



***A Long Way Gone, by Ishmael Beah***

Reviewed by: Shahzad Musaddiq\*

The UN estimates that there are nearly 300,000 child soldiers in the world today. Ishmael Beah was one of them. *A Long Way Gone* is Beah's memoir and I thankfully came across it by coincidence.

I was sitting at home one night watching a news show and Beah was on the program discussing his life and talking about the book. His discussion piqued my interest and I wanted to pick up a copy. A few weeks went by and to my surprise I found out that Beah had come to Winnipeg to promote the book. While I did not get a chance to meet the author I managed to pick up a copy and I am grateful to have had the chance to read it.

*A Long Way Gone* is a deeply emotional and powerful memoir of Beah's life before, during, and after the conflict. Beah describes in painful detail the turmoil that took place in Sierra Leone through his eyes. Describing how he went from peaceful daily life, to abandoning his home, being enlisted as a child soldier and finally his rehabilitation. Beah's story is presented through his perspective and thus as a reader you can't help but feel the pain, fear and anger that he shares recalling his past. The memoir is at times described with great detail and is certainly not for children, but this detail is needed to describe the harshness of his life as a soldier. It is this intense and powerful description that made the book resonate with me.

Before reading this book my knowledge of the conflict in Sierra Leone was limited. However, after reading the memoir I feel as though I have been given a very tiny glimpse of what the war was like through the eyes of a victim, soldier and a refugee. Being in a child's voice makes the book an easy read, but as a narrator Beah adds in his reflections, describing his thoughts now that he is looking back as an adult.

The memoir begins by describing how Beah (12 years old at the time) and his family lived in their village of Mogbwemo. When the war reached Beah's home he was forced to flee, leaving his family behind. Along with a few other young boys he traveled from city to city trying to survive and avoid the ever-spreading conflict. Unfortunately the group could not hold together for too long as they eventually split up and Beah with a few of his new friends were captured, recruited and brainwashed into serving the government army. The boys were drugged and told that they would be rewarded if they were "good soldiers", and threatened with death if they did not cooperate. He fought with the army and survived for three years, until at the age of sixteen he was finally given a chance to leave the conflict and be put into a Unicef rehabilitation program.

Upon his rehabilitation Beah was able to study in the United States and has since been involved with a multitude of Human Rights projects, even speaking in front of the United Nations. Overall, Beah's memoir serves as a reminder of all of the injustices that still exist in the world today and how he was one of the lucky few that were able to escape. Thus, I hope his memoir will serve as an inspiration for us so that we do not look away blindly to the horrors being committed around the world. At the very least we should fulfill our duty to become aware, remain active, and make sure that the cries of our brother and sisters are not left unheard.

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