

Trauma, Child Soldiers, and Displacement in Ishmael Beah's *a Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier*

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Abstract

Ishmael Beah's autobiography, A Long Way Gone, chronicles his experiences as a child soldier in the Sierra Leonean civil war. This essay analyses the author's journey from childhood to joining the war, the psychological and social trauma he faced as a child soldier, and his rehabilitation after displacement. The autobiography reflects both the fear, pain, friendship, relationships, and recovery of war. Childhood to a brutal war-torn reality explore the devastating consequences of war on children. To highlight the Sierra Leonean military's inhumane ideology-instilling practices, raise awareness about the conflict in Sierra Leone, and educate the public about the experiences of child soldiers Ishmael Beah's wrote the book 'A Long Way Gone'.

Keywords: Ishmael Beah, A Long Way Gone, Child Soldiers, War Trauma, Displacement, Loss of Childhood, Rehabilitation, Sierra Leone Civil War

Introduction

A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier is a 2007 memoir written by Ishmael Beah, an author from Sierra Leone. Ishmael Beah's early life is spent in the isolation of his parents and performing rap with his brother and friends. His first book, *A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier*, chronicles this experience. However, his childhood is cut short when armed forces attack his village. His brother Junior, his friend Alhaji and other friends are separated and Ishmael is forced to join as a child soldier at the age of 13. He is rescued with the help of UNICEF, and at the age of 16 he reaches a rehabilitation center and lives with his uncle Tommy. This journey represents the author's psychological, social and intellectual transformation. After serving as a child soldier in Sierra Leone's civil war, Ishmael Beah struggled to find hope that his humanity could be restored and their work in human rights advocacy, especially related to children and war, has made a difference.

Literature Review

1. Theoretical Approach: Child Soldier Trauma is a serious psychological, social, and emotional issue for child soldiers.
2. Moussa (2020): Analyzing the experiences of child soldiers, it describes the damage to childhood, the psychological consequences of violence, and the rescue measures
3. Akinsete & Oke (2022): A comparative study of the effects of war, survival struggles, and loss of identity, in terms of trauma theory.
4. Roberts (2018): Autobiography is not just a personal story, but also functions as a witness and a social message.

Trauma:

"Disordered psychic or behavioral state resulting from severe mental or emotional stress or physical injury"

The Role of the Main Characters

A boy who reaches the brink of war from the joys of childhood, experiencing trauma, fear, death, and displacement. His struggle continues until he finds rehabilitation and forgiveness through love.

Junior:

Ishmael's older brother, who is separated in an attack on the village where he took refuge, is an example of the psychological loss of support in the lives of child soldiers.

Alhaji:

Ishmael's close friend, known as "Little Rambo," his fighting skills and friendship save lives in battle.

Uncle Tommy and Esther:

The loving guiding characters during the rehabilitation period, who gave Ishmael a sense of mental stability and a homely atmosphere.

1.War Trauma

Nightmares and Fear: Ishmael suffers from constant nightmares about the death, violence, and destruction he witnessed in the war. He experiences scenes of that violence even when he sleeps at night, which disrupts his peace of mind. Habituation to violence: Constant exposure to violence makes Ishmael and other child soldiers feel that violence is natural or necessary.

The experience of war has serious effects not only on the physical but also on the mental and emotional levels.

2. Loss of Childhood

Ishmael's early childhood was filled with joy, rapping, playing with friends, getting an education. But because of the war, he loses his home, family, school, sports, and normal life. Lack of childhood means not only missing out on fun, but also losing identity, confidence, and social understanding. War causes serious damage to the mental and social development of children.

3. Displacement and Identity

Ishmael traveled through forests, refugee camps, and war-torn villages. Constant migration threatened his identity, family security, and social support. While living with other child soldiers, he struggles with trust, friendship, and social tensions. Displacement affects not only geographical but also psychological and social stability.

4. Rehabilitation and Hope

Ishmael finds a safe environment through a UNICEF rehabilitation center. He recovers mentally, physically, and socially – getting an education, making friends, and experiencing emotional stability. Reinstatement gave him hope, forgiveness, and the opportunity to love himself again. Psychological and social support, the damage caused by war can be reduced and the child can return to a normal life.

A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier – Ishmael Beah's

This begins as Ismael and his friends embark on a long journey through the countryside, fleeing war-torn villages and struggling for survival. On this journey, they face horrific experiences – death, violence, kidnapping, and basic crises such as food shortages. The boy gradually becomes a child soldier and experiences military training, the use of weapons, violent activities, and the horrific violence used to save lives.

The novel not only deals with violence, but also clearly shows the psychological and emotional consequences. Ismael faces fear, guilt, grief, and moral conflict. The author highlights the themes of the survival of children in the horrors of war, their changing attitudes, and the harmful destruction of childhood.

In a war situation, Ismael and other young boys are recruited as child soldiers. They are trained in the use of weapons, torture, and violent combat. Ismael gradually learns to live by the rules of war, but he continues to face internal suffering, guilt, and moral conflict.

A key part of the novel is the experience of rehabilitation and humanity. Ismael is taken out of the fighting, given psychological treatment, and reintegrated into society. He regains his identity, peace of mind, and a sense of humanity.

Town of Mattru Jong: Sierra Leone Civil War

Junior and a friend named Talloi traveled to the town of Mattru Jong, a 16-mile journey from their hometown of Mogbwemo. The boys had come Mattru Jong Talent show and stay at friend home. The purpose of their visit was to attend an art exhibition, and they were staying at a friend's house.

However, after receiving them, their friend tells them that the writer's house has been attacked by a rebel group. This makes the writer and his brother immediately decide to return home to find their parents and siblings. Or, they change their minds along the way, meaning they don't decide to go home right away, perhaps due to fear or insecurity about the situation.

The author and his brother decide to return home to find their parents and siblings, but on the way, they change their minds. They see crowds of people fleeing Mogbwemo; many are injured and fleeing with whatever they can carry. When they see the first body, it becomes clear to them that their family must have also left Mogbwemo. Terrified, they return to Matu Jong for safety.

His Departing Kamator, Beah journeys along the southern coast of Sierra Leone and settles in Yele, relatives safe. The government soldiers arrive in town. Their commander warns Yele's area people announced RUF attacks and displays the bodies of villagers brutally killed by rebels. At that point, Ishmael, age thirteen, is conscripted into the NRPC army, given an AK-47 attack rifle, and trained to kill rebels. In his first skirmish, Beah kills several rebels, including a boy wearing a Tupac Shakur T-shirt.

His removed the army by a UNICEF representative and sent to a rehabilitation center, given schooling and treatment to prepare him for a return to normal life. His adjustment to a life without violence and drugs is difficult. The boy soldiers at the rehabilitation center are addicted to both drugs and violence, and they are often violent and unruly.

Beah's stay rehabilitation center his uncle adopts him and brings him to Freetown. Ismael Beah's hear opportunity to go to New York and speak at the United Nations on the issue of child soldiers. Beah returns to Sierra Leone, his uncle dies, and the nation's government is overthrown. To avoid the resulting violence, Beah flees from Sierra Leone and travels to Guinea. In 1998, at age eighteen, his departed o New York to continue his education.

Conclusion

A Long Way Go is an autobiographical document of the trauma of war, child soldiers, and displacement. The author's experience shows how deep the psychological, social, and emotional impact of war is. Through rehabilitation, love, and social support, it is possible to find salvation and mental stability. This book is not just a personal story, but also a piece of literature that creates social awareness. Living a peaceful life with family one day and experiencing the uncertainty of where one's parents are the next is a terrifying experience in itself. The effects of war are particularly devastating not only on adults, but also on the most vulnerable population – children.

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Conflicts of interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper

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