



Girl Soldier by Grace Akallo : As Victim of Civil War



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ABSTRACT

War studies say that main victims of wars are children and women. Children are especially helpless among civilians. Indirectly, cause of incapacity of adults to protect them from the consequences of armed conflicts, loss of education, displacement, etc. Directly, as victims of warfare, bombing or war crimes and participation in armed conflicts. Children have different reasons to join armed groups, but they also have different post-war experiences. Some of them will return to their families and continue with the childhood they used to have. Society will accept them as victims or even heroes. One part of children, former soldiers is more

respected by parents, peers, teachers or whole because of their participation in hostilities. Others will have no family, community will reject them, and only identity they would have will be one of the combatants. Majority of children affected by armed conflicts are traumatized with some bad happenings. They may be physically injured, have big loss and problems of displacement, loss of families, friends and loved ones. A lot of them will express some difficulties in later life, and majority develops severe psychosocial problems or even psychiatric disorders.

KEYWORDS

Civil war, child soldier, victim, trauma and memoir.

RESEARCH PAPER

INTRODUCTION:

Girl Soldier, is the book describing story of Grace Akallo who was among 29 Aboke girls who were abducted from St. Mary's College in October 1996 in Uganda. This book is co-written by Faith McDonnell, an American activist and writer with special concern for future of vulnerable Acholi people of northern Uganda. Grace narrates how her and other girls were suffered under brutality of Joseph Kony's Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). The Lord's Resistance Army is a rebel group that originated in Northern Uganda as a movement to fight for interests of Acholi people. Through Akallo's voice, reader catches a glimpse of what it meant to be a girl soldier in Lord's Resistance Army and disturbing facts of impact of crisis in Uganda.

Depiction of honest life experiences is crucial today. African literatures have recognized the power and strength of words. They should not devalue words. Words are like fire. They are water too.

The most striking aspect of this novel is balance maintained by Grace while connecting history psychology and plot in this novel. Every chapter in this way deals with a key element of trauma memoir. The portraying trauma in literature is to address the readers to measure the intensity of suffering and mental shock experienced by victim of trauma.

In first chapter titled *Buried Alive* of her book, she mentioned in the very weak moments she tried to kill herself but it's not working she writes,

When death illuminates my way, there is no sign of
life. I have escaped death many times. Twice, I tried
to shoot myself, and I would have succeeded if a
fellow captive had not snatched away the riffle.¹

(Akallo. 27)

About Kony who abducted her with other 39 girls she describes, Since 1987 as many as fifty thousand children, almost all from Acholi people of northern Uganda, have been violently abducted from their homes, refugee camps and schools. The mastermind behind these kidnapping is warlord Joseph Kony, leader of a rebel force that calls itself the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). A former altar boy he now

refers to himself as a “*spirit medium*” and claims to have spiritual powers that protect him and his troops.² (Akallo. 31)

Child soldiers were forced to obey or they would be beaten or killed. As Jal mentioned in his book *War Child* about how they brainwashed by officer while training,

Think of everything you have lost. Think of all that
Has been crushed and destroyed by the jallabas.
Remember the life you once had, the peace you once
Knew, and be sure that the only way you will get it
back is if this war is won.³ (Jal. 74)

Thus, child soldier convinced to take revenge on their sufferings and ordered to kill others. If older soldiers told younger soldiers to beat their best friend they need to do that otherwise he will be punished badly. Friends, relation or family no matter at war, soldiers must follow the orders at any cost. They never allow ask any question about anything. At the end children became killing machines to militants.

Woman has always been supposed to be Subaltern. Subaltern means the colonized or oppressed subject whose voice has been silenced. Women’s voice has been silenced but women want to express, themselves in their own words. *Simone De Beauvior aptly says, “A free and autonomous being like all creatures a woman finds herself living in a world man compel her to assume the status of the other.”*⁴ (Mane. 145)

Women aware of the injustice compelled on them, they raised their voice in protest and build the base of women’s liberation movement through feminist writings. Its main concern is to make women independent, self-reliant, to bring awareness of their equal rights and status. Virginia Woolf rightly observes in this regard in her book that:

Imaginatively she is of the highest importance,
practically She is completely insignificant; she
pervades poetry from cover ; she is all but absent

from the history.⁵

(Mane. 145)

The culture and civilization have always denied woman right to live as a human being. Women's voice remains on periphery from her childhood either at her house hold level or at social level. Most famous African author **Ngugi wa Thiong** said Actually in the novel he said that,

I have tried to show the effect of the Mau Mau war on the ordinary man and woman who were left in the villages. I think the terrible thing about the Mau Mau war was the destruction of family life, the destruction of personal relationships.⁶

(Duerden. 121)

During civil war women and children suffered a lot. There was no hope for Jal during them travel to Wyatt. Many children include Lual died cause of what happened in the mind of a child soldier. In African countries a man can easily do more than one marriage for small reasons like household works. What a tradition or culture and believes no one can questioned about it behind it may be patriarchy or domination. Akallo's grandfather's father had seven wives rich and powerful person known by number of wives it is beyond one's imagination. Just like Jal's father married another women after left family to go at battlefield. Waris Dirie's father also married another young girl although his first love marriage with Dirie's mother. For them it is not a big deal to married more than once. They treat that person as honor. In short multiple wives for less reason are a common thing.

Someone was considered strong, powerful and rich depending upon how many wives and children he had. Grandfather's father had seven wives, but unfortunately Only gave him children.⁷

(Akallo. 50)

Girl mother '**forced mother**', '**child mother**', when used to describe the situation concerning girls within the fighting forces, are all related to forced marriage '**or forced wife**'. The word mother, 'however, obviously implies the birth of a child to a mother while in an armed group, which again also falls under forced marriage'.

The scar in real life situations has the point of a thing that harshly looks back at us, its spotted spots and weird presence telling us that a perfect skin once stood in its place before a scratch happened. This resonates with Caruth's idea of trauma as, "*the repeated infliction of a wound, a breach in the mind's experience of time, self, and the world*"⁸(Caruth. 3) or something which, "*imposes itself again, repeatedly, in the nightmares and repetitive actions of the survivor.*"⁹ (Caruth. 4)

Waris Dirie writer of memoir *Desert Flower* shared her life story with readers. She is from Somalia and wrote on the back cover of her another book entitled *Desert Dawn* that:

Although Waris Dirie fled her homeland, she never forgot the country and culture that moulded her. The world of famine and violence, where women have no voice- the very world that nearly destroyed her also gave her the tools to survive. She traces the roots of her courage, resilience and humour back to Somalia and most particularly to her mother.¹⁰

(Dirie. Back cover page *Desert Dawn*)

Natives suffered more than others without any cause only because they were at that particular and wrong place. They cried, children are dragged into bush and taught to smash people's heads, cut people's lips, hands and limbs ;related to this, there are some pictures one can find in *Another Man's War*, Sam Childers book on page no 57 and page no 178 .

The purpose of this paper is to examine actual experiences of Ugandan girl child soldiers, both during and following conflict, in order to explore gender gaps that exist in post-conflict programming and to engender meaningful solutions that target these gaps. Leading objective of this study was to try to answer question about effects of participation in armed conflicts on the children.

CONCLUSION:

One small fire can burn the entire forest. One small drop of tear shows concern about someone else. Human beings need to stand for other human beings. Life needs to know the importance of others' lives. War has become a worldwide burning issue in present society.

Autobiographies like *Grace* highlighted the brutality of war and boys or girls who became the blunt instruments of war. Really both names of authors Grace and Faith are suited for this text, without Faith Akallo could not be able to get Grace and came out from her trauma. Grace is a brave and insightful woman and brilliant author. Her descriptions of dissociation, untouched states and flashes of memory are gracefully realistic.

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