



Allah is Not Obliged

By Ahmadou Kourouma

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ALLAH IS NOT OBLIGED TO BE FAIR ABOUT ALL THE THINGS HE DOES HERE ON EARTH. These are the words of the boy soldier Birahima in the final masterpiece by one of Africa's most celebrated writers, Ahmadou Kourouma. When ten-year-old Birahima's mother dies, he leaves his native village in the Ivory Coast, accompanied by the sorcerer and cook Yacouba, to search for his aunt Mahan. Crossing the border into Liberia, they are seized by rebels and forced into military service. Birahima is given a Kalashnikov, minimal rations of food, a small supply of dope and a tiny wage. Fighting in a chaotic civil war alongside many other boys, Birahima sees death, torture, dismemberment and madness but somehow manages to retain his own sanity. Raw and unforgettable, despairing yet filled with laughter, *Allah Is Not Obliged* reveals the ways in which children's innocence and youth are compromised by war.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Starred Review. The late Ivory Coast author and political activist Kourouma (*Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote*) writes with a brutal and obscene frankness reminiscent of Celine in this powerfully tragic novel about a West African child soldier who learns early that "Allah is not obliged to be fair about all the things he does here on earth." Unsure if he's 10 or 12 years old, "rude as a goat's beard" Birahima, a third-grade dropout, recalls how his once-beautiful mother became an amputee who "moved on her arse like a caterpillar" and that he suspected her of being a soul-devouring sorceress. After her death, the boy is entrusted to a roguish shaman and sent to live with an aunt in Liberia. En route, they fall into the clutches of a warlord, and Birahima joins their forces as a boy soldier, witnessing and participating in all manner of savagery. Although Birahima's regurgitation of word definitions and chunks of West African history is awkward, this French import is a worthy if difficult read. And the popularity of the current Starbucks pick, the child soldier memoir *A Long Way Gone*, can't hurt sales potential. (May)

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From [Booklist](#)

Starred Review Birahima, who's 11 or so, tells the story of his three years as a child soldier in the fourth and final novel by Ivorian dissident Kourouma (1927-2003). After cancer kills his mother, Birahima embarks on a journey to his aunt in Nigeria, accompanied by Yacouba, "the crippled crook." En route they are diverted westward into the factional war in Liberia and then the worse mess in Sierra Leone, switching allegiances as circumstances dictate, witnessing atrocity upon atrocity, but surviving and sometimes thriving on Yacouba's Muslim gri-gris man shtick and Birahima's . . . what? Maybe his mother's spirit is watching over him. Eventually zagging back east, they discover his aunt has died, but Birahima at least acquires four dictionaries, which he mines to tell his story, ironically inserting definitions, too, for the sake of his fellow "Black Nigger African Natives"--one of many phrases he repeats as if they were refrains or Homeric epithets. And this is an epic tale, a savage odyssey traveled by a cursed latter-day Huck Finn, with, at the end, neither home nor territory to escape to anywhere in sight. *Ray Olson*

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Review

"A tour de force — original, irreverent, brutal, funny, poetic — in which history and myth are brilliantly evoked." —*The Independent* (London) "This is one of the funniest, most powerful, most intense novels to appear in French for a decade." —*Le Nouvel Observateur* (Paris) "Shocking and deeply moving. . . . An African *Lord of the Flies*." —*The Guardian* (London) "Witty and wholly authentic. . . . Spellbinding. . . . Kourouma has been likened to Voltaire. . . . Gabriel García Márquez also comes to mind, likewise John Updike's sparkling ventriloquism." —*The Spectator* (London)

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