

## الاساءة الى الطفولة: تجنيد الاطفال في رواية الجندي الولد لكيلي هوتون

The Devastation of Childhood: Child Recruitment in Keely Hutton's *Soldier Boy*

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## الملخص

يناقش البحث احدى المواضيع المهمة والتي تخص الاساءة الى الاطفال والمتمثلة بتجنيدهم في النزاعات المسلحة. للأسف، اصبح الاطفال هدفا جيدا للمجاميع المسلحة في الماضية بسبب كثرتهم وضعفهم فهم لا يكفون هذه المجاميع الكثير لبقائهم على قيد الحياة او حتى اعاليتهم. يتناول البحث هذه القضية من خلال تقديم دراسة لرواية الجندي الولد (٢٠١٨) للكاتبة الامريكية كيلى هوتون من خلال تبني نظرية كل من بيرند بيبر وكريستوفر بلاتمان "منطق تجنيد الاطفال والتهديد (٢٠١٣). يعتقد الباحثان بوجود منطق وراء عملية تجنيد الاطفال والخطوات التي تتبعها الفصائل المسلحة لتهديد و تدريب و تظليل الاطفال لضمان بقاءهم معهم والقتال بجانيهم.

الكلمات المفتاحية: تجنيد الاطفال، التهديد، كيلى هوتون، رواية الجندي الولد.

**.Abstract:**

The paper discusses one of the pressing issues concerning child abuse through the use of children as child soldiers or recruits. Unfortunately, children become a good target for armed groups in the last decades due to their availability and vulnerability. They do not cost these groups to preserve or sustain them. The paper tackles this issue through presenting a study of Keely Hutton's *Soldier Boy* (2018) adapting one of the theories concerning this subject which is Bernd Beber's and Christopher Blattman's "The Logic of Child Soldiering and Coercion"(2013). In this theory, the researchers

advocate the logic behind child recruitment and the steps followed by armed groups to intimidate, indoctrinate, and misinform children to ensure the latters' stay with them and fighting for them.

**Key Words:** *Child Recruitment or Soldiering, Coercion, Keely Hutton, Child Soldier*

While we commonly think of war as men in uniform, fighting for the political causes of their states, it is not the case. The wars of our times are actually fought by men, women, and now children. (P.W. Singer, Author's Note 7, Italics added)

Traditionally, people everywhere believe the romantic assumption that childhood is associated with innocence as opposed to experience which is associated with adulthood. In the last decades, this concept has changed dramatically due to political, economic, and social conditions. Dictatorship, poverty, and poor sustainability become the major cause of armed conflicts worldwide that make civilians, especially women and children their fuel. The aim of the paper is to shed light on one of the heart breaking issues concerning children, which is forced or forcible child recruitment or soldiering. Though this issue has drawn a considerable attention of human rights circles and organizations, especially since the advent of the 1996 UN report which put the bases for action against child recruitment internationally, it remains shadowy in the academic literary domain. Through discussing *Soldier Boy* by American novelist Keely Hutton, the paper tries to present only a humble attempt to investigate and discuss such a critical issue while showing the interconnection between politics and literature.

W.P. Singer's book, *Children of War* (2005) is one of the earliest attempts to investigate the issue of child soldiering. He gives very realistic, but painful facts about the number of children who have lost their lives, maimed, or psychologically traumatized in armed conflicts:

In the last decade of warfare, more than two million children have been killed, a rate of more than five hundred a day, or one every three minutes, for a full ten years...For those children who are touched by war but still survive, the experiences are nonetheless devastating. Six million more children have been disabled or seriously injured in wars over the last decade, and one million children

have been orphaned. Almost twenty-five million more children have been driven from their homes by conflict, roughly 50 percent of the current total number of refugees in the world. Another ten million children have been psychologically traumatized by war. As you read this book, these numbers are growing only larger. (14-15)

This is a statistic only about the effects of war and armed conflicts on children. Here, the children are passive participants or only casualties. It is understandable that usually children and other civilians fall victims for armed combats, but why do they become active participants in these conflicts in the contemporary world? Why are children recruited by armed groups while these groups can recruit the more effective and stronger adult people? What makes children a favorite choice for criminal organizations opposite to adults? And, how states or countries can protect children from suffering such a kind of an atrocity? By discussing Hutton's *Soldier Boy*, the paper will answer these questions focusing on the devastation of that romantic concept of childhood as the target children are forced to sense of innocence or humanity in general.

The paper adopts Bernd Beber's and Christopher Blattman's theory in their "The Logic of Child Soldiering and Coercion"(2013), where they present the reasons behind such an increasing phenomenon and give suggestions how to mitigate or reduce it. The theory focuses on forced recruitment of children and excludes the voluntary side as the latter is rarely happened among children. It is improbable that children will volunteer for war or armed conflicts because of their vulnerability first and lack of experience, second. With forced recruitment, children will be trained to be soldiers by the use of soft and hard powers. The first and most prominent of these powers is the power of coercion or intimidation.

As military training makes children able to use a weapon, Beber and Blattman believe that coercion is the most important power because there is no effectual recruitment without it. For to intimidate, indoctrinate, and misinform the children are the basic strategies of armed groups to control and make them willingly persist in serving them. Children are easier to deceive and indoctrinate, and they are low-priced to preserve, and more receptive to intimidating techniques than adults (67). So, the study tries to adopt these strategies in discussing *Soldier Boy*, finding out how intimidation,

indoctrination, and misinformation are implemented in the novel and how they become successful in devastating the good nature of children.

According to international law and common training, a child soldier or recruit is mostly defined as "any person under eighteen years of age who is engaged in deadly combat or combat support as part of an armed force or group" (Singer, 16). In fact, this group of young adults becomes very tempting for armed groups. Beber and Blattman state certain reasons behind the desire of armed groups to recruit such a group (69):

1. Children are easier to manipulate than adults.
2. They have difficulties in escaping or freeing themselves.
3. Their coercion is easier and has fewer consequences (i.e., punishment) than adults.
4. They do not have alternatives like adults or "outside options"

### **Literature review**

For a decade, *AK* (1992) for British novelist, Peter Dickinson (1927-15) remained alone in tackling the topic of child recruitment through depicting the story of the child Paul from Nagala in Africa, whose land is torn by civil war and who has found no option but to keep his Ak rifle for future use because it becomes his best friend and protector. The novel ushered a subgenre in young adult fiction as it was the first of its sort to pinpoint the atrocities faced by a child during an armed conflict. Following the publication of this novel, tens of novels have been published in recent years which make this issue their major focus. In this literature review, only a few samples will be mentioned just to show the host of such a kind of novel and how it becomes like a trend hoping to shed light on the suffering and loss undergone by such a group of young adults. What distinguishes such kind of novels is that most of them are based on real stories lived by these soldier boys or girls. Such novels are closer to the memoir-fictive novels. They are not only about lost innocence, but also about regained hope as these children are rescued, given shelter and security, things which enable them to narrate their stories while perhaps thousands of other stories are remained untold and without an opportunity of being heard of. So,

these stories provide these children with a “voice” after being “voiceless” during their recruitment experience

The story line of novels of child recruitment revolves around a child or a group of children whose countries undergo armed conflicts and how are kidnapped from their villages after the killing of their families only to find themselves in the hands of armed forces who begin to train them to be child soldiers. The process of training has different steps. It begins with coercion or intimidation, indoctrination, then misinformation. These steps ensure the children’s total obedience and prevent any opportunity for them to escape.

The group includes such renowned novels like *Allah is Not Obligated* (2000) by Ahmadou Kourouma’s; *Beasts Of No Nation*(2005) by Uzodinma Iweala; *What is the What* (2006) by Dave Egger; *Memoir: A Long Way Gone* (2007) by Ishmael Beah; and *Song For Night* by Chris Abani; *War Child: A Child Soldier’s Story* by Emmanuel Jal and Megan Lloyd Davies (Contributor)(2009); *War Brothers: A Graphic Novel*(2013) by Sharon E. McKay and \_Daniel LaFrance (Illustrator); *Heart of Fire: One Girl's Extraordinary Journey from Child Soldier to Soul Singer* by Senait Mehari ; *Let's Go Swimming on Doomsday* (2019) by Natalie C. Anderson; and *The Lost Boy: Tales of a Child Soldier*(2020) by Ayik Chut Deng

### **Historical Background of *Soldier Boy***

The major action depicted in *Soldier Boy* by Keely Hutton is based on Ricky Richard Anywar’s real story as a recruited child in Uganda from 1989 to 1992. After remaining alive during his enslavement in the LRA, Ricky eventually went on to establish the charity Friends of Orphans, a nonprofit organization dedicated to “the recovery, rehabilitation, and reintegration of former child soldiers in northern Uganda and others affected by the war”( Author’s Note). While the subplot is based on the story of the fictional character, Samuel, who embodies so many children Ricky and his organization have aided in northern Uganda for nearly two decades. Samuel’s fictional account is based on the real experiences recorded in articles, videos, and interviews made by Ricky with several former survivors of (Ibid).

The conflict depicted in the novel is known as the Ugandan civil war. In 1986, after years of political conflict under the dictatorships of Idi Amin and other rulers, the guerrilla leader of the National Resistance Army, Yoweri Museveni, overthrew the military regime of General Tito Okello and became president of Uganda. His action to dissolve all political parties ignited a fierce dispute among the many tribes in Uganda, who felt they were marginalized.

One rebel group of the Acholi tribe in northern Uganda was the Holy Spirit Movement, a religious sect led by the self-proclaimed prophetess Alice Lakwena. This woman began a rebellion against Museveni's government in 1987, but it failed. After her exile, her cousin Joseph Kony led the Holy Spirit Movement and changed its name into the Lord's Resistance Army. Kony asserted that he was the Holy Spirit and demanded that President Museveni be ousted and exchanged by a government ruled by the Ten Commandments. His strategy, however, did not win enough support to proceed. As he became disappointed by the people's attitude which he considered a treachery, he blamed the Acholi tribe of disloyalty and targeted his assaults on innocent villagers throughout northern Uganda. The LRA is considered one of the most deadly insurgent groups in Africa. It can best be defined as "a quasi-religious-rebel armed group that began operating in the Acholi region of northern Uganda in 1986, but has now grown into a regional concern due to its expanded activities in the Central African Republic (CAR), the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and South Sudan" (Adhere&Maina,1)

For twenty years, Kony and his LRA terrorized Uganda, attacking anyone suspected of supporting Museveni's government. They abducted children like Ricky and his brother, Patrick, to increase their forces. Due to the remote locations of many villages in northern Uganda and its surrounding countries, accurate records of LRA crimes are difficult to find. However, it is estimated that since its inception, the LRA has abducted more than 96,000 children, killed more than 100,000 people, and displaced approximately 2,000,000 in northern Uganda (Hutton, "Author's Note," ii). The LRA's inhuman treatment of its victims and its practice of abducting children to fight in Kony's army earned the rebel group bad reputation around the world and ranked Joseph

Kony among the top persons wanted by the International Criminal Court, for thirty-three counts of war crimes and crimes against humanity (Ibid).

Seven years before government army defeated Kony and his rebels, Ricky returned to his home in Pader district and founded his organization. Despite threats and attacks on his life, Ricky has continued his work to heal the people and rebuild the communities of northern Uganda. Though Uganda has been free from LRA attacks since 2006, the twenty year war left nearly two million Ugandans struggling to rebuild their lives and communities. Hundreds of thousands still live in abject poverty today. Since its establishment in 1999, Friends of Orphans' aim has been to empower, rehabilitate, and reintegrate former child soldiers and abductees. The organization and its major concerns have developed over the years to help "To contribute to the empowerment, rehabilitation and reintegration of war affected children, orphans, child mothers and vulnerable communities through education, vocational skills training, affordable healthcare services, women empowerment, food security and livelihood support programs" (Friends of Orphans' Authorized Website)

#### Critical analysis of *Soldier Boy*

Sleep, little warrior, sleep/ For the hares in the forest are sleeping/ The moon looks down from the skies; Brighter than stars are thine eyes/ And thy mother her vigil is keeping/ Sleep, little warrior, sleep/ Sleep, little chieftain, sleep/ For soon the world will be waking/ And babyhood gone Like the verse of a song/ Thy mother's heart may be breaking/ Sleep, little chieftain, sleep. (Hutton, iv)

With this "Ugandan Lullaby" written as an epigraph, the novel begins to assert the loss of childhood and the fear of mothers to lose their children. It is an eternal instinctive motherly fear which shows the instability and insecurity of such societies. Structurally, the novel is divided into 49 chapters. The narration is divided between two narrators, Ricky, the major character and Samuel, one of the soldier boys who is rescued by the military forces and put in a rehabilitation camp before sending him home. Their two narrative perspectives are different. While Ricky narrates what happens to him during his two year stay with the LRI, Samuel concentrates on the present and refuses any attempts for help. He even refuses the idea of going home.

Just like Samuel, Richy is kidnapped by the LRI armed forces with his elder brother and the rest of the male children of his village. He has to undergo acute physical and psychological injuries like great fatigue, hunger and thirst, besides, fear, humiliation, and brain wash. The first atrocity that Ricky has witnessed is the burning of his family, his parents and sisters, alive in their home cottage without his ability to help them. As they were pushed further away from their home, Ricky and his brother decide to stay alive and to strengthen themselves with OBENO or hope to return one day to their village.

Samuel, on the other hand, is portrayed as a passive and unresponsive character. He keeps silent refusing to talk to the people responsible for his recovery. Though he is rescued, he is programmed or brainwashed as he still believes that his place is with Cony's army because this is the only place where he belongs especially after he has been forced to kill his own uncle and hurt his family. Beber, Blattman and other specialists in the subject of child soldiering believe that "child recruits, are often threatened, abducted, and abused" (67). As a result, Samuel thinks that he will not be accepted by his village because he is considered a killer by his people. These thoughts, of course, were ingrained in his mind by Cony's people. They brainwash the children's minds that if they try to escape and go home, nobody will receive them and they will be punished.

As Samuel refuses to tell his story of the three years of his abduction, the narrator substitutes his story with Ricky's as if their stories are almost similar because they have suffered the same atrocities. Ricky begins his story after their being kidnapped and saying farewell to his burning home, he described their long journey into the Ugandan bush led by LRI. They were tied to one another bare footed, so that if any one stumbled or hurt, the robe will be tightened for the others. It was a very long journey to north of Uganda, the residence of these rebels, and the children have to move quickly carrying their loads of stolen things. Some strategies were followed by the armed men to secure the stay of the children with them so as not to escape and to kill any hope inside these frightened children.

As a strategy to intimidate them, these children are forced to take the lives of their own parents as in the case with Kilama. "Every time Kilama closes his eyes, he sees his parents dying by his hands, just like they did on the day I took



him.... And a man who's killed his own parents will not hesitate to kill worthless boys like you" (Hutton, 62). Another strategy is to separate the siblings once they know they are relatives and show sympathy to one another. If any one of them tries to escape, he is killed by his own brother or sister as in the case of Joseph who is killed by the hand of his own sister, Sarah. Making the children feel the acute pain resulted from killing their own siblings, the rebels kill any hope inside the children to return home as they feel ashamed and frightened at the same time from returning home and facing their people. Trench, one of the rebels threatens them saying, "Boys like you have tried to run. There's nowhere to run. There's no one waiting for you. There's no one looking for you. They are all dead...*We are your family now*" (Hutton, 73, Italics added).

As the children are secured totally to the armed groups, they begin to indoctrinate. Rebels begin to teach the children how to use weapons.

The Ak-47. It is a beautiful machine. You must know how to field strip and reassemble your weapon at any time, even in the middle of a battle...your weapon is worth more than your life... You never leave a weapon in the battlefield, the LRA's or our enemies. if you see a rebel or a government soldier fall, you take the weapon and leave the wounded. (Hutton, 93)

Therefore, the rebels teach the children how to behave without any sense of humanity, without compassion towards their supposed enemy or even their comrades. The rebel forces deal with the children only as tools stripping them of any sense of humanity.

What is heart breaking is the fact that most of these crimes against children go unpunished. According to Beber and Blattman, the relationship between the ability to indoctrinate or brainwash/program and child soldiering is strengthened when punishment becomes cheap, when it is not castigated (75). As the rebels feel safe of being punished for recruiting children, their actions increase as they recruit more child abductees. They know that a child's ability is not simply a physical one, but it can also be influenced by technology. For instance, the invention or increased availability of light automatic weaponry in the late twentieth century has caused an upward shift in child recruiting (1bid).

Consequently, child soldiering becomes the result of the ease with which children can be indoctrinated by rebel leaders. Children are often manipulated because they have poor outside alternatives. A reduction in the cost that rebel leaders pay for punishing their recruits kills any attempt against child soldiering (80).

After teaching the children how to use the weapons which is the easy part because children could consider automatic weapons as toys, the rebels begin to use misinformation by telling the children lies about the spiritual powers of the leader of the rebels, Ladit Cony. They tell them that Cony's are the Holy Spirit's commands.

Those who refuse to help or seek to oppose him in his holy mission to create a Uganda on the foundation of his holy word is the enemy. Nonbelievers cannot hide. Ladit Cony knows what you are thinking. Even if your lips do not speak it, your mind will... The holy spirit will read to your minds when we meet up with his "Control Altar brigade"... And he will judge if you are loyal to him or a traitor". "Bullets will turn away from a true Kony follower. Bombs will malfunction before a true Kony follower... Kony and the Holy Spirit will lead you into battle, young warrior... Fight without hesitation. Fight without fear... You are cleanced, you are blessed with the Holy Spirit.... (Hutton, 93)

Rebels try to shake the children's religious faith, play on their simple beliefs in God's mercy through denying such mercy if they disobey the instruction of the leader. They deceive them stating that if a child dies in the battle field, he is considered unbeliever. "Those who died on the battle field today were not true believers of Kony. They died because of their lack of faith. And they were killed by our enemy. The government troops killed them" (Hutton, 99). So, to exploit the children's simplicity and their lack of proper knowledge make them finally respond to rebels through demonizing the government troops who are portrayed as their real enemy. Unfortunately, some children like Kalima who threatens the children, "if you run ...I will be the one to kill you" (Hutton, 59). Kalima and some other believe completely in such propaganda and become very fierce fighters just to make the leaders satisfied with them.

Ricky was forced to kill just to keep on living, embracing the hope that one day his brother and himself will go back home. Two years later, the opportunity

comes after the successful escape of his brother. Ricky escapes to go home and meets his brother, but unfortunately he arrives too late for his brother commits suicide out of depression and a great sense of guilt. Ricky does not stop and he proceeds to continue his life and to make finally his organization of “Friends of Orphans” where he receives the children like Samuel and many other children who instead of being intimidated, indoctrinated, and misinformed, they will be recovered, rehabilitated, and reintegrated.

*Soldier Boy* is one of the novels which sheds light on the problem of child recruitment and shows the suffering these little children have to go through. It advocates the notion of forgiveness and embracement by governmental as well as nongovernmental organizations to rehabilitate them and then to reintegrate them into society because contrary to adults who have always a better choice, these children are more vulnerable to coercion.

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