

# A long way gone analysis essay



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A Long Way Gone by Ishmael Beah was one of the most shocking books I have ever read. I knew that there were many problems and civil wars occurring within Africa, but I never realized how much war truly affected the country and its culture. This is not a typical war that we envision here in the United States, this is a dismantling of a country's way of life.

Beah's story gives detailed accounts of things that seem unimaginable in today's world. The fact that governments around the world had an idea that these things were going on and did nothing to stop it sooner is extremely upsetting. The description told by Ishmael of life in Sierra Leone before the war seems like a very traditional African country. The elders of a village were the most respected out of everyone, men had their traditional roles of hunting and providing for the family, the women would cook, and the children would go to school and have various chores and games they would do. There were stories told and big village celebrations that everyone in the village would attend. All of these things that made up the African culture in Sierra Leone were ripped apart at the seams when the war started.

A once proud and tightly knit society was in shambles; the life that people had always known was being taken from them. As the rebels moved through Sierra Leone and raided villages; people had no other option than to run for their lives and worry about the whereabouts of their family members later, because if they did not get out of the village as fast as they could they risked facing death and torture. To me this was one of the more disturbing aspects of the war; even if you were to make it out of your village alive, there was a very slim chance that you would ever find your family. Ishmael was a twelve

year old boy when his village was taken over by the rebels and from then on he never saw his family again.

The traumatizing effect that the loneliness alone would implement on someone of that age is unbelievable, and if you take into effect the terrible and gruesome things he saw at such a young age, it is difficult to even imagine the pain he had experienced. Although he was with a group of boys it was not much better; people would no longer trusted others, especially a group of young boys because they were always mistaken for rebels. For this reason they faced the possibility of death many times, and were not welcome most of the villages they passed through on the long journey throughout the country; another example of how the war has torn the country apart. Ishmael's daily objective was to survive each passing day, but besides that he was unsure of everything else. After losing everything, your home, your family, most of your friends; most people would give up hope but he kept fighting for survival. As bad as life was running from the war, it was even worse when Ishmael was forced into the war.

By the time he joined the army, he virtually had no other choice. He did what any boy that went through what he had would do; he wanted to avenge the murder of his family and joining the army was seemingly the only way to do that. The lifestyle he was living is unbelievable for anyone to endure, let alone a teenage boy. The amount of drugs he was taking was affecting his state of mind and perception of reality, while also severely damaging his body. The army knew what they were doing to these kids with the drugs, they were giving them to the soldiers for their own benefit.

The drug brown-brown was specifically designed to increase the aggression of the children, which obviously made them do things that they would not do in a normal state of mind. The combination of all the drugs that they were taking would enable them to stay up days on end without sleeping. Ishmael's life consisted of war, drugs, and watching war movies, I could not imagine being robbed of my childhood in such a way, and to think that it is happening to majority of the children in Sierra Leone is very disturbing. The psychological damage that a child soldier went through seems almost unbearable, especially after they are taken out of the violence and drug infested environment. After drugs wore off and the children had to face what they have done over the past few years of their lives, to me would be worse than being in the war itself.

I could not imagine going through the withdrawal stages of such powerful drugs at such a rapid pace after being so use to having an unlimited amount at your disposal. Also coming to the realization that you became a killing machine without even knowing it; and experiencing the remorse of brutally murdering people that were forced into battle just like you were would be torture. Ishmael would be afraid to sleep because of the terrible nightmares he knew would come throughout the night. Dealing with such horrific images and memories I wonder how Ishmael was actually rehabilitated back to normal.

Living here in the United States it is difficult to imagine an environment so much different than ours. A war environment where there are no rules of engagement, no consequences for soldiers' actions, Sierra Leone was in complete anarchy throughout the civil war. I find it astonishing that someone

who went through such an awful and dramatizing childhood could come out of the environment still completely sane, and still live a happy life. What I find is the most amazing part of the novel is Ishmael's ability to recall day to day details years after the fact. He can remember things from his early childhood, running from the war, and even remember his years in the army vividly despite being under the influence of such mind-numbing drugs.

It must have been extremely difficult for him to recall such a terrible past as he was writing this book, which gives it even more meaning because he felt that the people around world really needed to know and address the issues affecting children throughout Africa.