings of Childhood and Democracy,' *Educação e Pesquisa*, 46, no. 2 (2020).

celebration for the NRA as attested in the local newspaper *MUNNO* on April 7, 1986 in the following excerpt in Luganda: *Emikolo egitegekebwa Bannakampala olw'okulagirako okusima kwabwe eri bamwoyogwaggwanga abaabanunudde mu kuwoola kwe babaddemu [...] Wategekeddawo ne kaadi ez'ekijjulo eky'okubaako President [Museveni] mu bimuli bya Nile Mansions awaligabulirwa abalwanirizi baffe bamumira mwoyo balye basindise na bigere*, which translates as 'The Kampalans are organizing the celebration of victory to express their gratitude toward the brave nationalist combatants who liberated them [...] Invitation cards to the dinner have been organized, for our brave fighters to eat to their satisfaction, at the Nile Mansions Gardens which President Museveni will attend.'<sup>17</sup> The recognition of the contributions of the child soldiers to the liberation struggle could not be divorced from such celebrations of victory. Arguably, in the country's Christian devotional landscape, they reawakened interest in the cult of Saint Kizito as patron of children by inspiring the post-war titular for the dedication of St. Kizito Parish Church Bwaise in 1987. Additionally, devotion to Saint Kizito was also meant to inspire young people to be conscious of the times in which they lived and what those times dictated.

In 1981, when the drums of war were sounded, belligerence in Uganda eventually created an insurgency environment in the country. It was not only a struggle for power and control, but also one in which the belligerents wanted to win hearts and minds of the population. 'To win in an insurgent environment, you have to win the people. That means you have to be close to them and gain their trust. Only the locals know who's an insurgent and who's not.'<sup>18</sup> The NRA tried to win the hearts and minds of the people by branding themselves as their liberators. They recruited from them fighting forces and asked for food supplies or any form of logistical support the local people would offer. It was possible to raise a fighting force for the NRA and other rebel forces in the country from the population because the latter was weary of the anarchy that arose in the country at the time.

The military conflict left a number of children orphaned and homeless. 'The children who were orphaned and left alone were starving and dying. The NRA saw this and decided to step in. With no strong social order, the children were vulnerable. The NRA "adopted" the refugee kids and gave them food, shelter, and clothing.'<sup>19</sup> The NRA created a specific emotional link that won the trust of the children they inducted into the liberation struggle by trying to create for them a feeling of filial gratitude as their adoptive parents. "These children were taken in by the army when their parents died," a government official said. "They looked to the army, and the state, as surrogates, as parents."<sup>20</sup> It is a paradox that life in the service of the NRA was a form of security to the child soldiers who had been inducted into the armed struggle but who also became victims of that induction as a grave violation of rights of the child in itself. 'Later, however, between 1985 and 1986, in the last stages of the war, a new category of child soldiers developed. As mobile units of the NRA moved across

17 'Bannakampala Bataddewo Obukadde Okulisa NRA,' *MUNNO Publications*, April 7, 1986.

18 Dick Cough, *Chosen Soldier: The Making of a Special Forces Warrior* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2007), 16.

19 Jodie Rogge, 'The Collapse of the Social Order in Uganda that Caused Child Soldiers,' *Social Change and the Future*. Oct. 31, 2014. <https://socialchangeandcourse.wordpress.com/2014/10/31/the-collapse-of-the-social-order-in-uganda-that-caused-child-soldiers/>, accessed September 16, 2025.

20 Edward A. Gargan, 'A Child's Lot in Uganda: At 14 a Combat Veteran,' *New York Times*, August 4, 1986.

the country, children joined them, mainly out of excitement and a sense of adventure, especially when they saw other children in the ranks of the victorious army. These children were not orphans.<sup>21</sup>

In the case of Saint Kizito, he had been an adopted child. ‘Nyika, or Nyika-omuyonga, Guardian of Mwanganga’s umbilical cord, often said to be the father of Kizito, was his father by adoption only. The relationship arose from a blood-pact between Nyika’s father Kiggwe and a member of the Lungfish Clan named Mitala-ekoya,’ wrote the Mill Hill Missionary John F. Faupel.<sup>22</sup> When the above-mentioned official in the court of Kabaka Mwanganga II adopted Kizito, he brought him close to the powers that were. In later years, when the child soldiers were in service of the NRA, they also got close to the powers that were in the National Resistance Movement (NRM) which came to power in 1986.

The NRA took up the responsibility of nurturing the child soldiers. It was compelled to do so because of the nature of the military conflict which unfolded. Each conflict has its own history and background, and the following narrative explains the formative experience of the NRA child soldier: ‘As the UNLA operations became more threatening, the NRA also gave the children self-defence lessons. Soon enough the children became loyal members of the NRA. They escorted officers, cooked, cleaned, ran errands, and carried weapons.’<sup>23</sup> The NRA instructed those children in a way that enabled them to develop a martial spirit and loyalty to the military as their moral community. Arguably, their involvement in armed conflict as child soldiers led them to miss out on their natural unfolding in early childhood development according to their age category and they risked fixation. They were trained in observation skills, mental agility, and the skill of disguise which could be read between the lines of the following narrative: ‘During the war, children were frequently used as spies in cities and along roadsides. They counted trucks in government convoys and troops marching into the bush. They delivered messages for Mr. Museveni’s agents working in the capital.’<sup>24</sup> Thus, the child soldier was also trained in reconnaissance mission and became an asset to the NRA.

Similarly, Kizito who was courted by the Roman Catholic missionaries had also been an asset to the Buganda Kingdom as a page in the palace of the *kabaka*. ‘The youthful Kizito, continuing the family tradition, became an eager and fervent catechumen, seizing every opportunity for instruction and, after the martyrdom of Joseph Mukasa, constantly importuning the priests to baptize him. He seems to have been employed largely as the Kabaka’s errand boy.’<sup>25</sup> The nexus between the child soldier training in reconnaissance mission in the NRA’s ranks and Kizito’s role as an errand boy of the *kabaka* was quite telling. ‘[Kizito] also used to be sent to collect, drive to the Palace and deliver to the royal butchers the cattle selected for slaughter for the royal table’ wrote Faupel.<sup>26</sup> What is more, the youthful Kizito was also prepared for spiritual combat as a soldier of Christ just as the child soldier would later on be

21 Kale Kayihura, *Uganda: The Integration of Child Soldiers into the School System* (Paris: Association for the Development of Education in Africa, 2000), 15.

22 John F. Faupel, *African Holocaust: The Story of the Uganda Martyrs* (Nairobi: St. Paul Publications, 1962), 106.

23 Rogge, ‘The Collapse of the Social Order in Uganda that Caused Child Soldiers.’

24 Gargan, ‘A Child’s Lot in Uganda.’

25 Faupel, *African Holocaust*, 108.

26 *Ibid.*, 108.

prepared to fight for the NRA. The self-defence lessons for the child soldier, and Saint Kizito's instruction as a catechumen created a spirit of soldiering for the military and for Christ, respectively. It was a demonstrable martial spirit. In light of the foundation of a martial spirit in Christianity, James Hillman wrote that: "The early Christians were not merely meek and mild victims; they called themselves *militēs* (cf. 2 Tim. 2:3; Phil. 2: 25), and St. Cyprian (d. 258) used the term *militia* for the Christian's "service against the world."<sup>27</sup> In that context, Saint Kizito was one of the proselytes who plausibly considered themselves as *militēs* in the *kabaka's* palace of whom Christianity created martyrs and whose blood became seeds of the faith in Uganda. Christianity provided a new worldview when the missionaries came into contact with nature religion and folklore during their evangelization drive. It provided a new spiritual life and fulfilment for the African converts. Saint Kizito and some other converts held out to the new faith up to their execution in an inner obedience to duty for Christ as they understood it.

In the early 1980s, there was distress in Uganda which took a psychological toll on children during the armed conflict. The NRA seized the opportunity that motivated a number of children to take up arms and join the fray in the fight against the UNLA. 'The children were filled with revenge against the UNLA for destroying their homes that they became motivated, reliable, and dedicated to the NRA. In the late 1985, the NRA was stretched pretty thin and sent child soldiers into action.'<sup>28</sup> Beneath the surface of the martial spirit of the child soldier was a childhood that the contestations in the societal politics took away from them. In a way, they had personal scores to settle, which fuelled their courage and determination.

In the same manner, Kizito's spiritual drive to prove himself as a soldier of Christ was plausibly on account of his vulnerability in the *kabaka's* palace because he had taken a moral high ground that Christianity had offered him. 'Being young, cheerful and good-looking, he was also one of the objects of the Kabaka's unnatural [sic] lust. However, in this child of about thirteen, the tyrant [sic] encountered a resolution and resistance to his gross passion that put him to shame,' wrote Faupel.<sup>29</sup> In that context, Saint Kizito was a Christian soldier *qua* Christian soldier in resisting the *kabaka's* lustful desires toward him which were not in variance with the Christianity he had embraced. That was the accepted narrative in Christian missionary circles. In contradistinction, Samwiri Lwanga Lunyiigo argues that: 'When the faiths served the Kabaka it was well and good but the Kabaka did not want the temples of the mediums to institute another centre of power to rival his. So, the priests were kept on a very tight leash by the Kabaka.'<sup>30</sup> Arguably, the Christian proselytes represented the centre of power that rivalled the *kabaka's* power and influence which made them subjects of his rage. Nonetheless, the missionaries advanced the idea that the *kabaka* found himself in conflict with the converts in terms of ethical values concerning chastity which the new faith had set for them. Faupel added that: '[Despite] his youth and his small size, [Kizito] was sufficiently mature to understand the evils that surrounded him at

27 James Hillman, *A Terrible Love of War* (London: Penguin Publishing Group, 2004), 192.

28 Rogge, 'The Collapse of the Social Order in Uganda that Caused Child Soldiers.'

29 Faupel, *African Holocaust*, 108.

30 Samwiri Lwanga Lunyiigo, *Mwanga II: Resistance to Imposition of British Colonial Rule in Buganda 1844- 1899* (Kampala: Wavah Books Ltd, 2011), 3.

Court and to understand and love the virtue of chastity.<sup>31</sup> When he was executed on June 3, 1886 for holding on to his faith, his martyrdom epitomized the victimhood that accorded him victory and the celebration of his heroism in the afterlife together with other Ugandan Martyrs. The third of June was designated a national holiday in Uganda and it became popularly known in the country as Martyrs Day.

Similarly, the NRA child soldier *qua* child soldier was archetypal of the victim that became paradoxically heroized because of gallantry in the NRA victory against the UNLA which was accomplished on January 26, 1986. That date was also designated a national holiday in Uganda and it became known as Liberation Day. Both Martyrs Day and Liberation Day have a common denominator in the victim-victor dichotomy. Consequently, the NRA child soldier's victimhood and mettle was, arguably, a mirror of Saint Kizito's victimhood and victory that aided popular devotion to him as patron saint of children and primary schools.

However, there was popular international criticism against the involvement of child soldiers in military service as a violation of the rights of children in the debate that was chiefly steered by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). That debate led to *The Cape Town Principles and Best Practices on the Prevention of Recruitment of Children into the Armed Forces and on Demobilization and Social Reintegration of Child Soldiers in Africa* which were adopted on April 30, 1997. The Cape Town Principles defined a child soldier as 'any person under 18 years of age who is part of any kind of regular or irregular armed force or armed group in any capacity, including but not limited to cooks, porters, messengers, and those accompanying such groups, other than purely as family members. It includes girls recruited for sexual purposes and forced marriage.'<sup>32</sup> The NRA child soldier fell in many of the categories given in the above definition. Nevertheless, Ugandan civil society received the child soldiers through the lens of hero and demon archetypes, as can be discerned from the following narrative when reading between the lines: 'But Government officials and many [sic] Ugandans say they regard[ed] the uniformed children as heroes of the guerrilla war that toppled President Obote and his successor, Maj. Gen. Tito Okello.'<sup>33</sup> Arguably, that was a way of trying to sanitize the involvement of child soldiers in the armed struggle. Although the child soldiers were subjects of folk memory in Uganda because they enshrined the legend of the country's armed conflict of the 1980s, their post-conflict rehabilitation was a province for collective memory.

When the NRA took over power in 1986, it had 'perhaps 3,000 children under the age of sixteen, including 500 girls, among its 10,000 to 15,000 troops.'<sup>34</sup> There was a story behind each of those numbers and, they implied that the child soldiers played a central role in the liberation struggle. However, they also showed how far the NRA went in putting children in harm's way. Such a phenomenon was not only limited to the 1980s armed conflict in Uganda. 'A Save the Children report, published in April 2005, found that more than 120,000 girls and young women ha[d] been abducted and

31 Faupel, *African Holocaust*, 108.

32 Cape Town Principles and Best Practices. *UNICEF and the NGO Working Group on the Convention on the Rights of the Child*, 27- 30 April 1997, Cape Town, South Africa.

33 Gargan, 'A Child's Lot in Uganda.'

34 Ibid.

pushed into conflict. They often serve[d] as cooks, and care[d] for the wounded.<sup>35</sup> In order to make significant progress toward peace and to salvage the dignity of child soldiers, the above figures became a recipe for dialogue that was to improve the way those youngsters lived their lives. In April 1986, Dr. Samson Kisekka (1912-1999), who was Prime Minister of the Republic of Uganda, announced the establishment of a Rehabilitation Relief Fund to help the war victims. He also announced that donations were to be sent to Uganda Commercial Bank Account No. 24975.<sup>36</sup>

In a later account, a former girl-child combatant, Goretta 'China' Keitetsi, who was in exile in the United Kingdom and thereafter relocated to Denmark, gave the following narrative of her double victimhood that plausibly wounded the conscience of the NRA: 'The NRA gave us weapons, made us hate, kill, torture, and made us their girlfriends: we had no choice.'<sup>37</sup> In 2002, the Government of the Republic of Uganda was critical of her memoirs *Child Soldier: Fighting for My Life* and launched a documentary in 2003 'to counter China Keitetsi abuse claims.'<sup>38</sup> Her case was an example of the misplaced trust and abuse that the NRA child soldiers suffered. The victim who tried to seek justice was more likely to be punished than the offender. The girl-child soldier was a victim that was used for sex by military men, and in some cases the boys of their ilk were plausibly molested. 'Female assault survivors are faced with numerous sources of ambiguity and loss, including the loss of a sense of certainty about their safety in spaces where their safety was not in question before the assault. Survivors may also question their future safety when there is a lack of certainty about whether they will see the perpetrator or where they may encounter loss and trauma (e.g., work, college campus, social events) again,' argued Tashel Bordere.<sup>39</sup>

The collectivism for survival of sexual assault survivors among the NRA child soldiers was plausibly a form of suffocated grief which Ugandan Christian visual piety reconfigures in the victimhood of Saint Kizito. Radhika Santhanam and Ernest Hunter argued that: 'When abuse occurs in childhood the losses experienced are multiple and unfold gradually, the meanings evolve throughout life as the abuse is redefined and reconfigured.'<sup>40</sup> Thus, in Christian devotion, such victim children had a patron in Saint Kizito, a victim-victor of their ilk. Consequently, the NRA child soldier of the 1980s was archetypal of Saint Kizito as patron of children.

### **Saint Kizito and Creative Peacebuilding in Uganda**

In Ugandan popular devotion, the cult of Saint Kizito reflected values embedded in creative peacebuilding in the country's civil society. That cult became legendary in terms of Ugandan heroic sacrifice for peace. In 1987, a year after the NRA victory, the Roman Catholic Church dedicated Saint Kizito Parish Church in Bwaise to honour Saint Kizito as a symbol of children's heroic sacrifice for peace, reflecting a creative focus on children as pillars of peacebuilding.

35 Hare, Costin, and Blumberg, *Peace Psychology*, 43.

36 Jose Yiga, 'Katikkiro Kisekka Alangiridde ku Bajaasi Amabujje,' *Munno Publications*, April 23, 1986.

37 Laura Smith-Spark, 'Ex-child Soldier's Path to Hope,' *BBC News*, May 25, 2004.

38 'Government Launches Documentary to Counter China Keitetsi Abuse Claims,' *New Vision*, May 21, 2003.

39 Tashel Bordere, 'Disenfranchisement and Ambiguity in the Face of Loss: The Suffocated Grief of Sexual Assault Survivors,' *Family Relations* 66, no 1 (2017): 29-45.

40 Radhika Santhanam and Ernest Hunter, 'Grief Matters,' *The Australian Journal of Grief and Bereavement*, 5, no. 3 (2002): 1-20.

St. Kizito Parish Church Bwaise in the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Kampala is a modern form of auditory church built in Uganda as an exemplary devotional space that resonated with peacebuilding initiatives of the country after the 1981-86 armed conflict. It is one of the epochal centennial churches built to commemorate the centenary of the Uganda Martyrs. It is located in Bwaise, a neighbourhood within the Greater Metropolitan Kampala, approximately five kilometres north of Kampala Central Business District. In the 1980s, Bwaise was a commercial and residential township with a sizeable section of a community living at the margins of life. Noteworthy, the native spelling of *Bwayiise*, translated from Luganda language to mean ‘it poured,’ has been written as Bwaise in modern usage of the name. However, the titular for the Roman Catholic parish church in the area retained the original spelling of *Bwayiise*. St. Kizito Parish Church *Bwayiise* was put under the secular clergy and it was designated to fit into the community of those affected by collective trauma from tragedies of civil strife of the 1980s and of subsequent industrialization and poor urban planning after the war. In popular culture, it befits the iconography of nonviolence in creative peacebuilding.

To have an improved understanding of what constitutes creative peacebuilding, the following procedural definition suffices: ‘Creative peacebuilding is a broad term for creative therapeutic strategies to create peace, within individuals, groups, and societies in conflict situations. Although used primarily to overcome violence, creative peacebuilding is also a preventive measure explored to establish stronger foundations of peace initiatives, especially when used with children.’<sup>41</sup> Arguably, an example of such an initiative especially targeting children in contemporary Ugandan visual culture was in establishing the devotional image of Saint Kizito that was promoted through the titular of the parish church at Bwaise. The Roman Catholic Church in the country used it as a means of soft power to creatively intervene and deal with collective trauma and psychosocial distress from which embodied memory of armed conflict was re-imagined to the local populace in the NRA child soldiers. ‘Studies of intractable conflicts in the geopolitical domain that were eventually resolved have taught us that forceful interventions by powerful authorities or third-parties rarely help for very long. Ironically, they find that it is often weaker third-parties who employ softer forms of power (are trustworthy, unthreatening, reliable, and without their own agenda) who often are the most effective catalysts for peaceful change.’<sup>42</sup> In the history of Uganda during the last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Catholic Church had been a weaker third-party in resolving intractable conflicts but it used soft power which popular devotion embodied in the cult of images.

The Christian cult of images provided something attractive which was more in tune with the prevailing needs for peacebuilding. Christianity offered a set of behavioural and social norms for an exemplary Christian. It, therefore, led to some mutual aid and collaboration among people who were not related to each other and did not know each other. Along those lines, the images were agency for instruction, to teach one and remind one of the social norms to espouse. ‘For example, love your neighbour and show compassion is what the Virgin stands for, and live credible and

41 ‘Selected Definitions of Peacebuilding,’ *Alliance for Peacebuilding*, August 12, 2013.

42 Peter T. Coleman and Morton Deutsch, *Psychological Components of Sustainable Peace* (Berlin/Heidelberg: Springer Science & Business Media, 2012), 76.

stay to one's principles even when it would be easier to defect is what the martyrs showed. The success of Christianity depended on such an enforcement and sharing of social norms.<sup>43</sup> Thus, in light of such morality, devotion to Saint Kizito was also a pitch for peacebuilding in lives of children, to see themselves in him. His tenderness as a teenager was to appeal to them as their patron saint. They were to identify with him as a young boy who diligently served as a page in the court of the *kabaka* of Buganda Kingdom.

The key sacred story in his life was his courage and suffering as a young convert to Christianity whose resilience as a loyal 'soldier of Christ'<sup>44</sup> conflicted with his loyalty to the *kabaka*. He stood out in their devotional lives as an example that spoke to the victims of social injustice in Uganda and to the efforts for peacebuilding. Similarly, the NRA child soldier contemporaneously typified such injustice but also needed to be rehabilitated when building a new environment for peace in the country. 'In surveying the range of efforts for peace, the concept of peacebuilding as the construction of a new environment should be viewed as the counterpart of preventive diplomacy, which seeks to avoid the breakdown of peaceful conditions,' argued Boutros Boutros-Ghali who served as Secretary-General of the United Nations from 1992 to 1996.<sup>45</sup> In the mid-1980s, national consciousness for peacebuilding had already favoured recreating the story of Saint Kizito, a Uganda Martyr whose martyrdom would inspire children to experience lives that avoided violence and its glorification. Military saints such as Saint George did not significantly feature in Ugandan churches as devotional images, although the name George tended to be christened in popular piety. Arguably, offering such a titular for churches in the country was deemed too dangerous for neophytes to model themselves upon since the militant church was in Christianity's distant past.

Thus, the Roman Catholic Church in the country promoted Saint Kizito as a portrait of an innocent and resilient child who was able to distinguish what was evil and what was righteous. His attributes also appealed to preventive diplomacy. Boutros Boutros-Ghali argued that: 'Preventive diplomacy is to avoid a crisis; post-conflict peace-building is to prevent a recurrence.'<sup>46</sup> However, in a more heterogeneous society like Uganda, popular devotion, in light of preventive diplomacy, was not only for Roman Catholics in the same way that the patronage role of Saint Kizito was not limited to Roman Catholic children nor church-founded primary schools. There were some collateral non-Catholic beneficiaries from those who participated in devotion and from the roles of seeing the didactic images and hearing the preached message.

The cult of Saint Kizito was useful in revealing the devotional image which was to speak not only to empathy for child victimhood but also to concerns for the rights of children and the need of showing them a model to emulate in their social lives. There was a model from the Western Christian cult of images for the Roman Catholic Church in Uganda to consider in promoting a patron saint for children. It was St. Nicholas of Myra (d. ca. 350). However, the cult of Saint Nicholas of Western Christian tradition, that evolved into the cult of the good-natured gift-giving Santa

43 Kateete, 'Ugandan Christian Devotional Images at the Crossroads,' 701.

44 Cf. 2 Tim. 2:3 "You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ" (New King James Version).

45 Boutros Boutros-Ghali, 'An Agenda for Peace: Preventive Diplomacy, Peacemaking and Peace-keeping,' *United Nations*, January 31, 1992, ODS A/47/277.

46 Boutros-Ghali, 'An Agenda for Peace.'

Claus who appeals to children in the Christmas festive season, did not hold sway over the need for an African saint that would appeal to Ugandan children as their own hero and pride. 'For many families, incorporating Santa traditions into their holiday celebrations creates joyful and fun experiences. It also provides opportunities for shared belief and play, reliving and sharing childhood memories, and encouraging empathy, kindness and generosity.'<sup>47</sup> Thus, believing in Santa Claus became important to children in a number of ways. 'Believing in Santa Claus can also benefit children's development as an avenue for creativity, imagination and play,' argued Elena Merenda and Nikki Martyn, scholars on early childhood development.<sup>48</sup> Although Saint Kizito was not revered as a gift-giver as Santa Claus is at Christmas time, his true gift-giving according to Roman Catholic piety, was seen in terms of inspiring children to lead virtuous lives. Arguably, he was projected to define sanctity to them in the history of his way of life, of his resilience to resist temptation and molestation, and of overcoming materialistic desires in order to live their faith in ways that model behaviour on Kizitonian virtues. Thus, Saint Kizito's victimhood as a child and the reverence which was accorded to him in his afterlife conveyed emotions of empathy and hope in victory that peacebuilding promised through cohesive relationship. The following extract expresses the spirit in the relationship which was deemed central in peacebuilding: 'Peacebuilding requires a vision of relationship. Stated bluntly, if there is no capacity to imagine the canvas of mutual relationships and situate oneself as part of that historic ever-evolving web, peacebuilding collapses.'<sup>49</sup> Thus, the vision of a relationship which the cult of Saint Kizito attracted for creative peacebuilding in Ugandan civil society was that of a patron saint of children who was an essential devotional image as a moulding force for their normative behaviour in society. The saint was reenvisioned to teach children courage in their own trials, most especially when they needed to stand up against violence. Additionally, devotion to him redefined for them a new role in community service education to find strength in his courage and carved out their space to share in his story, in an instructive way, beyond the contemporary social limitations of child soldiers. It was, therefore, demonstrable that the cult of Saint Kizito reflected creative peacebuilding in Ugandan civil society.

### **Victim-Victor Paradox in Post-War Uganda Peacebuilding**

Creative peacebuilding in post-war Uganda was buttressed in the paradigms of the victim and of the victor. It was directed toward reenvisioning the identity of the victim as a victor which the legacies of the NRA child soldier and of the cult of Saint Kizito had bequeathed to the country. It should be re-examined in the contexts of peace psychology in post-war Ugandan Christian visual culture and of popular tradition in the cult of the hero. In the parish church which was dedicated to Saint Kizito at Bwaise to promote his cult in Uganda, there is an altarpiece portrait depicting him as a slender teenage martyr. That image kept with the tradition of Christian iconography of a martyr holding a palm branch as pastoral agency in the context of art for peace. It

47 Elena Merenda and Nikki Martyn, 'Why it's Ok for Kids to Believe in Santa,' Conversation, December 15, 2019. <https://theconversation.com/why-its-ok-for-kids-to-believe-in-santa-128170>, accessed September 16, 2025.

48 Ibid.

49 John Paul Lederach, *The Moral Imagination: The Art and Soul of Building Peace* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 35.

was a creative response to peace education that the 1981-86 armed conflict provoked. However, in some respects, such creations also shaped responses to war, like in the case of how the war and its aftermath were depicted on the silver screen to move the masses toward support for creative peacebuilding. ‘The films that portray recently returning veterans provide serious accounts of their suffering, as well as their attempts to return to civilian life. Some of these end tragically, which is regrettably realistic,’ argue Rebeca Maseda and Patrick L. Dulin.<sup>50</sup> The returning NRA child soldier also needed demobilization, rehabilitation, and re-integration into the society so that their lives would not end tragically.

In front of the parish church at Bwaise, there is also a parallel and affront statue of Saint Kizito at the grotto in which he was depicted as a young warrior with a shield in one hand and a spear in the other. Contestably, it is a paradoxical equivalent of the modern-day child soldier with a rifle, and it provides a recollection of war victimhood of a child. ‘Drawn pictures and photographs have shown the devastation of war or the realities of nonviolent campaigns. These art forms can help in coping with emotions and in dealing with the truth.’<sup>51</sup> Taking that into context, although the image of Saint Kizito with a weapon in hand would have represented allegiance to secular or spiritual authority, it would also contemporaneously represent abuse of the rights of the child such as getting them in direct participation in armed conflicts.

In another form of victimhood, as the media had begun to expose them to a lot of graphic images of violence, a number of children in the country were tempted to glorify the gun in visual culture when they made their own rudimentary toy guns to play with as they enacted war. As years went by, Western-made toy guns became part of the material culture of children’s play in Uganda. They would be bought in shops in the country. In light of peace psychology, they were a potential threat to peacebuilding. However, to tone down such a threat in real life, one has to read into the iconography of valour in the image of a weapon holding Saint Kizito in terms of its having been staged at the grotto to symbolize readiness for combat in an internal or spiritual conflict, as per cf. Eph. 6: 10 – 18.

While the spear and shield are part of the folk aspect of Kizito’s story as an errand boy of the *kabaka* of Buganda Kingdom, it would not be easy to tell children about his martyrdom without stigmatizing them. Plausibly, that was also a way of trying to come to terms with their collective trauma and disenfranchised grief. ‘Grief is disenfranchised when it is not openly acknowledged or publicly supported through mourning practices or rituals because the experience is not valued or counted as loss.’<sup>52</sup> In 1989, Kenneth J. Doka’s seminal work, *Disenfranchised Grief: Recognising Hidden Sorrow*, opened the ground for research in disenfranchised grief and subsequently extended its theoretical development and clinical practice. However, in Christian visual piety, the cult of the Martyrs of Uganda opened possibilities of enfranchisement of grief in the celebration of their heroism, depicting Saint Kizito with a spear in hand as the instrument of his martyrdom.

Conceivably, a better devotional image of Saint Kizito would have been one

50 Rebeca Maseda and Patrick L. Dulin, ‘From Weaklings to Wounded Warriors: The Changing Portrayal of War-related Post Traumatic Stress Disorder in American Cinema,’ *49<sup>th</sup> Parallel* 30 (2012): 1-32.

51 Rachel MacNair, *The Psychology of Peace: An Introduction* (Santa Barbara, California: ABC-CLIO, 2012), 88-89.

52 Bordere, ‘Disenfranchisement and Ambiguity in the Face of Loss.’

in which he was depicted without a spear in order to fit into the modern spirit of sensitivity to children's emotions by promoting heroism of the living over martyrdom. That would have been achieved by taking leaf out of the triumphal cross of medieval churches whereby the crucified Christ, although on the Rood of the Cross, was depicted as unconquered by death in the following fashion: with a ruler's crown or halo instead of a crown of thorns, wearing shoes or feet that were depicted as nailed parallel to each other on the hypopodium (footrest), with the healed wounds of the body, with the stylized perizoma (loincloth) in vertical folds, and without facial expression of pain nor signs of grief from attendant figures. An image of Saint Kizito in such similar spirit of the medieval depiction of the triumphal cross would have been a befitting embodiment in light of liberation theology and of progressive Ugandan religious visual culture. Potentially, it would have spoken more clearly with a pitch to liberate both the oppressor and the oppressed.

Consequently, Saint Kizito as a patron of children and primary schools resonated with the kind of Ugandan children who were projected to be able to see themselves in him through the image of a young innocent boy. Promoting his cult in Uganda plausibly brought about advances in peace to deal with the plight of child soldiers in the country. In the 1986 Pastoral Letter of the Roman Catholic Bishops of Uganda, the bishops urged the government to take a leading role in the psychosocial recovery programmes for the child soldiers which included taking them back to school or reinstating them within their communities, if possible.<sup>53</sup> The bishops represented alternative voices and a collective Ugandan ethic of care. 'In 1987, the "Kadogo School Program" to take the child soldiers back into school was initiated.'<sup>54</sup> Their psychosocial recovery was at a premium, and the civil society had weighed in as the nation's conscience to address the victim-victor dichotomy which had redefined their identity. 'A campaign was waged by some agencies and by the international media concerning the issue of child soldiers. President Yoweri Museveni and the NRA were criticized for "exploiting children" by misusing them in combat.'<sup>55</sup> Subsequently, '[the] program for the reintegration of Kadogos into school was designed and implemented by the Ministry of Defense in close collaboration with the Ministry of Education.'<sup>56</sup>

## Conclusion

After getting an improved understanding of the victim-victor identity of the National Resistance Army child soldier as archetypal of Saint Kizito and how devotion to him embedded values of creative peacebuilding, one would appreciate why that model for peacebuilding in post-war Uganda would have merited re-examination. Rightly so, the Ugandan civil society did not take lightly the plight of children who were used in armed conflict, albeit appreciating the cults of the heroic child and of the archetypal saint in the patronage role for children.

Consequently, in Ugandan Christian visual piety the image of Saint Kizito was used to handle the thorny question of child victimhood which gave heroism of

53 'With a New Heart and a New Spirit: Pastoral Letter of the Catholic Bishops of Uganda,' *St Paul Publications*, Kampala, 1986.

54 Kayihura, *Uganda*, 11.

55 *Ibid.*, 13.

56 *Ibid.*, 17.

the National Resistance Army child soldier a face in the country's popular culture. It not only provided the victim child soldier with an alternative way of dealing better with the consequences of their victimhood in the here and then, but also the child spectator or devotee with a young Christian martyr as a hero to model oneself upon in the here and now. On the one hand, Saint Kizito was promoted as a Ugandan portrait of child victimhood that vitiated the heroized child soldier in the country's popular culture because of his heroic virtue. On the other, he provided the National Resistance Army child soldier with an archetypal image that would breathe the spirit of social justice.

By embracing Kizitonian devotion and dedicating a parish church at Bwaise to his honour, the Roman Catholic Church in Uganda embraced his cult and patronage as a model for creative peacebuilding in the fight for the rights of the child. It was also a fight over the fate of child soldiers in Ugandan collective memory, a fight for the recognition of their contribution to the liberation of Uganda in the 1980s, and a fight for a critical understanding of the role of the cult of Saint Kizito in opening up a reflection on the rights of the child. In the foreground of that Kizitonian devotion is the celebration of the victory of a child martyr whose victimhood became his triumph in the afterlife. Therefore, his devotional image provided lenses through which children were to see a saint of their ilk. Rendering him with dignity, sympathy, and heroism would have been useful in contemporary Ugandan popular culture when mobilized as an emblem of the rights of the child.