

The inhumanity of  
war and the loss of  
innocence in 'a long  
way gone'



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

David Hackworth once said “[w]ar is the ultimate reality-based horror story.” David introduces the idea that war has a constant theme of horror. Many of the events that take place in Ishmael Beah’s narrative “ A Long Way Gone” support Hackworth’s opinion. Ishmael describes several events that take place on his journey to find his family; many of which turn into a horrific encounter that sometimes involves death. The tactics portrayed in war leads to a great loss and a change in point of view as portrayed in A Long Way Gone by Ishmael Beah.

Due to the condition of Ishmael’s home, he and his friends are given an ultimatum: either they leave the village and die or they stay and suffer through the horrific war tactics, which leads to the loss of innocence in Ishmael and his friends. The soon to be soldiers had just started to feel safe in Yele after wandering for days trying to survive and grieving the loss of their friend, they were not going to give up safety just to avoid killing rebels. After choosing to fight, Ishmael and his friends witness prisoners being lined up and killed from being shot in the head. This action is justified by the lieutenant exclaiming “[t]hat is why we need strong men and boys to help us fight these guys, so that we can keep this village safe.” (Beah 12). While at first Ishmael and a few others were disgusted by this action, they soon took part in deciding whether or not someone got to live or die. The lieutenant used this quote as propaganda to get young boys to join the fight against rebels. Not long after the encounter with death upon prisoners Ishmael and his war buddies are transformed into soldiers who can eat anything edible in one minute flat. Ishmael proclaimed that “[...] killing had become as easy as drinking water.” (Beah 12). The once innocent children are now lost

brainwashed soldiers trained to kill; no one can get in their way. Violence was not the only tactic that began the process of loss for these child soldiers; drug addiction soon stripped them from all innocence as well. Ishmael shared how he “[...] had become addicted to them.”(Beah 12). Marijuana, brown brown, and white capsules fueled his addiction day after day, soon leading him to a slow recovery from withdrawal. The actions Ishmael and his companions took part in lead them to the loss of their childhood.

In response to the crumbling world around them, Ishmael and his friends would constantly try to make the best of things in order to keep the bit of childhood innocence that remained. After joining the fight against the rebels their point of view on the world was changed permanently. No longer did the child aged soldiers think there was still hope in the world; Ishmael confirmed that they were “[...] dangerous, and brainwashed to kill.” (Beah 15). They did not think twice about whether someone lived or died at this point, they just killed them. No one, in their eyes, could be trusted anymore. The boys tried so hard to steer away from violence on their lengthy journey to find their family, but now they “[...] needed the violence.” (Beah 12). This quote not only shows how their point of view shifted from finding their family to killing everyone in sight, but it also shows the effect war has had on them. No longer are they trying to flee from violence. Only after they entered the Benin Home and went through hours of people trying to rip them from the corruption of war did they realize how shifted their point of view was. As they entered the second month of living in Benin Home, Ishmael explained how they were “[...] still traumatized, and now that we had time to think, the fastened mantle of our war memories slowly began to open.” (Beah 19). The

boys have now had time to relive the moments they began to regret from war. Their outlook on certain things have changed, and now not only are they traumatized from fighting but also from reliving their childhood war. The point of view from Ishmael and his friends have suffered due to participating in the Sierra Leone war.

Ishmael and his friends experiences in war showed a loss of innocence and a change in point of view. The tactics portrayed in the conflict between the Rebels and Sierra Leonean childhood soldiers shaped them into almost new people. These boys had to make hard choices during the attack from the Rebels that they grew to regret; not only that, but they failed to keep their child mind frame throughout the war. War is unnecessary and leads to a bad effect on the minds of citizens everywhere.