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“From White to Blood Diamonds”: (Re) Interrogating Postcolonial Child-Soldiering in Ishmael Beah’s *A Long Way Gone*

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Abstract:

Sierra Leone history since colonial incursion is awash with political violence, crude use of power and deepening socio-economic crisis. Her rich natural resources especially diamonds have flared up conflicts in Liberia and Sierra Leone. These resources which were supposed to be a ‘blessing’ have now become a ‘curse’ due to neo-colonial influence and sheer greed by the political class. Ishmael Beah’s fictional autobiography explores the carnage of war and children forcefully recruited as child-soldiers. Britain-erstwhile colonial master of Sierra Leone was more interested in reaping the fallout of diamonds to the detriment of the socio-economic growth of the country. Eventually, this degraded government rule and led to the rise of corruption. The effects of Britain and warring ethnic groups to control the diamonds led to a shadow state which eventually exploded into a civil war in the 1990’s. The postcolonial condition is a direct legacy of colonialism as it “interrogates the structures of inequality that emanates from colonialism and its aftermath” (Loomba, Ania: 1998). The metaphorical change from ‘white to blood’ diamonds is fundamentally an aftertaste of lingering state violence which is replicated in Sierra Leone’s political culture. The principal factor that shaped this tradition is couched in mass involvement of children (as child-soldiers) replica of postcolonial innocence. Their ultimate aim is to kill, maim and safeguard the establishment. This has left the children not only physically but also mentally impaired and Sierra Leone’s next generation is at peril.

Keywords: blood diamonds, child soldiering, postcolonial condition and trauma fiction.

Introduction:

Warfare has existed since time immemorial, but was usually conventional fighting between one nation and another. The 21st century is fraught with wars and civil strife, among this new order is the child soldiering phenomenon which is now attracting the attention of literary writers across the globe. The African reality especially after the decolonized phase of her history has experienced wars in an escalated scale. Post-Independent Africa has become a trope of socio-political tensions as the political class seem to exclude a mass of people from the little benefits of decolonization. This manipulative order is captured by the narrator of Chinua Achebe’s novel, *A Man of the People*:

We had all been in the rain together until yesterday. Then a handful of us (...) had scrambled for the one shelter our former rulers left, and had taken it over and barricaded themselves in. And from within they sought to persuade the rest...it required that all arguments should cease and the whole people speak with one voice and that any more dissent and argument outside the door of the shelter would subvert and breakdown the whole house. (Achebe, 1966:37)

African socialism at dawn of independence was a ‘smooth screen’ to keep the masses abeyant and exclude them from the fallout of independence struggle. It was a fake ideology to consolidate power and protect personal interests over general interest. Ayi Kwei Armah, corroborates this view when he opines that “...the nationalist leaders preach African socialism without speaking any compulsion to become ideopraxists, everywhere and always the word is faster than the deed” (1967:630). Frantz Fanon, a strong indictment of African bourgeoisie who have no intention of developing their nations: “the national bourgeoisie increasingly turns its back on the inferior, on the realities of a country gone to waste and looks toward to the former metropolis and foreign capitalists who secure its service” (Fanon, 1981:111). Some of these leaders in their efforts to carry out some ‘cosmetic developments’ paid attention to clans they originate from. This postcolonial impasse where projects of developments are geared to certain clans to the detriment of the majority caused poverty and ethnic-rivalry. More interestingly, regions endowed with mineral resources were mostly underdeveloped. Such is the case of Delta region of Nigeria, Kono diamond district in Sierra Leone and other mineral areas in Angola and Democratic Republic of Congo. Most of these resources were exploited and sold illegally in order to fund insurgent war efforts against legitimate and internationally recognized governments. Since postcolonial literature among others is concerned with the mess of African independence, ‘...the experience of independence as a suspension rather than fulfilment of the agenda of decolonisation’ (Simatei, 2001:35), African writers such as Chris Abani, in *Song for Night* (2007), Emmanuel Dongala’s *Johnny Mad Dog* (2006), Ken Saro-Wiwa’s *Soza boy* (1995) and Ishmael Beah’s *A Long Way Gone* (2007), all chronicle the awful recruitment of children as war-soldiers. The oeuvres of these writers have introduced child soldier literature as a subgenre in literary discourse. Most of these novels are autobiographical fictions and the narrators of each of these books are persons recovering from different conflicts: Abani wrote about the Nigerian civil war, Dongala wrote about the civil war in Republic of Congo, Jal about the war in Sudan and Beah about the Sierra Leonean civil war where they experienced and even took part first hand.

It is in this spirit that this paper aims at interrogating the conscription of children as child soldiers. A reading of Beah’s novel reveals how a nation is torn apart in an effort to control the diamond areas. Are these children war victims or perpetrators of evil?, What is the nexus between war on diamond and child soldiering? What is the impact of children participation, as war lords to the lost generation of Sierra Leone?, and what is the role of the postcolonial state in the perpetration of this heinous crime? This paper thus argues that Sierra Leone is rich in diamonds and thus attracts the interest of many imperialist powers especially her former colonial master-Britain. The general consensus in this paper is that child soldiers, whether violently abducted, coerced into signing up or volunteered to join an army because



they have no safer alternative are exposed to high levels of abuse and exploitation. Children are also used by government forces other than rebel groups in armed conflicts as child soldiers. For a better understanding of who a child-soldier is, our attention turns to United Nations' definition of a child in Sendabo Teferi's (2004) *Child Soldiers*. He states:

The 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 1 defines a child as: "every human being below the age of eighteen years unless, under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier." Article 38 No. 3 of this convention prohibits recruitment of children below the age of 15 into an armed force. In the article it stated: "states and parties shall refrain from recruiting any person who has not attained the age of fifteen into their armed forces. "Some countries including the USA, strongly oppose raising the recruitment age to 18." However, a majority of countries in the world set 18 years in their national laws for military recruitment and participation in armed conflicts as a standard. (15)

From the above citation, any child recruited below the age of eighteen years is considered as a child-soldier. In Beah's fiction, the children are recruited as from twelve years and below. For the purpose of this study, 'child-soldier' means a person below the age of eighteen years who takes part in an armed conflict. They are used as combatants while others are used as spies, porters and cooks. Girls are not left out according to Romeo Dellaire (2010), girls represent about 40% of all child soldiers. Girls are as he posits "a more valuable resource than boys because they come with additional domestic skills and they can be used for sexual rewards for the soldiers" (Dellaire, 2010:21) in the form of bush wives or sex slaves. This is a far outcry of the happy transition from nightmare to sweet dream that the dawn of independence had promised.

Text and Context: A Historical Overview

Sierra Leone is regarded as one of the first countries in the region to come in contact with the Europeans. The first slaves that were brought to Northern America were taken from Sierra Leone to the Islands of the coast of the Southern United States; and during the 1700s the trade was lucrative as a lot of slaves were needed to work in the plantations of South Carolina and Georgia. The British helped freed slaves from the United States, Nova Scotia and Great Britain to return to Sierra Leone in 1787 and to establish what Kanter Stefan (1993) termed the 'Province of freedom'. In 1896, Sierra Leone became a British Protectorate, but the benefits of the country's abundant resources were rarely channelled to the people of Sierra Leone, as the rule was centred to export of primary goods such as iron, agricultural products and diamonds. The rural areas were largely ignored and the urban centres were mainly for trade and administrative activities; a means to channel out raw materials from the country to the West. Loomba (1998) in *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* has underscored the ways in which colonialists used colonial territories for European developments. He notes:

So far, we have defined colonialism as the forcible takeover of land and economy and in the case of European colonialism, a restructuring of non-capitalist economy in order to fuel European capitalism. This allows us to understand modern European capitalism not as some transhistorical impulse to conquer but as an integral part of capitalist development...In placing colonialism within the

trajectory of capitalism, most Marxist thinkers tended to regard colonialism, as indeed they did capitalism, as an exploitative yet necessary phase of human social development. (20-21)

This accounts for the gruesome rate of underdevelopment experienced by former colonised territories today, as these structures of inequality have ensued themselves into Post-independent Sierra Leone.

The diamond history of Sierra Leone began in 1935 when De Beers legally took complete control of the mining prospects in Sierra Leone. Despite De Beer presence, Lebanese traders within Sierra Leone quickly discovered the immense profits that could be made by the smuggling diamonds out of the country. As a result, illicit mining and trading soon increased throughout Sierra Leone. British colonial policy in West Africa created a system of patronage. According to John Hirsch (2001) in *Sierra Leone: Diamonds and the Struggle for Democracy*, Sierra Leone had a creole urban population of freed slaves. These creoles were educated and given jobs in the civil service. The interior was known as the ‘whites man’s grave’, and no systematic effort was made to develop the hinterland until pressure from another expanding colonial power pushed the British colonial officials to go to the hinterland to protect Freetown. Unwilling to pay the administration of the interior, Sierra Leone became a hybrid of British imperialism using both systems employed in Africa. This led to a great developmental imbalance in Sierra Leone and great discord amongst the different ethnic groups. Sandro Mezzadra and Federico Rahola (2006) in their essay evince that:

To speak of the postcolonial is to specify that time comes problematically ‘after’ the colonies, after that unresolved geography that emerged in Berlin in 1885; it means to bring to light the impossibility of that trench drawn up on papers, the appearance of that territory upon the map, without denying a single drop of blood that has been shed and continues to be shed because of that map. At the same time, it invites us to ponder again the complexity of a world, thanks primarily to the anti-colonial struggles, has truly become one and whose unity continues to be crossed by the subversive space of difference as well as by deep inequality, patent imbalances and incessant exploitation. (5)

The point at stake here is first of all the connection between the colonial enterprise and the conceptualisation of difference which has favoured gross neglect and discrimination in former colonies.

In 1961, Sierra Leone gained independence from Great Britain and inherited a system of reliance on one major export-diamonds. It was after gaining independence did diamond smuggling become a political problem as well as an economic one. In 1968, Siaka Stevens became Prime Minister, bringing the country to a one-party rule. Stevens was the first person to officially connect the diamond mines to political power and profit, and he encouraged illicit mining to gain political power. After Steven’s retired, Joseph Momoh, took control of Sierra Leone with little political skills, he placed even greater efforts in reaping the benefits of the illicit diamond trade. By 1991, Sierra Leone had a corrupt government which did not take into cognizance the aspirations of the impoverished peasants, who made up the majority



population, (Hirsch, John: 2001). In March 23, 1991, the war in Sierra Leone broke out with a cross-border invasion by the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) led by Foday Sankoh attacked Eastern Sierra Leone. Sankoh made it known he represented the urban dispossessed and promised the peasants a greater share in the mineral wealth misused by the corrupt government. However, Sankoh used brutal factors such as mutilation and amputation against these same peasants to allegedly expose the government's inability to protect its citizens. This historical account is evident in Beah's novel as the narrator states:

On our way through the quiet and almost barren town, which now seemed unfamiliar, we saw rotten pots of food that had been left behind bodies, furniture, clothes and all kinds of property were scattered all over. On our veranda, we saw an old man sitting in a chair as if asleep. There was a bullet hole in his forehead, and underneath the stool lay the bodies of two men whose genitals, limbs and hands had been chopped off by a machete that was on the ground next to their pile body parts. I vomited and immediately felt feverish but we had to continue on.
(27)

Thus, the rebels' actions do not seem to reflect their group name: 'Revolutionary United Front' as they kill the same citizens they claim to protect. There is therefore a greater course than just being rebels.

In 1997, President Tejan Kabbah was driven into exile following a military revolt. The coup brought a fourth group into conflict, Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC). The AFRC forged an unlikely alliance with RUF, inviting the insurgents to join a power-sharing arrangement. Following a Nigerian-led intervention in 1998, the democratic government was restored and AFRC/RUF alliance was removed from the capital. AFRC/RUF later regrouped in the bush and launched a successful and devastating attack on the capital, Freetown, in February 1999. The narrator in Beah's oeuvre gives a vivid account of this coup d'état as he says:

As usual I got up...But instead of the usual sounds that brought the city to life, it was woken by gunshots erupting around the State House... someone came on the radio announced himself as the new president of Sierra Leone. His name, he said was Johnny Paul Koroma, and he was Leader of the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC)...to overthrow the democratically elected president Tejan Kabbah...In the background of his speech, gunshots and angry soldiers, cursing and jubilating, almost drowned him out. (202-203)

Although the United Nations broke out a peace deal in 2002 to end the conflict, Sierra Leone is still facing the effect of the gruesome civil war which affected not only the present generation but the future generations.

Passive victims or Perpetrators of Crime

Sierra Leone has suffered terrible social and economic crises as a result of the civil war and fight over diamond. Under the cover of warfare, the rebels and government forces committed heinous crimes against humanity in the form of murder, rape and mutilation. This section aims at interrogating the role of corrupt Sierra Leonean government and rebels in the

conflict. The argument here is whether the children were forcefully recruited or they voluntarily joined to achieve a greater goal. According to Duerden and Piertersa (1972) quoting Achebe: “I think we might be neglecting our purpose function if we take anything for granted instead of thinking what exactly is our society, what are its needs, what can I do, what can I contribute; that is what I was trying to get at, and I think we have a very important function... this is only one of the roles of the writer...” (7). The essential duty of a writer in Sierra Leone in particular and Africa as a whole as posited from Achebe’s statement above resonates with gross portrayal of the strategies to obtain justice as well as to fight for the downtrodden in society. This creative preoccupation imbues writers with the burden to see themselves as fighters for the marginalised and marooned- those at the fringe of the social space. Incidentally, one of Africa’s fine minds- Sekou Toure, stresses this position writers have taken; in his opinion, there is no other platform for writers than to agitate for the right of the de-humanized in the society (Fanon, 1965: 166). There is an exemplification of this aesthetic bent in the characters portrayed in Beah’s fiction- the juxtaposition of voluntary and involuntary involvement of young boys in the course they do not very much understand. Since the Sierra Leonean writer- Beah, may not be overtly political or engaged in the political process per se in his country, but he has participated in the politics of the day through his artistic work.

For child soldiers, every day is a living nightmare due to perpetual failure of protection from the state and civil society. The blatant terror and savagery which is taking place in Africa, a situation where thousands of innocent children are at risk is definitely a microcosm of a problem affecting many parts of the world. In fact, crimes against innocent children after ruthlessly recruiting them with girl soldiers not only being risk of long lasting physical and psychological wounds but placed a greater risk of brutal sexual violence as well. The bone of contention here, is whether the plight of these children are caused by failure of the state or they are ‘demons’ in disguise. Rosen David (2005) in *Armies of the Young: Child soldiers in War and Terrorism*, argues that the general response concerning the issue of child soldiering vastly over simplifies the child soldiering problem. They claim that these children are not always the passive victims as many would erroneously believe. Besides false recruitment, great number of children also volunteers to fight due to limited options for a livelihood in both a poverty and violent stricken land outside the armed organisation. These children make the rational believe that not fighting is worse than fighting. Ishmael and his comrades in Beah’s novel are no exceptions. The brutality of the war and the death of their relatives convince them of a greater reason to fight: “I had passed through burnt villages where dead bodies of men women and children were of all ages scattered like leaves... I had seen heads cut off by machetes, smashed by cement bricks and rivers filled with so much blood” (49). From this narration, one can agree that these children had no choice but to join the fighting; because it is either they kill or they get killed. Moreover, the desire to avenge the deaths of their parents and loved ones spurred them to take up arms and join the war.

These children do not really see themselves as child soldiers but as adults who need recognition. They love being in command of adult rebels as they ‘led the way’ (122) for old and experienced rebels. They also ‘guard the perimeter while the adult rested for a bit’ (122). In this new status as commanders: ‘the rebels roomed about; some sat against walls dozing off



and others, boys as young as me stood at guard posts passing around marijuana' (122). As a result, Ishmael takes up arms, and probably tries to create a different social order which he believes will benefit his country. These children have lost their moral compass as their consciences have been succumbed to war. Ishmael and his comrades are portrayed as the proud perpetrators of this violent experience, this senseless destruction of lives and property and endless sequence of rape and death. Ishmael states:

My squad was my family, my gun was my provider and protector and my role was to kill or be killed. The extent of my thought did not go much beyond that. We had been fighting for over two years and killing had become a daily activity and felt no pity for anyone. My childhood had gone by without my knowing and it seemed as if my heart had frozen... in my head my life was normal. (126)

Thus, he vividly portrays himself as a 'demon' that has no regard for human life and existence. The war has taken a greater part of him and as he constantly tries to justify himself, he is only meant to kill because that is what is expected of him. Ilene Cohen (1994) in *The Role of Children in Armed Conflicts*, argues that humanitarian effort to barn child soldiers in international laws are ill-conceived because rarely they fail to recognise that armed children are not victims of adult manipulations but thinking agents of their own destiny. In this novel, when the war breaks out at the end of the novel, he immediately realises that: "Some friends who had undergone rehabilitation with me had already joined the army" (209). So he had to escape from Freetown for fear of being recruited as a child soldier again.

Rebel groups are often structured as jungle micro-societies and this is especially true of Revolutionary United Front (RUF). Ishmael in this oeuvre recalls how isolated he was from the rest of the world within RUF: "We were always idle at the front line, watching a war movie or doing drugs. There was no time to be alone or to think... It was as if nothing else existed outside our reality" (124). They initiate the children, train them and minimize the risk of dissenting by creating a sense of group cohesion and loyalty. Rebel camps echoed normal village models, but there were still significant mutations: hierarchies of age were reversed and youths could have command of elders. Coulter Chris (2009) corroborates this view when he evinces that:

In the bush the RUF 'Rebel villages' took on the structure and social composition of pre-war villages. Each consisted around two hundred people divided into smaller groups comprising several hundred units. These household units can best be described as pseudo family based, in which every commander would be the head of his compound with several wives, many children, his junior officers, bodyguards and sometimes even old people. (102)

The child-soldiers truly begin to see the organisation as a 'family' in their commanders and superiors as 'father figures'. Because of their youthfulness they look for guidance and a parentage within the armies. The rebel unit becomes a 'home' for the children as it provides them with shelter and comfort in drugs. Instead of aiming for the lost home of their parents, they strive to be realistic rather than idealistic. These child-soldiers prefer to feel a sense of

belonging to a community of rebel unit than to feel for their previous community where they supposedly belong and feel ‘unhomed’.

The disintegration of the postcolonial state is a prime factor that makes children vulnerable and susceptible to become child soldiers. The government of Sierra Leone is also very weak in its policies. A government that is unable to protect her youths puts in jeopardy the future of the nation. If a nation fails to bring up its children appropriately, then that nation is preparing to build up an improper and unsecured society for posterity. Ngugi Wa Thiongo (1993) in *Moving the Centre* shares this view when he notes that:

But even as an adult, by talking about the survival of children is not an act of charity. Children are the future of any society. If you want to maim the future of any society, you simply maim the children. Thus the struggle for the survival of our children is the struggle for the survival of our future. The quality and quantity of that survival is the measurement of the development of our society. Enslave the parents and you enslave the children. Thus if you enslave children, you are enslaving the survival and development of our society; its present and future. (76)

The above passage explains what happens in Beah’s society. The children in Beah’s fiction experience a double abuse of their rights and personalities. They suffer the fact their parents are not only enslaved but murdered in cold blood and as teenagers; they are forced to become soldiers. This is a serious blow to the failed nation of Sierra Leone.

The young boys caught in the throes of war run to the government military base for protection but they are instead recruited and trained as child soldiers. The lieutenant tells the children: “If you do not want to fight or help, that is fine. But you will not have rations and you will not stay in the village you are free to leave, because we only want people here who can help cook, prepare ammunitions and fight” (106). The lieutenant’s speech gives the impression that these boys are obliged to fight because if they refuse to join the government army, they will be chased away and will eventually be recruited by the rebel group. This shows how miserable the lives of these boys have become. They are left only with one choice-to fight in order to stay alive either with the rebels or the government army. If this is the case, what then is the importance of a postcolonial government to society if they cannot protect innocent and helpless young boys who are desperately in need of protection? These soldiers act very much like the rebels as they brainwash the children into fighting. The lieutenant continues: ‘From now on, we will kill any rebel we see, no prisoners’ (137). It is therefore evident that the government forces and rebels are guilty of the same recriminations and unconventional military manoeuvres.

Soldiers respond to conflicts and rebel groups employ child soldiers to boost their ranks. Many rebel groups operate within a meritocratic system of reward, in which the better fighters are given rewards or promotions. Ishmael in Beah’s fiction is awarded the rank of junior lieutenant for being the fastest in slaying or killing a captive: “I was given the rank of junior lieutenant and Kanei was given sergeant. We celebrated the day’s achievement with more drugs and more war movies” (126). The government army’s tactic of abusing and



terrifying children, then providing them with guns ‘for comfort’ (116) only makes violence a vicious cycle. Whether the actions of these children are as a result of brainwashing, their own vengeful motivators, or the child soldiers’ need to violate taboos in order to prove themselves within the structure of their new ‘families’; they forge a new social order where the status quo is dismantled. The state, rebels and ‘bad boys’ should take responsible for their actions.

Lost Generation: Trauma and Loss of Childhood innocence

The term ‘Lost Generation’ was first coined by Gertrude Stein after the gruesome and horrific disillusionment occasioned by the World wars. Haven seen the numerous deaths on such a huge scale, many lost faith in traditional values like patriotism, optimism and believe in God. Rather than face the horrors of warfare, many worked to create an idealised but unattainable image of the past, a glossy image with no bearing in reality. This is similar to Beah’s fictional autobiography which is intended to enlighten the reader of the devastating impact of children involvement in war. Being one of the few child soldiers who was able to escape completely from war, he feels he has as mission to illuminate the plight of these child soldiers. Since the fictional biography is governed by a veritable historical truth, Sarah Anyang Agbor (2010) re-echoes that:

The fictional autobiography is normally written in the first person narrative. Some theorist of the novel have argued that a novel in the first person rarely succeeds in fusing the illusion of presentness in the novel and the immediacy of the dramatized action, that the reader is not able to identity with the experiences of the hero because they seem remote in time, part of a past that is no longer part of personality. (225)

Sarah Anyang’s assertion will not wholly be a revelation of fact especially in an African society wrought with a plethora of conflicts and wars. The reader very much identifies himself with the account and realities in Beah’s fiction. Most often than not, fictional biographers find outlets for their frustrations, aggressions and fear and other lingering negativities surrounding their soldiering memories. Music, religion, political activism and fictional works become avenues through which these dreadful memories are purged out.

Beah’s *A Long Way Gone* is a serious indictment of the lost generation of Sierra Leone. Simon Gikandi (1992) had reiterate the fact that the absence of real change after independence could only lead to conflicts and distress. He has acknowledged the impact of this in his creative enterprise: “...the coming of independence later symbolised for me a fulfilment of these dreams (i.e freedom and injustice). But it soon proved to be a period of the same kind of uncertainties and the conflicts I have tried to come to grips with is one of trying to explain and understand exactly where the dream went: the dream of nothingness” (Gikandi, 1992: 19). Gikandi is thus admonishing a misplaced optimism wherein the end of colonisation has ushered in another era marked by civil wars and conflicts. Sendabo (2004) again:

The use of children as soldiers presents grave human rights problems. Many of these children have been killed during the conflict –denied the most basic right, the right of life. Others have been deprived of their liberty- forcibly conscripted by warring

factions, separated from their families against their wills. Many have been tortured and otherwise treated inhumanely by the warring factions with which they have served. Some have been forced to kill or torture others with consequent severe psychological effects to these children. All have been denied a normal childhood. (18)

The child soldiers in Beah’s narrative do not only suffer from physical and psychological trauma but also from loss of childhood innocence. Child-soldiers suffer immensely from mental illness of post-traumatic stress disorder as well as depressive and substance abuse disorders. While fighting for the government army Ishmael in Beah’s novel is constantly haunted by dreadful images of death: ‘I had a dream... I immediately woke up from my dream and began shooting inside the tent until the thirty rounds inside the magazine were finished’ (120). Life is taking a different turn on Ishmael as he is soon developing a mental illness. His mind continues to plague him with frightful incidents of the war to the extent that he could not make out any difference between illusions and reality: “I would dream that a faceless gunman had tied me up and began to slit my throat with the zigzag edge of his bayonet. I would feel the pain that the knife inflicted as the man sawed my neck. I’d wake up sweating and throwing punches in the air” (149). The rebel forces (RUF) accomplish their goal by inducing the children with marijuana and heroin to make them strong and brave. The drugs he is fed on a daily basis also contribute to the numbing of his emotions and to his transformation into a fierce and ferocious blood thirsty hunter. Ishmael confirms this when he says:

In the daytime around the guarding posts in the village, smoking marijuana and sniffing brown brown, cocaine mixed with gun powder, which was always spread out on the table, and of course taking more of the white capsule, as I had become addicted to them. They gave me a lot of energy. The first time I took all these drugs at the same, I began to perspire so much that I took off all my clothes. My body shook, sight becomes blurred, and I lost my hearing for several minutes. (121)

Ishmael and his comrades are so drenched in cocaine to the extent that his free activity outside the realm of fighting is only to consume it and in much quantity. Even at the Rehabilitation centre, Beah and other boys still suffer from the repleting effect of drugs as they undergo various flashbacks and nightmares: “But at night some of us, would wake up from nightmares, sweating, screaming and punching our own heads to drive out the images that continued to torment us even when we were no longer asleep” (148). They yearn for marijuana even at the rehabilitation centre made these boys to be hostile to those living around the centre and even to the staff members. The inability to get drugs to satisfy their anxieties and urges push them to attack staff members: “...we all shouted in agreement and rushed at Poppay. We unleashed blows on him. One of the boys stabbed his foot and he fell down...we kicked him relentlessly and let him lying on the floor bleeding and unconscious” (140). Even when there was nobody to fight with, the boys from different squads started fighting with each other. At the rehabilitation centre, the children had been accustomed to fighting and any attempt to stop them from fighting was met with stiff resistance.



Moreover, the involvement of children in armed conflicts led to separation of family units which form the base of every stable nation. The rebels murdered people of all ages- from the young to the old. Even breastfeeding mothers received no sympathy:

The last casualty that we saw that evening was a woman who carried her baby on her back, Blood was running down...Her child had been shot dead and as she ran for life...It was a girl, and her eyes were still open, with an interrupted innocent smile on her face. The bullet could be seen sticking out just a little bit in the baby's body and she was swelling. The mother clung to her child and rocked her. She was in too much pain to cry. (13)

The vivid portrait of the dead child and the anguish of the desperate mother only portray the indiscriminate killings of the rebels. Even at night; 'their whispers, the cries of little children seeking lost parents... and the wails of hungry babies replaced the evening songs of crickets and birds'' (12). The smallest yet most important unit of a state which is the family is distorted. The next generation of Sierra Leone is at peril. The lost generation of Sierra Leone only reveals different facets of our present times-hopes dissipates and fear triumphs. Most villages are burnt to ashes, dead bodies littered the streets and most of the young children coerced to join the fighting were in their early twenties; a young generation getting extinct.

The representation of children as child-soldiers occasioned a sense of mutual suspicion between the old and new generation. Communal sense of living suffered drastically. Communal trust died out and young children were regarded with a lot of suspicion or even attacked for fear of reprisals. Ishmael reveals that: "People were terrified of boys our age...Some people tried to hurt us to protect themselves, their families and communities. Because of these things, we decided to bypass villages by walking through the nearby bushes" (39). Innocent children fleeing from war became a collateral damage of the war. Children became victims of hate and suspicion as anyone who sees a child immediately fears is a child-soldier. Similarly Chris Abani's *Song for Night* presents the extent to which war has rendered these child-soldiers speechless. Even in the most violent moments when they feel pain, they are unable to scream because they have been deprived of their vocal cord. Abani thus notes that the violence which My Luck and his mates in the militia undergo renders them voiceless and the only medium of communication is possibly by understanding their memory. The experience of My Luck and Ishmael is symbolic of all the dehumanization that child-soldiers go through during wars.

War always has its costs and it is well documented that the primary victims of this are women and children. On one hand, women lose their husbands, their fathers and sons in combat and often have to flee from their ancestral homes they have ever known. On the other hand, children lose their mothers and they are themselves killed and most cases they are conscripted as child-soldiers. Most of those affected during war times are innocent civilians. The war in Beah's narrative has destroyed the spirit of human bond as "even a twelve-year couldn't be trusted anymore" (48). The old man who meets Ishmael and his friends in his hut tells the children the general fear of the society: "My children this country has lost its good heart, people don't trust each other anymore... I hope that you boys can find safety before this

untrustworthy and fear cause someone to harm you” (56). The breakdown in human relationship has led to mistrust of all. There is an atmosphere of uncertainty and panic.

Conclusion:

Beah’s oeuvre does not reveal any main reason for the recruitment of children as child soldiers, it is as a result of a curious juxtaposition of forceful recruitment, state collapse, willing participation and even as a result of resignation to fate. Although the novel illuminates on the devastating effects of wars in newly independent nations, it also portrays the failure of Sierra Leone government in handling her own affairs meticulously. His memoir has not only opened up an outlet of a historical past but echoes the dangers of how mineral wealth especially in less developed nations have torn apart a people completely. Ironically, the root causes of these conflicts are catalysed by the colonial heritage of structures of inequality such as dictatorial regimes, ethnic tension and civil wars. This is also facilitated by complicity of western nations that constantly fail to confront government corruption and Imperial powers intervene in conflicts only when their interests are at stake. The wars have sounded a note of despair and pessimism; revealing the brutality of the human heart. The strength of the above mentioned discussion resides in the fact that the Sierra Leonean novel is capable of generating the necessary stimuli for wholesome societal change. Thus, postcolonial Sierra Leonean writers’ preoccupation is to illustrate through their works that change is possible through art on the heels of state terrorism and anti-democratic culture widespread in Sierra Leone.

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