

Representation of the Sierra Leone Civil War in Ishmael Beah's *A Long Way Gone*

Abstract

This research has explored the issues of "Representation of Sierra Leone Civil War in Ishmael Beah's A Long Way Gone". This memoir has depicted the issue of what war is like through the eyes of a child soldier. This memoir has represented the African civil war, where people have been suffering from a miserable life due to the dominance of power holders. On the surface, this memoir appears to be text-driven by the central view of the historical pursuit migrating from the little place for the new historical literary analysis. In-depth, it has explored the suppression of poor people by the people who are in power through war. The researcher has seen it from the lens of New Historicist perspectives using the main concepts of H. Aram Veesser's "New Historicism", Foucault's "Power and Knowledge" and "New Historicism", and Stephen Greenblatt and Catherine Gallagher's "Practicing New Historicism". This research explores the Sierra Leone suppression by power holders because of how much they try to escape from the injustice they get more abused. The Hero: Ishmael Beah is forced to go to war and bound to carry AK-47s the tendency of official history.

Keywords: New Historicism, Civil War, Memoir, Migration, Trauma, Genocide

This research focuses on the issues of the Sierra Leone Civil War in Ishmael Beah's *A Long Way Gone*. It analyzes the story of a boy soldier. This book is a record of Beah's real-life experiences as a 13-year-old boy, who was caught in a bloody civil war in his home country of Sierra Leone. He is forced to wander around looking for food, hiding in the woods and trying to avoid getting gunned down by soldiers. It represents the commoner, who are suppressed by the power holders. It explains the pathetic life of Sierra Leone's people, who were forced to live in Africa. Through this

concept appears to be a text-driven by a central view of historical pursuit, leaving little place for the new historicist literary analysis, showing the universal feeling of migrated people.

This research focuses on the representation of Holocaust history in Beah's *A Long Way Gone* and it has explored the issues of the holocaust in the society of Sierra Leone during the war period. Beah denaturalizes the holocaust history, conveying the message from dramatization of Mattrujong people in war, which is self-problematic. The protagonist Beah exposed to violence within their communities is left with emotions of hopelessness, insecurity and doubt. Historical events such as the war on terrorism have had a detrimental effect on the entire nation including the children and Beah's memoir depicts how easily children are lured into combat. It also examines how difficult it is for them to emerge from it and it also represents a pathetic life in Sierra Leone.

The characters in the memoir *A Long Way Gone* are victimized by the suppression of power holders through war. It is against the law for State armed forces and non-state armed group to recruit children, but it still happens. It is a serious problem from a humanitarian standpoint, particularly in Africa through the war. This project seeks to explore how the child soldiers like Beah are compelled to go on war and how they are bound to carry AK-47s because of the tendency of official history. It analyzes how Sierra Leone live freely and decently when they are hunted by the civil war and how war looks like through the eyes of a child soldier, It also analyzes how Beah explores the issues of civil war in Sierra Leone and how he represents all children's problems and context of the civil war through this memoir.

A Long Way Gone represents the issues of war conflict reconciliation and reintegration of youth ex-combatants into society. Sierra Leone sees the inverting

hierarchies by giving children too much power, but by taking on the modern notion of youth and difference between the power of holding a gun and other types of power and the conflict among the majority of the crimes that are perpetrated by rebels from the Revolutionary United Front (RUF). Beah's uncompromising voice is a potent elegy for their suffering, a powerful reminder of the innocent casualties of war. The major quest of this research is to bring new historical discourse of power and discourse in conversation with the depiction of power in African society and the people of Sierra Leone. Through critical analysis, it brings out the bad impact of civil war upon the life of the common people.

This research makes a significant contribution mainly in three areas of concerns. Firstly, the researcher has brought the suppression of official history and linear history in an account. Secondly, it unmask the power practice in Sierra Leone in particular and Africa in general. Lastly, it depicts the construction of new history in African society like that in Sierra Leone. This research quests not only disruption of linear history and power politics but also revives the child soldiers like Beah as important characters in the memoir.

Different critics have analyzed the memoir from the multiple perspectives which preserves the universal importance of the memoir. Regarding the nature of the protagonist and his life, Diedre L. Badejo explores the autobiographical touch in *A Long Way Gone*. He claims that not only Ishmael but thousands of other child soldiers were obliged to fight to survive. He puts forward:

The child soldiers, including Ishmael, were kept high on marijuana and cocaine to numb them to killing. After three years of this hell, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) rescued Ishmael. While he was at a UNICEF center for children soldiers, he struggled with depression and other

mental problems, resulting from all the brutalities he had witnessed and performed. Ishmael has been conditioned to feel that violence and brutality were normal and that people on the other side of the conflict were enemies to be hated and killed. (58)

Badejo opens the secret of the war as he explores how UNICEF rescued Beah, but he even reveals that those child soldiers were struggling and suffering from depression and other mental problems resulting from the brutal acts during the wartime. Badrjo's criticism also assists the researcher in exploring the issues of psychological tension in the major characters.

Irina Kyulanova, one of the prominent literary critics and writer finds Beah's memoir similar to that of Bernard Ashley's novel for young adults *Little Soldier*. He also explores that *A Long Way Gone* represents the then reality of the Sierra Leon. He asserts: "Both *A Long Way Gone* and *Little Soldier* represent and test a common social assumption that war can serve as a rite of passage to maturity and can accelerate the transition from childhood to adulthood" (28-29). Here Kyulanova's criticism explores that war makes a child, a man. But it is also controversial that people; especially child are deprived of their basic rights and obliged to serve for the militia. The war that crushed Sierra Leon, not only crippled the country, but also the innocent children. The proof of this war results in Beah as he gets victimized and psychologically disordered. The criticism of Kyulanova will be utilized to show how innocent people are obliged to take strong liabilities. In the same manner, Sebastian Junger comments:

A Long Way Gone is one of the most important war stories of our generation. The arming of children is among the greatest evils of the modern world, and yet we know so little about it because the children themselves are

swallowed up by the very wars they are forced to wage. Ishmael Beah has not only emerged intact from this chaos, he has become one of its most eloquent chroniclers. We ignore his message at our peril. (92)

The main protagonist, Ishmael Beah, a 13 years old boy, was separated from his family because of the civil war. He struggled hard for survival. He lost his family and friends in the war, and he also suffers because of the holocaust and brutal killing memories. Ishmael's village had been an isolated and peaceful place, and he remembers his pre-war childhood fondly. His loss of innocence is profound and violent. He recalls his grandmother's kindness and advice before the war. Jeannette Walls elaborates:

A Long Way Gone hits you hard in the gut with Sierra Leone's unimaginable brutality and then it touches your soul with unexpected acts of kindness. Ishmael Beah's story tears your heart to pieces and then forces you to put it back together again, because if Beah can emerge from such horror with his humanity intact, it's the least you can do. (102)

In this memoir, they didn't want people to abandon the town because they needed to use civilians as a shield against the military. One of the main aims of the rebels, when they took over a town, was to force the civilians to stay with them, especially women and children but young boys were immediately recruited, and the initials RUF were carved wherever it pleased the rebels with a hot bayonet. This not only meant that you were scarred for life but that you could never escape from them because escaping with the carving of the rebels' initials was asking for death, as soldiers would kill you without any questions and militant civilians would do the same.

James Thorsen examines, "Rarely does one encounter anything but outrage, sadness, and pain when reading about the exploitation of child soldier, but Beah's

account also offers hope, humanity, brave and yes, peace” (1). In this memoir, Ishmael is taken to a rehabilitation centre, where he struggles to understand his past and to imagine a future. In the same manner, one of the critic Carol Huang, opines:

When Beah is finally approached about the possibility of serving as a spokesperson on the issue of child soldiers, he knows exactly what he wants to tell the world... ‘I would always tell people that I believe children have the resilience to outlive their sufferings, if given a chance.’ Others may make the same assertions, but Beah has the advantage of stating them in the first person. That makes *A Long Way Gone* all the more gripping. (37)

A Long Way Gone the protagonist, Beah, loses his real identity by the war. Beah is a wonderful young man who becomes a victim of devastating civil war in Sierra Leone. Like most of the other civilians, he is victim of terror campaign on the part of the both sides of war. Thousands of civilians die in this conflict and in that way, Beah is lucky because he lives. However, he comes out of the experience as a boy soldiers are badly damaged by war.

Another critic Joan Hopes says that Ishmael Beah’s Memoir tells how an ordinary boy becomes a ruthless soldier and then overcomes his terrible experience. He asserts that “the memoir not only highlights the complexity of human nature under stress but also adds an important voice to political and policy discussion on the effects of war on children” (90). He further writes:

Although many of the details in the memoir are horrific, Beah helps the reader through it by maintaining the tone of a story teller somewhat distanced from what has happened. Through many of Beah’s memories include tragedy, personal loss and extreme violence, he lets the facts speak for themselves (91).

The protagonist in the memoir *A Long Way Gone* suffers due to the holocaust and war trauma. Ishmael Beah's psychological drive does not function properly due to the fear of getting killed. The innocent nature of Beah makes him frightened due to the war, killing of innocent lives and his personal experience of escaping from that civil war.

In this memoir, underlying causes of the country's fragility and instability have been studied from the various perspectives by the different critics. They have explored the narrative shared by the Sierra Leone Government, bilateral donors who are rapidly disengaging, and international institutions promoting private sector investment as the primary solution to the country's underdevelopment, that Sierra Leone has emerged from fragility, and, although set back by the shocks of the global financial and Ebola crises, is on a path towards stable development. These observations have emphasized the continuity of socio-political dynamics from the colonial period to the present. They highlight the poor positioning of the country in light of the likely challenges of the future, but they have ignored the historical perspective as well as left the author's perspective to understand the past in this fiction.

In this paper, the researcher has explored Beah's memoir from the new historicism's perspective. The major quest of this research is to bring new historical reading of power and discourse in conversation with depiction of power in African society and the people of Sierra Leone. Through critical analysis it brings out the bad impact of civil war upon the life of the common people which makes their life difficult. In this memoir is the study of an absent a concerted effort to construct a peace accord that deals more fundamentally with the sharing of power and resources between Sierra Leone's many nations, chronic instability and even escalating violence remains a significant risk.

In this memoir due to the war, people were handicapped and felt crisis of identity and freedom. There was excess punishment, suffocation and ultimately death to the people, which brought turmoil and disturbance, physical and psychological pain and many other internal and external suffering in the people. They lost identity in their homeland and were compelled to leave their own homeland. People's life, liberty and pursuit of happiness are shattered by armed activities.

This research is based on the new historicist methodology to excavate representation of Holocaust history in Beah' *A Long Way Gone*. The nomenclature "new historicism" came in western academia, during the early 1980s, and came against formalism and new criticism's focus on the text as an autonomous entity. *Renaissance Self- Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare*, a book by Stephen Greenblatt is regarded as the early text for the development of new historicist reading of the text. New historicist reading often prioritizes parallel reading of the literary or non-literary text. Moreover, it denaturalizes the hierarchy that privileges either literary text over the non-literary text as in the non-literary text or new criticism like a history over literary text as in biographical-historical criticism.

The researcher has used the New historicism theoretical prospects using Michel Foucault's *Power and knowledge* and Harold A. Veenser's *The New Historicism*. Veenser mentions:

If the power anything but repressive, it never did anything to obey say no, do you think are would be brought to obey it? Further, there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge or only knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations. Men make their history, but they do not make it just as they please: they do not

make under circumstances chosen by them but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past. (125)

Ishmael Beah was a child soldier for the Sierra Leone Armed Services during the civil war with the RUF (the Revolutionary United Front) known as the rebels. The rebels are blamed for the death of Ishmael's family, and his soldiering is motivated by his desire for revenge.

New historicism as a theoretical approach to literary texts negates both the autonomy of individual genius, the talent of the author and the autonomy of the texts. It assumes literature is the protection of foregrounding techniques. It contains politico-cultural, social and economic background. So, these aspects are inseparable while analyzing historical texts and the author himself/herself remains in the grip of the historical period while producing the texts. Therefore, history is included in literature. Hence, literature is not only the chronological series of historical elements rather it actively exploits history through its participation in discursive practices. In this perspective, Montrose argues, "The new historical criticism could claim to be in refusing unexamined distinction between 'contexts' in resisting a tendency to posit and privilege autonomous individual-whether an author or a work to be set against a social or literary background" (398).

By formulating the term "Historicity of the text (means to suggest the historical specificity, the social and material embedding of all modes of writing-including not only the text that critics study but also the texts in which we study them. Thus I also mean to suggest the historical, social and material embedding of all modes of reading. By the textuality of histories, I also mean to suggest, in the first place, that we can have no access to a full and authentic past. . . In the second place, those victorious traces of material and ideological

struggle are themselves subject to subsequent mediations when they are construed as the "documents" on which those who profess the humanities ground their own descriptive and interpretive texts. (410)

Here, 'textuality of history,' for Montrose, is that no one has completed and authentic histories of past in the textual forms because one cannot become familiar to historical events and circumstances. Therefore, it happens to be fictional. In this regard, one piles up some reminiscences through artistic use of creative imagination. Similarly, 'historicity of texts' defines historical issue mentioned in the texts which notice the similar type of action or events, and material surrounding with the socio-cultural, political, economic atmosphere. Such event helps one locate the texts based on its eruption. In this view, we emphasize the text rather than foregrounding materials which rejects multiple voices of the people. Hence, new historicist reading of texts attempts to champion the marginal, subdued or out-casted figures, opinions, and the like. In this regard, a literary text includes historical context, not as a factual, independent series of events that exist apart from the reader.

New historicism and cultural criticism come in a similar line for theoretical ground. Both emphasize the historical contexts, politico-social-cultural background for the eruption of the texts. Cultural criticism remains a part of the new historicism. These theories directly attack structuralism and new critical assumption in terms of timelessness, objectivity, autonomous verbal entity, and the like. H. Aram Veesser writes in preface of *The New Historicism Reader* that new historicism really asserts:

That every expressive act is embedded in network of material practices; prey to the practices it expresses; that literary and non-literary 'texts', circulate unalterable human nature, and that a critical method and a language adequate to describe culture under capitalism participate in economy they describe. (2)

Veeseer as a new historicist argues that new historicist reading champions expressing, critiquing and disseminating the embedded religion, culture, society, and politics, materials on the ground of the people who change the unchangeable alter the unalterable.

Stephen Greenblatt, H. Aram Veeseer, Louis Montrose and Michel Foucault are some of the prominent new historicists. For new historicism, every literary text has its situation, background within discourse, institution, social norms, values, characterization, conflicts, and social practices that become the document culture of particular time and space. In this regard, Louis Montrose takes new historicism as "shift from an essential or immanent to a historical, contextual, and conjectural model of signification and a general suspicion of a closed system, totalities and universals" (393).

Foucault was equally a philosopher, a psychologist and a historian. The power problem is central to his thinking regarding the relations between society, individuals, groups and institutions. He investigated this problem from a critical and historicist viewpoint in his notion of discourse power and truth, and also in many articles, studies and interviews. The fundamental idea emerging from all these works is that the privileged place to observe the power in action is the relation between the individual and the society, especially its institutions. Consequently, Foucault studies in what he calls "the analysis of power" how various institutions exert their power on groups and individuals, and how the latter affirm their own identity and resistance to the effects of power.

Moreover, Foucault has contributed to the idea of discourse and power. Foucauldian concept of discourse has an equal position to generate the ideas of power and knowledge. Discourse is regarded as a discipline that came to prominence during

the late 1960s. The term "discourse" means "discursive formation" that denotes large heterogeneous discursive entities. Discourse helps for the eruption of power, and power creates knowledge that becomes truth at last through representation. Truth also is vulnerable to change after a certain period because the same case repeats and established truth can be replaced by new discourse. Therefore, discourse is always moved ahead through the process of formation, correlation and transformation.

Similarly, for Foucault, discourses are everywhere in society. Discourses are inherent even in social, political, cultural phenomena and even economic power operates through discourse. Here, discourse is interconnected with power, knowledge and truth. So, discourse is inseparable from power because discourse is the vital and ordering force that governs every social and political institution.

'Will to Power' is a prominent concept in the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche. The will to power describes what Nietzsche may have believed to be the main driving force in humans namely, achievement, ambition, and the striving to reach the highest possible position in life. These are all manifestations of the will to power. However, the concept was never systematically defined in Nietzsche's work, leaving its interpretation open to debate. In contemporary Nietzschean scholarship, some interpreters have emphasized the will to power as a psychological principle because Nietzsche applies it most frequently to human behavior. However, in Nietzsche's unpublished notes, he sometimes seemed to view the will to power as a more general force underlying all reality, not just human behavior thus making it more directly analogous to Schopenhauer's will to live. Nevertheless, concerning the entire body of Nietzsche's published works, many scholars have insisted that Nietzsche's principle of the will to power is less metaphysical and more pragmatic than Schopenhauer's will to live while Schopenhauer thought the will to live was what

was most real in the universe, Nietzsche can be understood as claiming that the will to power is a useful principle for his purposes.

New historicist reading of the text *A Long Way Gone* by Ishmael Beah helps to study Holocaust history. It attempts to dig out the suppressed voices of marginal groups. Especially, serfs' condition locating them during the civil war period. Through the theoretical concept of new historicism like truth, power relation, discourse, issue of culture, gender problems, hierarchic dimension and so on, it reads Beah's portraiture of civil war and survivor and RUF side in particular and the civil war period.

In this memoir, people at war lose their freedom; even they cannot find their identity. The rules and regulations are dismantled and human life becomes valueless. The given lines make clear that how civil right have gone and human life becomes valueless: "The war had destroyed the enjoyment of every experience of meeting people. Even a twelve-year-old child could not be trusted anymore". (48) Ishmael's speech in the first part of the novel clarifies that war not only affects the humanity of the human being but it also badly affects the animosity of the domestic animals. Even the dogs are running here and there and looking for their owners. So the war hurts all creatures of the earth. We saw children walking themselves, shirtless, in their underwear, following the crowd. 'Nya nje oo, hya keke oo,' my mother, my father, the children were crying. There were also dogs running, in between the crowds of people, who were still running, even though far away from harm. Looking for their owners, the dogs sniffed the air. My veins tightened (12). Those memories are painful. Beah understands that he has to come to terms with them to remember his life before the war and to be able to live on in the present.

However, viewing the memoir through Veesper's concept of new historicism, the Foucauldian "notion of nexus of power, discourse and truth" and Catherine Gallagher and Stephen Greenblatt concept of "practicing new historicism," this project asserts that people of Sierra Leone are suppressed by the powerful people in the name of war because of the tendency of official history. The devastating eleven-year armed conflict in Sierra Leone was characterized by extreme brutality and widespread human rights abuses against civilians. The majority of the crimes were perpetrated by rebels from the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) and the Revolutionary United Front (RUF). However, government forces and their allies, notably the Civil Defense Forces (CDF), also committed serious crimes, although on a smaller scale and of a different nature than those by rebel groups. During the conflict, tens of thousands of civilians were killed and up to one-quarter of the population was displaced.

The war creates fury to those people who want to live free individual life. But war destroys the freedom of the people. They are bound in the chain of "do" or "die". Gun is the symbol of supremacy, power and more than tyranny. An armless person with some sort of view in his mind cannot speak anything in the presence of gun. So, in the memoir, *A Long Way Gone*, people are frightened by the gun and its supremacy. So, they escape from their town and settle in next place as the refugees. They transform into refugees. It may create obstacle in the individual identity of the civilians.

New historicists seek to dig out the relationship between texts and their socio-historical and cultural contexts. For them, texts not only document the social forces but inform and constitute history and society. It also features in the social

processes which form both individual identity and the socio-historical situation.

Greenblatt critics:

The whole passage has the resonance of an allegory of the fall of man: we were whole, agile, integrated; we were individual subjects but not individuals, we had no psychology distinct from the shared life of the society; politics and poetry were one. Then capitalism arose and shattered this luminous . . . (3)

In this extract, Catherine Gallagher's and Greenblatt focus on the relationship between text and context, and art and society. For Greenblatt, the poem should be interpreted as poetry where artistic form along with context that remains as the inherent characteristics. For him, all human beings are individual subjects but not individuals. That is to say, each person is different from each other, but their behaviour, the way of thinking represent certain group, society in which they belong to. We have a psychology which is not distinct from our society. He means to say that individual is the part of society because he is the socio-cultural construct.

Ishmael Beah who penned a memoir about his time as a child soldier in Sierra Leone's civil war said he wrote the book for a variety of reasons. First, he wanted to expose how children are subjected to indoctrination as they are recruited to fight in conflicts around the world. *A Long Way Gone*, Beah's harrowing account of the civil war in his native Sierra Leone, provides the fullest picture of just how inexorable the plunge into war is for many children. Beah's memoir depicts how easily children are lured into combat; it also examines how difficult it is for them to emerge from it.

At the beginning of the book, he is a young boy whose parents are separated and he loves performing rap with his elder brother and friends. After an armed force attacks his home village, his brother, his friends and he are left orphans and wander around seeking shelter. Ishmael is eventually claimed as a child soldier for the Sierra

Leone Armed Forces at age 13. After being rescued by UNICEF at 16, he is rehabilitated and begins to live with his Uncle Tommy. While there, he is recruited to travel to the United States to speak at a United Nations event about child soldiers. Returning to Freetown after his speaking event, he eventually made his way back to the United States. After a time, he was able to forgive himself and love once again.

The boys then settle into another village protected by the army. After many uneventful days, the lieutenant in charge of the troops in the village announced that the RUF was beginning to assault the village. The lieutenant said that for the people to survive, they must contribute to the war effort by enlisting in the army; escape was not an option. By doing this, the lieutenant secures many child soldiers, the weapon of choice for both the RUF and the Sierra Leone Armed Forces.

Ishmael becomes a junior lieutenant for his skill in executing prisoners of war and is put in charge of a small group of other child soldiers. As a child soldier, Ishmael is exposed to extreme violence and drug usage. The drugs he used are described in the book as "brown brown", "white pills", cocaine, and marijuana. Critics Hilary Mante writes A corrosive, eloquent and illuminating account of a child soldier's life. It makes you look at the news with a fresh eye. What Beah has done is to make his situation imaginable for us, and stop us from simply turning away in horror. That is the best gift he could give the world (238). This memoir is a wrenching survivor's tale, but there's no self-pity or political digression to be found. Raw and honest, *A Long Way Gone* is an important account of the ravages of war, and it's most disturbing as a reminder of how easy it would be for any of us to break, to become unrecognizable in such extreme circumstances and how it compelled to go war because of power holders.

New historicists recognize the idea that a work of art should not be judged in terms of its formal structures isolating it from context. So, context plays a vital role to understand various aspects of that society. New historicist reading helps one understand different discourses, truths, power relation, conflict and many other issues that exist in the text. New historicists believe that, after reading a text, one can find the use and dispersion of power, marginalization or subjugation of social classes within the creations. New historicists assert that examination of literature is based upon one's cultural background where the environment also affects.

The Foucauldian notion of discourse goes against the traditional notion of linguistic discourse believing in the discourse as the socio-political statements constructed by the certain power location operating in the network of truth, power and representation. Discourse determines the functioning of the society constructing the truth through the creation of power. A certain group of society goes to the power in its evolution, and creates the socio-political statements as truth that is supposed to be Trans historical by the discourse makes but in reality the discourse becomes the constructed truth that rules society till the time when the individuals will not find the defect. Discourse in society is created with the help of object, and concept and theory. First of all, the object is focused, the concept is formulated and finally, the theory is made which becomes discourse. In the creation of discourse, the powerful location of society plays an important role because of which the supports of discourse remain in Centre and the opposed are silenced, making them reside in the society that rules the common individuals hegemonically or the discourse created in the social rules the common individuals taking their consent to be ruled.

Beah goes against the claim of the rebels. He finds rebel's claim not appropriate. The slogan of rebels was the liberation of the people from the corrupt government, but he does not see their aim and act matching. He asserts:

I wondered what he would say about the war that I was not running from. I had heard from adults that this was a revolutionary war, liberation of the people from corrupt government. But what kind of liberation movement shoots innocent civilians, children, that little girl? There wasn't anyone to answer these questions, and my head felt heavy with the images that it contained. As we walked, I became afraid of the road, the mountains in the distance, and the bushes on either side. (14)

Here, Beah feels sorry for those innocent civilians, who were killed by civil war. He does not see any evidence that aims at their freedom; rather the violence has created instability and fear in people. The 'heavy head' suggests his incapability to reason it out. Thus, he became afraid of the road, the mountains and the bushes. It suggests that he is still suppressing by the civil war, and he is suffering from the war period in Sierra Leone.

The protagonist Beah a 13- year old soldier represents all the child soldiers suffering from civil war. He reminisces: "We walked around the village and killed everyone who came out of the houses and huts. Afterwards, we realized that there was no one to carry the loads. We had killed everyone. So I sent Kanei and Moriba back to base to get help. They left, taking some ammunition from the dead gunmen; some of them still clung to their guns. The three of us remained in the village. Instead of sitting among the dead bodies, the bundles of food, crates of ammunition, and bags of drugs, we took cover in the nearby bushes and guarded the village..." (143-144).

Those seeking to understand the human consequences of war, its brutal and brutalizing costs would be wise to reflect on Ishmael Beah's story.

In *A Long Way Gone*, author Ishmael Beah depicts the events of life in Africa during the civil war period through the lens of his friend, family and himself experience covered with his imagination. Beah says:

A soldier wearing civilian clothes, with a whistle around his neck, stepped up to a rack of AK-47s and handed one to each of us. When the soldier stood in front of me, I avoided eye contact, so he straightened my head until my eyes met his. He gave me the gun. I held it in my trembling hand. He then added the magazine, and I shook even more. (109)

Ishmael's story is one of personal transformation and survival. Before the war, he enjoys a happy childhood in his village. During the war, he becomes a killing machine capable of horrible acts of violence. When UNICEF rescues the boy soldiers from the front lines of war, Ishmael is rehabilitated.

Leila Gupta in her writing *Psychological Intervention for War Effected Children in Sierra Leone*, cited the history of the war in Sierra Leone, "Given the sudden, cruel and interpersonal nature of the violence inflicted at close range during the real invasion in Sierra Leone, it is a wonder that these survivors experienced intrusive images, bad dreams, nightmares, and intense arousal systems". (14)

A Long Way Gone raises the issues of political conflict in which commoner people are increasingly not only the victims but the weapons of war. Ishmael's sensitive and careful telling of a story has not been allowed to tell, obliges us to examine the limits of representation. Beah faced many obstacles on the way. The bloodshed mass destruction, murder and the bloody man are commoner, which he found on his journey. They walk for days, but Ishmael cannot remember how many.

Suddenly, they are stopped by the government soldier with rifle who takes them to another village. He narrates:

We must have been walking for days, I do not really remember, when suddenly two men put us at gunpoint and motioned, with their guns, for us to come closer. We walked in between two rows of men carrying machine guns, AK-47s, G3s, and RPGs. Their faces were dark, as if they had bathed them in charcoal, and they stared intensely at us with their extremely red eyes. When we got to the back of the line, there were four men lying on the ground, their uniforms soaked with blood. One of them lay on his stomach, and his eyes were wide open and still; his insides were spilling onto the ground. I turned away, and my eyes caught the smashed head of another man. Something inside his brain was still pulsating and he was breathing. I felt nauseated. Everything began to spin around me. One of the soldiers was looking at me, chewing something and smiling. He took a drink from his water bottle and threw the remaining water at my face. (100)

Along the way, they see two dead bodies that make Ishmael want to vomit. One of the soldiers smiles and says, "You will get used to it, everyone does eventually" (100).

They are taken downriver to Yale, which is occupied by the military. Again, he is turned into a soldier. He joins in the direct war at first at the age of 15. At that time, he thinks about his identity; whether he is a child or soldier. These lines make clear so:

In the daytime, instead of playing soccer in the village square, I took turns at the guarding posts around the village, smoking marijuana and sniffing *brown*, cocaine mixed with gunpowder, which was always spread out on the table, and of course taking more of the white capsules, 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 time, I began to perspire so much that I took off all my clothes. (121)

In this way, Ishmael's identity of a child is turned into a soldier. At the time of taking pleasure by playing with the children and loving with their parents, he was compelled to enjoy with the guns. He says, "My squared was my family, my gun was my provider and protector, and my rule was to kill or be killed" (126). This gives the hint that the war has no good side, its adverse impact upon the whole human being whether they involved in the war or not, may show into the human psyche. The physical and psychological pain was realized by everyman at the wartime. Even the children are also involved in the war. They faced numerous difficulties by this war. They can't formulate their own identity. So this research proves that war has no good side. It means the present researcher proves the negative impact of war on human society.

The memoir produces the young character, Beah so as to fit his in certain historical time period of war. New historicism denaturalizes the impermanence of literary criticism. Recent literary criticism is directly or indirectly affected that includes the beliefs and assumptions of our present time. In the same manner, literature deals with society or it is reflected by its own socio-economic and politico-cultural contexts. New Historicists claim that as time changes our understanding of literature also changes. However, historical context remains the same in the silent form there in the text. M. H. Abrams writes, "In the place of dealing with a text in isolation from its historical context, new historicists attend primary to the historical and cultural conditions of its production, its meaning, its effects, and also of its later critical interpretations and evaluations" (190).

He argues that historical context cannot remain in isolation. Through the contextual reading, meanings and effects of text come to the fore that ultimately results in critical interpretation. For him, the concept of new historicism dominated academia and taken as an important tool in the 1980s. As a literary theory, it came against the concept of new criticism that focused on the self-sufficient verbal entity. New critical reading of the text prioritized figurative use of language like simile, metaphors, ambiguity, irony, and the like. Unlike new criticism, the new historicist analysis takes context on the top of others. Therefore, it undertakes to dig out the socio-cultural context concerning the context of the text itself. New historicism argues that literature cannot be understood by separating from its contexts. Hence, context is the soul for new historicist to generate meaning.

History is not the manuscript of chronological events of the facts. Certain historical, social and cultural practices remain as the background for any literary text. In this respect, literature is simply a means to resemble social reality in which it has been set up. New historicists assert that literature carries the seeds that were embedded in context. These aspects always remain with constant interaction and interchange with other discourses inside the network of institutions, beliefs, and socio-cultural power relation. These components help to conclude that a text includes history where contextual elements liberate multiple meanings by text. In this line of argument, M.H. Abrams discusses the role of new historicist while producing and analyzing literary text. Abrams argues:

New historicist acknowledges that they themselves, like all authors are subjective that have been shaped and informed by the circumstances and discourses specific to their era, hence that their own critical writing in great

part construct, rather than discover readymade, the textual meanings they describe-and-rupture the literary and cultural histories they narrate. (194)

Abrams argues that all authors of any literary and non-literary texts bound up with different social practices and other social elements. So, the text is directly or indirectly governed by socio-cultural practice. The author cannot neglect these elements because he is a member of the same society. He writes what he finds in the society. In Abrams's understanding, new historicists also assert that when an author creates something, the subjectivity of the author prevails in the text but such creation is shaped by the circumstances and discourse specific to the particular era. Therefore, the text is the representation of a particular society and culture as such.

Beah also memoirs that, "I am from Sierra Leone, and the problem that is affecting us children is the war that forces us to run away from our homes, lose our families, and aimlessly roam the forests. As a result, we get involved in the conflict as soldiers, carriers of loads, and in many other difficult tasks. All this is because of starvation, the loss of our families, and the need to feel safe and be part of something when all else has broken down. I joined the army really because of the loss of my family and starvation ..."(199). It is defining the effects of power as repression; one adopts a purely juridical conception of such power; one identifies power with a law, which says no power is taken above all as carrying the force of a prohibition.

Michel Foucault, prominent thinker of post-structuralism, has a widespread contribution to the development of new historical methodology. Foucault did not take the direct role for developing a new historical reading of the text. However, new historicism exploits many ideas of Foucault such as discourse, representation, truth and power. Foucault came up with the concept of truth, discourse, knowledge, and representation. He critiqued truths and said truths are by-products of discourses which

are made through knowledge. Power is a matter of representation. Likewise, through power, all types of truths can be made up. Truths, discourse, discourse, networks of power, empower certain institutions that privilege other institution with certain attributed images. Therefore, for Foucault, power is creative.

Foucault questioned the authenticity and validity of official history because it binds the information in a linear order that excludes the important events. Foucault puts forward his notion of official history. For him, official history left the core concept that was subdued due to politics. Foucault asserts "effective history however, deals with events in terms of their most unique characteristics, their most acute manifestation"(94). Foucault furthermore claims, "Power is everywhere... Power comes from below. That is there, is no binary and also encompassing opposition between rulers and ruled at the root of power relations and serving as a general material"(93) in his first volume of *History of Sexuality*. For Foucault power should not be understood as a destructive force rather it has productive or creative nature.

The fact that Beah does not want to leave the army is quite a surprise for the leader. It is argued that everyone wishes the war to be ended and gets relief from war, but Beah as a child soldier does not want to leave, he does not want to leave the war because war has taught him and hallucinate him in such a way that he understands it as a daily routine and killing as a rule. In Benin Home, Beah and other boys are very aggressive towards the staff members. Beah says that "we would throw bowls, spoons, food, and benches at them. We would chase them out of the dining hall and beat them up" (138). It indicates that since Beah is not in a proper condition to response people, his warm blood does not let him stay without doing anything.

In *A Long Way Gone*, the understanding of rehabilitation as a reverse rite of passage to childhood is inherently problematic in two ways. First, the forceful and

systematic engagement of children in activities that are considered socially unacceptable for their status challenges the distinction between children and adults. The fuzzy boundaries between child and adult soldiers in Beah's memoir make the selection for rehabilitation seem illogical and undesirable to its subjects. Due to the established correspondence between fighting and maturity, the boys cannot make sense of the reasons for them to be chosen for rehabilitation, as they are all "good fighters" (hence, by perverse logic, good adults).

Furthermore, only some of the boys are selected for the program, and many of them are left on the frontlines, which confirm the boys' impression that they are "randomly selected" (133). Ishmael supposes that one of the criteria for the selection is age, because his friend Kanei is not chosen for the program, being about eighteen or nineteen years old at the time. Kanei, however, had been recruited at the age of sixteen as one of the group of liminal adolescents with whom Ishmael had been traveling through the country, and had gone through the same two years of fighting and violence as Ishmael. A number of questions arise here: is age, then, a sufficient standard for adulthood? Has war played the role of an effective rite of passage for boys like Kanei, sanctioning violence as an appropriate sphere of activity for them? The lack of justification of the selection procedure and its clash with the idea of social and age hierarchy that the boys have been taught to accept undermine the positive intentions of the rehabilitation and provoke the boys' anger and resistance to it. When they are taken away from the frontline, Beah comments: "As the truck began to pull away from the base, I started boiling with anger, because I couldn't make sense of what was happening"(130). New historicists believe that, after reading a text, one can find the use and dispersion of power, marginalization or subjugation of social classes within the creations.

Beah's texts represent war as a devious rite of passage, one that denies the protagonists their childhood status but fails to either grant them maturity or to incorporate them as adults in a stable social structure. This memoir represents the messages Nevertheless, war? Or the violent activities that can possibly fall under the definition of war? does share with the normal rite of passage a certain transformative power, which affects the characters internally and leaves them in the middle ground, in the liminal position that is supposed to be only a temporary stage on the road to maturity. Ishmael Beah's story, while one of the horrific acts of violence, is also one of hope and transformation as he struggles to regain his identity and shed the terrors of his past. Learning about his life and the struggle and survival of other child soldier thinking and empower them to seek other rewarding and inspiring opportunities to learn even more about their world.

Beah's memoir is an act of witness. He relates gruesome violence so that the reader might understand what his life was like, what the war was like. The hope is that he might draw enough attention to what happened in Sierra Leone so other atrocities might be stopped before they begin. When the memoir begins, war is just a rumour to Beah. He doesn't believe it will ever reach him. Refugees who pass through his village won't speak of what they've seen and do not stay for long. When the violence does reach Beah, his innocence is shattered. That he is a target of violence makes no sense to Beah. The purpose of the violence does not seem to be political. Indeed, the rebels seem to have no purpose other than to be violent. They laugh and joke as they kill. The arbitrary nature of the violence makes it all the more terrifying. Beah only knows if he is caught, he will not be spared.

When Beah is conscripted by the army, he comes to understand the condition of those soldiers he once feared. Killing becomes something they bond over out of

necessity. As a soldier himself, he becomes attracted to the power he can have over another person's life that is, the horror he can inflict. But as attracted as he is to the violence, he is also horrified by it. He has terrible migraines, cannot sleep and does a fearsome amount of drugs to distance him as much as he can from the present.

Beah chooses to narrate his time as a child soldier through a series of flashbacks illustrates how people afflicted by war are forever changed by it. The trauma never leaves them. Beah's occasional narrative forays into the present reflect the permanent influence of his past as a child soldier and as a victim of the war on his present. He is still haunted by nightmares and suspects he always will be.

In *A long Way Gone* illustrates lessons that apply to both the historical event and the situations in which modern readers might find themselves. In this way, the memoir can be used collectively to find an appropriate balance between studying the Holocaust as an isolated historical event and post-memory narrative. By situating the lessons about scapegoating in the proper historical context, the stories about the Holocaust can be appropriately used to illustrate the modern effect of the historical event. After concluding their Holocaust history research with the realistic, horror and sentimental accounts of the Holocaust, students are interested in the event, are aware of the history of the event, and are empowered to never allow such an event to happen again. Together, the books confront the fact that the Holocaust as a historical event happened and extract appropriate lessons from it.

In a nutshell, through the minute study of the primary text with the lights of new historicism, the researcher has concluded that Beah's *A Long Way Gone* is all about the discussion of existing movements like in the war period in Sierra Leones. It not only focuses on the general background of Holocaust history but also portraits the ramification of the Holocaust. This research concludes that new historical fiction is a

way to represent a new historicism experience in a particular case since the recruitment of child soldiers is continuing in African nations at present, the study reached to the level by which it can predict that the recruitment of child soldiers for the political benefit does not make any good to individuals and nations.

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Tribhuvan University

Representation of the Sierra Leone Civil War in Ishmael Beah's *A Long Way Gone*

A Thesis Submitted to the Central Department of English, TU

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement for the

Degree of Master of Arts in English

By

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Letter of Recommendation

Anu Bhandari has completed her thesis, “Representation of the Sierra Leone Civil War in Ishmael Beah's *A Long Way Gone*” under my supervision. She has completed her research in December 2020. I hereby recommend this thesis to be submitted for viva voce.

.....
Dr. Raj Kishor Singh

Supervisor

Date: 21 February 2021

Letter of Approval

This thesis entitled “Representation of the Sierra Leone Civil War in Ishmael Beah's *A Long Way Gone*” by Anu Bhandari has been submitted to the central department of English, Tribhuvan University. It has been approved by the undersigned members of the Research Committee.

Members of the Research Committee

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Internal Examiner

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External Examiner

Prof. Dr. Jib Lal Sapkota

Head

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Date: 05 March 2021

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Anu Bhandari