

## Case Report

# East Africa Civil Wars' Impact on Children: A Case Study of Selected Texts

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**Abstract:** One of the most salient features of contemporary Eastern African fiction is the recurrent emphasis on civil war and its dehumanizing impact on innocent civilians. The present analysis focuses on wars' impact on children, as reflected in two selected short stories: "My Parents' Bedroom" by Uwem Akpan, and "Butterfly Dreams" by Beatrice Lamwaka. The study is carried out using the framework of New Historicism, which posits that a text is an instrument of political awareness, whose understanding involves taking into account the various social concerns around which the text is built. It highlights the various forms of atrocities which leave children with a treble yoke: a memory of unspeakable pain, a wretched life and an unpromising future. These wars leave children orphans, physically and emotionally wounded, abused and helpless, often at the mercy of war lords or hardened criminals who abduct them and initiate them into adult vices. Rape, dropping out of school, and dehumanization, are only a few of the various aspects which child victimization takes in the texts under consideration.

**Keywords:** civil war, rebellion, East Africa, rape, child education, dehumanization.

## INTRODUCTION

The East African region has recently been a scene of protracted and recurrent conflicts. The ones still fresh in mind include the 2015 post-electoral violence in Burundi, the decade-long ethnic war in the same country (1993-2003), the 1994 Rwandan genocide, the wars in Somalia since 1984 between Muhamed Farah Aidede and President Muhamed Siad Barre before Al Shabaab took over, the Sudan civil wars led by John Garang since 1983 before the independence of South Sudan, which remains at war between Salva Kiir Government and Riek Machar, and Joseph Kony's Lord Resistance Army's rebellion against Ugandan Government since 1987. Tanzania and Kenya, which are geographically sandwiched between war-torn countries, offer asylum to millions of refugees from neighbouring countries and are called to be key role players in regional conflicts.

The generalised reign of violence has often been at the centre of literary creation on the region. Examples that readily come to mind include Nurruddin Farah (*Maps*) on political unrest in Somalia, Eritrea, Ethiopia and Djibouti; Tierno Monémbo (*L'ainé des orphelins*) on 1994 Rwandan genocide,

and Tim Butcher (*War Child, a Boy Soldier's Search for Africa's Fighting Spirit*) on Sudan war.

Their voice adds to others' on the continent, which include Emmanuel Dongala (*Johnny Mad Dog*) on Congo Brazzaville civil war; Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (*Half of a Yellow Sun*) on Biafra war; Ahmadou Kourouma (*Allah n'est pas obligé*) on Liberian civil war, Ismael Beah (*A Long Way Gone*) on Sierra Leonean war, to mention but a few.

Recent research has proved that children (people under eighteen years of age) form a large number of wars' victims (Wessels, 2016:198). The pains and losses that war inflicts on children unavoidably get reflected in their country's future, so that the concern should now be on the exploration of all possible forms that child victimization takes, with the aim of using the findings to redress the situation. That is what this article sets to do, as a contribution to the existing related literature, namely that of Michael G. Wessels, Fernando Chandi and Ferrari Michel, Singer W. Peter, Jean Pierre Chretien, Priebe Richards, and Elaine Scarry.

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Michael G. Wessels' work (2016: 198-207) is primarily an overview of children in armed conflicts, with a clear focus on the generalities rather than on regional peculiarities. The book by Fernando Chandi and Ferrari Michel (2013) is another attempt to depict different forms of suffering which children from war-torn countries go through, ranging from being orphans, displaced, exiled, child soldiers, involvement in violent acts, ... The book is rather a guide to adults who may be willing to understand, accompany and treat different forms of traumas on war-victim children. As for Singer W. Peter (2005), he discusses new causes, forms and consequences of war in which children are used to fight national wars, illustrating examples being those of Afghanistan, Sri Lanka and Palestine.

Jean-Pierre Chretien (2000), on his side, gives an elaborate historical account of the millennial history of the Great Lakes Region. Though his book has the merit of being specially focussed on the Eastern African Region, it is too general a study to be used as a substitute for a literary analysis which specially focusses on war and children in Eastern African literature.

Given the internal nature of the conflicts that characterize contemporary eastern African fiction, it is necessary to take into consideration Greenblatt's view, according to which narratives set in ethnic war environments present characters who are ethnically antagonistic. The one of a different ethnic group becomes the "other", the always threatening element who needs to be eliminated or weakened. In Greenblatt's words, "we define ourselves in relation to what we are not, making it necessary to demonize and objectify what we are not as 'others', the 'others' being evidence of the rightness of our own power" (qtd in Ann Dobie, 2009: 178). In *Johnny Mad Dog*, for instance, where a civil war rages, Johnny sees the other ethnic group as threatening, as the 'other' who should be killed. Friendship with a girlfriend who is not of his ethnic group becomes shaky, for the young protagonist knows that she belongs to the ones that he would feel no mercy to exterminate like vermin (Priebe, Richard, 2006: 49).

The war-torn settings of the stories under investigation also render the feasibility of the analysis delicate, for violence creates unusual behaviour among victims, which might interfere with literary interpretation. As Elaine Scarry has pointed out, pain destroys language, and political regimes in warfare use bodily pain to break down their victims' sense of self (Scarry 1987). What will then be the methodology to study victimization of characters who are still children, and whose communicative ability is function of the nature of the threat around them? It can be assumed that language alone may not be sufficient to give the right account of reality. History (New Historicism method), less subjective than an individual's words, is

going to serve as an investigative tool in the analysis of the selected texts, in line with Krockel's observation that "there is a moral imperative to read literature in its history of production when characterized by large-scale violence..." (Krockel, Carl, 2011:59).

Recent literature on East Africa depicts recurrent intra and inter-national wars, which place children at the receiving end of all exactions, and which consequently raise a number of questions that call for a scholarly investigation: to what extent does the literature tackle the issue of child victimization? What forms does this victimization take? What are its implications on society and on education?

The current study attempts to investigate these issues as reflected in two fictional narratives: "My Parents' Bedroom" by Uwem Akpan, and "Butterfly Dreams" by Beatrice Lamwaka. The texts are selected based on their setting against backdrops of political unrests, with children as the innocent whose victimization materializes in the form of parents' murder, sexual abuse, abduction, induced poverty, dropping out of school, and a wide range of social and human rights violations. .

It must be here noticed that, although Uwem Akpan is not East African, his inclusion is justified by the conclusions of the old scholarly debate on what makes a literature African: not only the African citizenship of the writer, but also the African setting of the narrative, and the content which is based on African reality, determine the "Africanness" of a text. The same criteria apply to what makes a literature East African. Uwem Akpan's short story being set in Rwanda and discussing 1994 Rwandan genocide, rightly falls in the category of East African literature, despite the Nigerian citizenship of the author.

The selection of the texts also finds justification in the war setting that patterns both of them. Concerning "My Parents' Bedroom", the 1994 Rwandan genocide affects Monique (affectionately called *Shenge*, i.e. Beloved) in two ways: she is a Hutu girl whose mother is Tutsi. Mothers are expected to protect life. But will a Tutsi mother who is in danger of being macheted to death by her Hutu husband, care for a Hutu daughter who carries in her body the genes and the physical resemblance of her Hutu father? Or where will a Hutu child find support between a Hutu father involved in "cleansing the land of Tutsi nuisance" (Akpan, Uwem, 2008: 36), i.e. slaughtering the Tutsis, and a Tutsi mother who hardly reconciles in her the duty to protect children and her need for survival?

The second text, "Butterfly Dreams", is set in an IDP camp at Alokolum, northern Uganda, known before the rebellion as a peaceful land of abundance. Since the beginning of the rebellion in Northern Uganda, Alokolum has turned into a land of child

abduction, loss of life, of home, of family affection; dropping out of school, ... The protagonist, Lamunu, who forcefully spends five years in the LRA rebellion, still tirelessly searches for the fulfilment of her dream, even if war has destroyed or rendered hardly attainable her former peaceful home, an eventless education, and dignity. This study, therefore, specially focuses on war's potential to turn girls into war booties, and its negation of children's social and educational potentials.

### THE GIRL AS WAR BOOTY IN THE 1994 RWANDAN GENOCIDE

The present section centres on "My Parents' Bedroom", a short story which gives an account of the impact of the 1994 Rwandan genocide on characters, but more specifically on female children, whom Monique aptly represents. It is an investigation into the level to which a girl child is reduced into a war booty during the genocide. To this effect, a survey of the historical and the cultural background of the narrative is a preliminary imperative.

Since her colonization by Belgium in the early twentieth century, Rwanda has been described as a kingdom (now a republic) composed of a minority Twa, a minority Tutsi whom the colonial master qualified as the ruling aristocracy, and the Hutus, whom the same European sources presented as the Tutsi's vassals. Physical description of the Tutsis presented the latter as tall, slim, beautiful with a pointed nose, while the Hutus, a vast majority, were portrayed as short, fat, and ugly with a large nose. The Tutsis have been associated with the Beauty Myth that the Hutus later on endeavoured to demystify by raping Tutsi women in the 1994 genocide (Chrétien, Jean-Pierre, 2000, 246-47). Previous studies have indicated that the Belgians' attitude to ethnic differences and role in Rwanda, whereby they are reported to have favoured the Tutsis over the Hutus in school education, partly deepened the resentment of the Hutus against the Tutsis (Chrétien, Jean-Pierre, 2000, 251). Popular Hutu revolutions started in the 1950s and continued under Hutu president Grégoire Kayibanda, and sent many Tutsis either to exile or to an early grave. To be a Tutsi was no longer viewed as a source of pride, and inter-ethnic marriages, though they existed, were not common (Chrétien, Jean-Pierre, 2000: 283).

When exiled Tutsis organized anti-government attacks from neighbouring countries, they soon got the sobriquet of *inyenzi*, a Rwandan word for cockroaches, these excessively disturbing and therefore most undesirable insects, which do not give peace to a homestead at night, and which are so tactfully organised that catching a single disturbing one is rather illusive. Indeed, the Tutsi in exile repeatedly attacked Rwanda, but more aggressively since 1990, and they became enemies of the nation.

When the genocide started in April 1994, it is reported that Tutsis and moderate Hutus were the main targets of an organized youth militia called *interahamwe* (those who attack together). Safety in a Hutu-Tutsi homestead such as the one presented in "My Parents' Bedroom" was at stake. How will a Hutu protect a Tutsi spouse and not be viewed as an enemy of the country, especially in view of the 8<sup>th</sup> of the ten new commandments that a Rwandan newspaper published: "Hutus must stop having mercy on the Tutsis" (<https://www.niod.nl/sites/niod.nl/files/Rwandan%20genocide.pdf>). Inter-ethnic couples had been reported vulnerable in the 1993 inter-ethnic war in neighbouring Burundi, whereby a Hutu traitor's punishment reportedly consisted of forcing him to machete, in everybody's presence, his own wife, his neighbour or his friend, or else be matcheted to death. (What made a man pass for a traitor could be the simple fact of being married to a Tutsi woman). That is what happens in "My Parents' Bedroom". The short story is set in Rwanda during the 1994 genocide and presents Monique, its protagonist, as she gets raped by an unknown man, loses her mother to the genocide, and inherits nothing but the family crucifix that hangs in the parlour. Below is a short summary of the story.

It is a Saturday evening when Monique is playing in the family house with her little brother, Jean. Suddenly, her parents' attitude changes. Tension and commotion fill the locked house, and she is not allowed to ask any question. After receiving safety instructions from her Tutsi mother, and after the Hutu father has gone out, Monique is left alone with Jean. At that moment, her uncle, Tonton André, comes in with some other people, armed with machetes and axes. They are looking for papa Monique to force him to kill his Tutsi wife, or else get killed. As he is nowhere to be found, one of the armed intruders, "a big-bellied man", tears Monique's underpants to rape her. A wizard, Tonton Nzeyimana, who in ordinary time is feared for his spells on people, is the one who declares to the rapist the saving words: "she is one of us" (Akpan, Uwem, 2008 : 25), to mean that, like them, she is a Hutu whose life should not be harmed.

Monique goes to bed in sobs and when she wakes up the following morning, her parents are in the parlour, arguing tensely. She learns that many people are hiding in the ceiling, and that mama had also been hiding among them throughout the night. Suddenly, the same mob – *the interahamwe*— arrives, and force Monique's father to butcher his wife with a machete. He does so in everybody's presence, and goes out with them to keep "cleansing the land of Tutsi nuisance" (Akpan, Uwem, 2008: 36). Upon the mob's departure, the family ceiling collapses, spilling down all the heavy load it was harbouring: blood, some corpses, the bleeding and the living, who had gone there for a temporary shelter. Those among them who are still alive promise to take care of Monique's school fees,

but she fears a house which now appears to be haunted by ghosts, and, carrying Jean on her back, she starts wandering in the village hills.

In contexts of war, analysts have often depicted the female gender as a special target for rape and other forms of human abuse. Patricia Daley for instance has demonstrated the differential violence perpetrated against men and women in war and genocide contexts, and has concluded that women are targeted because their bodies are perceived as being symbolic of the nation or the racial /ethnic group and that, basically, abuse of women is frequently not viewed as a tactic of war or nation-building, but simply as 'booty' (Daley, Patricia, 2008: 127). Monique and her three year old brother are the only people left in a room deserted by their parents. Tonton André, their uncle, is ready to kill them if he fails to find papa Monique: "I'm killing these children if I don't see him", he furiously declares (Akpan, Uwen, 2008: 26). From the onset, the two children are presented as scapegoats. Their survival will be conditioned by the parents' payment of a "debt" that they seemingly owe to the whole community.

It is interesting to note that the setting of the fictional narrative is a married couple's bedroom, a place usually dedicated to conjugal intimacy. In the text under investigation, the bedroom ends up in total collapse, manifest in the betrayal of one spouse by the other. The writer's portrayal of the shaky Hutu-Tutsi marital relationship is a pointer to the more generalized insecurity without, with children born from that union as its principal victims. The protagonist is portrayed at a loss of orientation, at a moment when parental presence and guidance would have been most helpful. The same bedroom which had seen the conception out of love, of two children, is the same setting which leaves the children in desolation.

In a seemingly shift of focus, the reader is presented Monique's molestation not as ethnic-motivated (she is a Hutu at the mercy of Hutu *interahamwe*), but as she narrates, as a victim of a generational problem, that parents pass on to their children, in the order of seniority. She alludes to her burdensome inheritance figuratively as follows: "Though I am a girl, papa says that the crucifix will be mine when he dies, because I'm the first born of the family. I will carry it till I give it to my child. Some people laugh at papa for saying that it'll come to me, a girl" (Akpan, Uwen, 2008: 23). It cannot be argued that one's ethnic group is passed from parents to children, but emphasis here seems to be oriented toward Monique's innate duty, as a first born, to testify to what she has suffered.

In this perspective, the burdensome crucifix that she does not get parted with may also be viewed as a pointer to the nation's self-imposed duty to remember the genocide, for which in 2002 the Rwandan

government erected a memorial called "*Ibuka Centre*", *ibuka* meaning exactly "remember" (<http://rwandaisses.com/2012/04>). Monique's experience in the bedroom is a unique testimony which she will have to pass on to her children. As a victim entrusted with the duty to remember - through the symbolism of a crucifix - Shenge carries in her the burdensome remembrance responsibility, passed on to her by her parents.

A crucifix does not symbolise only excruciating suffering, it might also be understood under a religious angle. A crucifix is an element of Christianity introduced to Africa - Rwanda included - through the work of missionaries, the same white missionaries who divided the country on ethnic ground. If tribes there were before colonialism, they were not as antagonistic as the ethnic groups turned out to be since colonial times. Now, the ethnic based hatred whose consequences Monique is called to bear is present since colonial time, and it has turned into an unshakable trans-generational burden, which apparently hints on the impossibility to solve ethnic-based conflicts in Rwanda. War gives Monique a double identity: that of a war victim and that of a witness. Emphasis on her identity as a Hutu who is among Hutus ("She is one of us") saves no matter: a nine year old girl surrounded by armed men in a bedroom can do nothing better than submit herself to the power of their machete, perfectly playing her double role mentioned above. The bedroom is a microcosm of the country: two ethnic groups that should be united by love but which split apart and end up in bloodshed, at the detriment of children.

Despite the ethnic sameness with Monique, the rapist's gesture proves that the enemy is not necessarily the one we do not ethnically identify with. The opposite ethnic group is not always the "other" whom Greenblatt describes as subject to demonization, or as a nuisance, in the New Historicism School of criticism (Dobie, Ann, 2009: 178). Each adult, no matter his ethnic group, is a potential danger to a child in war setting. After surviving the slaughter while hiding in Monique's house ceiling, the survivors pledge assistance to her through payment of her school fees. However, she remains indifferent to their offer, as if to emphasize on their sameness with those unreliable "others". A father who killed, a mother who was killed, faceless neighbours, uncles who bewitch or kill, offer no relief to the children, and the latter avoid all of them in block. For Monique and Jean, the darkness outside offers more security than adult human beings. Physical appearance, identification with a given ethnic group, happens not to guarantee safety in the Rwandan genocide. Even Jean's resemblance to the Tutsi mother, for which he used to get her preferential love over Monique, and Monique's resemblance to her Hutu father, keep the children in the same basket as war victims.

Parents are not strangers to their children, yet, they turn into the threatening “other” through certain distancing attitudes. As a case in point, an imposed silence over what has become puzzling to Monique worsens her condition as a war victim. After her molestation, she is instructed by her mother not to ask any question. How will she not ask when she is paying a generational debt, a ‘hereditary sin’ of ethnicity that runs in the family blood? How will she not extract a word from her mother about what happens “when wizards pee” (Akpan, Uwem, 2008: 30), an expression evidencing her sheer ignorance in sexual matters.

Monique’s attempted rape is an assault to her innocence, her dignity and her moral integrity. Rape has reportedly been so generalized a tool of war in the 1994 Rwandan genocide that a large number of Rwandan women have testified to the psychological wounds left on them by politically motivated rape they underwent, and which the UN reports as follows: « les viols étaient systématiques, utilisés comme arme de guerre (. . .) La règle étant le viol et l’exception le non-viol » (“Rapes were systematic, they were used as war weapons (...). Rape was the normal thing and non-rape was an exception” (my trans.; AFP. Jeuneafrique, April 8, 2014).

Monique’s inquisitive mind, and her dire need for consolation, hit a barricade erected by her mother who, concerned about her personal safety, admonishes: “Don’t tell me now” (Akpan, Uwem, 2008: 30) as if there is a different time when she will be allowed to tell her. As if, after the mother is fully safe, only then can the daughter get heard. Conclusively, the child’s safety is subject to her mother’s as well. And, as the mother’s safety is jeopardized, the child turns to the father for help, only for her to be advised not to think of it again. She who was given the duty of remembrance (the crucifix), must remember only what reaches the national level, while her personal traumatizing memories remain unshared. The duty to remember [*Ibuka*] requires sacrificing her personal interest over the national one.

Nonetheless, if physical damage can heal, the psychological one hovers around the child like a shadow. After failing to engage in a therapeutic communication with both parents, Monique turns to objects, especially the family picture in the parlour. She scratches at Tonton André’s face with her nail in order to erase him from the picture. But the glass saves him (Akpan, Uwem, 2008: 30). Tonton André did not directly molest the child, but the girl saw him bringing in the rapist. Failure to erase Tonton André from the family picture can be interpreted as an impossibility of resilience in the traumatic condition brought about by the genocide. Impossibility persists about how she can eliminate the cause of her injury: the offender is protected by glass, and the truth about it leaves the child’s search for healing a fruitless task. She remains a

perennial victim of a more powerful threat, which is shielded by established political, military and social institutions.

Another detail worth investigating is the centrality that the writer gives to Monique’s family in this crucial moment of insecurity. Her plight first stems from individualism and disunity among family members: each individual (father, mother, Tonton André, the wizard ...) is portrayed restlessly seeking immediate solutions to a problem that would have been communally solved. By the time the narrative reaches its climax, Monique as a victim has already got entangled within the webs of violence, amidst family ties which fail to hold together and war atrocities which care less for children. She is still called to take over adults’ responsibilities, her young age notwithstanding. War steals from her her youth, it propels her into a world of adults where she does not fit, and with nobody to bandage her wounds. The promise by her father that she will get new underpants apparently hints to a possibility of a future retribution, but in no way will the new underpants replace the care and the restorative justice that she deserves. Her indifference to the educational support offered by neighbours highlights the level at which war acts as a hindrance to child’s social and educational growth. However, Beatrice Lamwaka’s “Butterfly Dreams”, set in Uganda civil war, is better indicated for the analysis of this second aspect of child victimization.

#### **UGANDAN WAR’S IMPACT ON CHILDREN’S SOCIAL AND EDUCATIONAL LIFE**

The setting of “Butterfly Dreams” is Alokolum, a north Ugandan village, at a time of war between the Lord Resistance Army and the Uganda Government Army. The writer of the short story, like its protagonist, are of Acholi tribe from Gulu in northern Uganda. This tribe traditionally dominated the army. Former president of Uganda, Tito Okello, evinced by President Museveni, was Acholi, as is also Joseph Kony, who started anti-Museveni’s government war in 1987. The war forced millions of civilians to live in internally displaced people’s (IDP) camps, turning Alokolum into one of the biggest IDP camps outside Gulu. The LRA has also been known as an agent of child abduction on a daily basis. Many of those children would be killed if they try to escape.

Though a fictional narrative, “Butterfly Dreams” depicts the predicament of a primary school girl caught between thirst for academic achievement and LRA violence. It centres on Lamunu, an eleven year old primary school girl since her pre-abduction cling to education until her return home, five years after her abduction. The story’s beginning presents Lamunu with such a strong commitment to her studies that neither bullets nor fear of abduction deter her from keeping in attendance of classes otherwise deserted by other schoolmates. One evening, like many of her age

mates, she gets abducted from her house and will spend five years in the hands of the LRA. In her five years' absence, her father gets killed by the LRA, and the village turns into an Internally Displaced People's camp, at the mercy of hunger, kidnaps as well as extreme poverty.

Little is known of her life in the rebellion, for when she comes back, she has become uncommunicative. Loss of former spontaneity to laugh and to communicate, drastic weight loss, bullet scars all over her body, and her screams in dreams, give a hint of the ordeals she went through while in the rebellion: the beating she received after her failed attempt to escape, and the forced participation into the beating to death of her friend Akello. Her release by the government forces offers her an opportunity to seek education in her former primary school- now turned into a school for formerly abducted children- so that her dream to become a doctor comes true.

One of the things that strike the reader is the level to which war has affected Lamunu. From the former school child that she was before abduction, she has lost freedom, joy, family... Five years will be wasted in a rebellion that destroys her physically (scars, red eyes, cracked and swollen feet, weight loss) and psychologically (refusal to talk to anyone). She now communicates through her silence to her family members, who watch her while she watches them. Eyes and ears in particular are an eloquent expression of what the girl's mouth has become unable to utter, and the horrible noise that the ears heard, namely the screams of those bullied, tortured or killed, and the bullet hitting people's body.

Her five years' stay in the rebellion were not only atrocious, but also, they destroyed her dream to become a medical doctor. The importance she put in becoming a doctor is demonstrated by her immediate move, upon liberation, to enrol in school, without waiting for anybody's advice. However, even her attempt to mend her educational life hits serious problems, among which are a generalized reign of poverty, the death of the father, and the nature of the school, which has turned into a school of formerly abducted children. The first phrase she utters ("thank you") to her mother who offers to support her financially in her academic endeavour, is a strong indication of the value she places in education, and the financial challenges she was probably anticipating. Had the rebellion instilled in her a feeling of mistrust in everybody, including her mother? The "thank you" sounds like a sigh of relief, a hope that what abduction had destroyed is being gradually recovered.

Change is also reflected in the nature of the school of reintegration. The latter is set in the same village as before, but it admits children of a different mind: former subjects of abduction, whose past life is

guessed but not voiced out. Her new self-imposed solitary life worsens her plight, for, as she reintegrates the school of formerly abducted children, she feels the querying eyes on a fifteen year old girl who is still in primary six. Those schoolmates "knew that the war had brought something that they didn't understand" (Lamwaka, Beatrice, 2011: 58), but they still look inquisitive about Lamunu's changed nature. Her change is parallel to that of her school: from the school child that she was before abduction, she comes back, five years later, with a past tarnished by years of stay in the LRA, whereby any villager guesses that, like other children in her condition, she might have murdered (Lamwaka, Beatrice, 2011: 58).

Analysis of Lamunu's victimization cannot be complete without a focus on her psychological change, manifest in her refusal to communicate with anybody. Apart from the physical signs on her body, one learns what the child fails to narrate about her ordeals as an abducted child, through others' reports. Reportedly, in Gulu, once the LRA abduct children, the latter are beaten into submission, and they are sometimes required to commit other atrocities against others, and serve as combatants, cooks, porters, sex slaves, ... Many of those children will be killed or wounded while fighting, others, while trying to escape (<https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/the-lord-resistance-army-and-children>). Adong, a mother of two formerly abducted children, narrates her two daughters' ordeals:

In 1999, two of her daughters, aged twelve and thirteen, were kidnapped by LRA and forced to join the rebel force. Adong's younger daughter fled the LRA at night trying to escape her captors. Unfortunately, she got lost in the darkness and wandered back into the LRA area, where she was caught. As a punishment and lesson to other abductees, the twelve year old was forced to kill her older sister (<https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/the-lord-resistance-army-and-children>).

Circumstances as harrowing as these might have turned the protagonist of the short story into a Gospel preacher, namely to win – vainly – mercy for her friend and age mate Akello whose attempt to escape is punished with death. "You shall not kill", Lamunu tells the rebels (Lamwaka, Beatrice, 2011: 54) as one learns from her loud screams in a dream. It is contrary to all expectations that a captive child preaches gospel-based morality to her captors. However, a possible explanation of the child's stand lies in the history of the foundation the LRA. In fact, the LRA started as a Christian charismatic movement, before it turned violent and used arms, presumably for the Lord. Later on, cruelty became one of its landmarks.

Through Jonathan Littell's report, one also learns the children's sink into dehumanization, partly

attributable to years spent in youth-destroying occupations in the rebellion. While investigating Uganda's 1980s civil war and its impact on children, Littell attributed to the war a shift in occupational activities whereby school aged abduction victims were introduced into new forms of activities incompatible with academic learning : "le mouvement rebelle ougandais arrachait à leurs familles des adolescents d'une dizaine d' années. Les garçons devenaient des soldats, tuaient et pillaient les civils; les filles rejoignaient les harems des chefs qui auraient pu être leurs grands-pères" (« Uganda rebel movement uprooted from their families adolescents in their teens. Boys became soldiers, they killed and looted civilians; girls joined harems of the war leaders, old enough to be their grandfathers»; my trans.; qtd in Pajon, *JeuneAfrique*, 29 March 2017). There is no room for academic pursuit once children enter the rebellion.

The rebellion is a setting of child dehumanization par excellence. Anti-values pass for values, leading adults to consider the children who were part of Joseph Kony's Lord's Resistance Army as "wrong elements". Corruption of mores among them was aggravated by the quasi-absence, in the bush, of adults who were to serve as models. Once in the hands of the Lord Resistance Army, children's victimization takes a more violent turn. They are taught to be violent, to destroy others' life and their own gets affected as well, instead of them to have it built up.

In order to avoid abduction by LRA, Alokolum children between the ages of eight and fourteen walk up to twenty kilometres from IDP camp to larger towns for night safety, and move back to the camp in the morning and this becomes part of their life, so that people start calling them 'night commuters' ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lord's Resistance Army Insurgency](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lord's_Resistance_Armey_Insurgency)). An uncounted number of them has dropped out of school, out of fear of being waylaid on their way to school ("Butterfly Dreams" 56). Paradoxically, Lamunu will get abducted from her home (not from school) with other young children of her age, and will have no other chance to go to school for the five next years that the abduction will last.

A shift in children's activities cannot go without other consequences. Lamwaka, who is a native of Gulu and knows that farming puts food on every home's table, and that the trade is learned since childhood, laments an inability for Alokolum children to be trained in the trade, as a result of abduction and internal displacement which led to family's loss of personal property. School education used to go with farming, but now, children can neither go to school nor farm. The ensuing famine is as acute as the thirst which Lamunu has for academic education that war has jeopardised for half a decade.

Like butterflies, so beautifully coloured but very light against the wind, Lamunu nourished a good

ambition to prepare her bright future through medical studies, but war destroys it. Though she is not physically killed, her future is forever tarnished by the stigma of war, murder, failure, misunderstanding, which by nature are obstacles to a sound academic performance.

As a war victim child, Lamunu attracts sympathy. The writer's option for the second person narrative seems to speak in that line of idea, and has successfully created an impression of solidarity with the girl. In an impossibility of first person narrative (Lamunu has become so uncommunicative that she cannot narrate her ordeals), and by refusing to use a third person narrative which would make the protagonist one of the many distant victims in an anonymous crowd, the writer seems to have effectively created a closeness to her "sister". By using "you", the narrator, who appears to be a family member, becomes that voice so close to the victim that, in the end, the reader is given an impression that Lamunu is not alone, that she is surrounded by caring family members, who don't accuse her, but rather gradually disclose to her acts of care performed on her behalf in her absence. It is important to note the apparent indifference of Lamunu to all those caring family members, until she sees genuine financial support for her dream to become a doctor.

The mother has endeavoured to make everything possible for her daughter not to have a failed youth, namely by teaching her what she wouldn't, in ordinary time. In times of war, as it has been the case with the LRA, most children become pregnant during their abduction period, and this becomes a greater challenge for reinsertion into the community and the school. Indeed, it has often been deplored that one of the community integration and educational challenges to formerly abducted children is that they often come back with a child (Hyun, Chulho). Can it be assumed that Lamunu's return home childless is a result of her application of the contraceptive method she learned from her mother some time before her abduction? Otherwise, why should the writer have devoted a passage on this training? Ma broke the social taboo by which discussing sexual or reproduction matters between a mother and her daughter is not encouraged among the Acholi (and among many other African communities), out of the wrong conviction that total silence over sexual matters is a guarantee of virginity before marriage. Not having a child before marriage is vital to an Acholi girl, who is always expected to be virgin before marriage, or else bring disgrace to self and to parents. And it is the mother in particular who dutifully ensures that her daughter remains virgin till marriage. Lamunu had to go through an unusual training in contraceptive methods for her to come back home without the disgraceful single motherhood. Yet, as she still remains uncommunicative and unhappy, full social reintegration is still impossible to her.

It took five years for war to sap all the joy and trust out of Lamunu, turning her into a stranger to herself, to her family and to the community. The end result is a solitary life with pains unshared and with a withdrawal into loneliness, an attitude typically characteristic of victims of severe emotional pain, which Elaine Scarry's describes as capable of transmuting into physical pain and to affect the whole behavioural attitude of victims (qtd. in Smith, Elizabeth, 2006: 225). Lamunu represents the multitude of war victim children who are thirsty of education but who never get it problem-free. The war setting in which she moves has brought new social norms, which in turn prevent fulfilment of her set educational goals.

### CONCLUSION

Protagonists in the selected texts are identical on their brutal separation with parents, the loss of at least one parent to the war, and the incapacity of the remaining parent to intervene in the child's welfare. They move lonely in a jungle from which adults have been incapacitated or dehumanized. They are school aged children forcefully taken away from their home, with survival mechanisms frustrated by the absence of parental support. They turn into war victims who live with wounds which take time to heal, when they are not transferred generationally or transnationally, as the other fictional story about Joshua Hakizimana eloquently exemplifies. Joshua is a Rwandan who witnessed the 1994 genocide. After surviving the genocide, he now lives comfortably in America. At the mysterious death of a neighbouring American girl, found lying dead at his doorstep, he is the only human to remain indifferent, an attitude which is attributed to his past Rwandan familiarity with the dying in the 1994 genocide. The narrator observes about him: "he had lived with death and a dead white girl on his doorstep was just one more dead amongst a million. Only the living wound interest a man like him" (Wa Ngugi, Mukoma, 2009: 12).

His attitude evidences the other truth that violence and death can only breed violence. Indeed, nobody can pretend to a peaceful coexistence with individuals who, for the majority, have lost the taste of laughter and the meaning of life, due to war-induced loneliness, exile, orphan-hood, child soldiering, murder inflicted or witnessed. Re-education, which humanitarian NGOs are getting involved in (Lamwaka, Beatrice) can reposition the children to their rights, their duties and their dignity.

The state of things may justify the need for child victimization to be tackled at a more global level. History has proved that former war-victims can reach leadership positions. As a case in point, the current presidents of Burundi, Rwanda, South Sudan and Uganda, have had a leg in armed groups before

ascending to power, a fact which validates the assumption that youth determines the future of a country, and an evidence of the need to handle the child soldier and abduction issues with caution, if one must work toward a lasting political stability in the East African region. The hardships children go through follow them up to their adulthood and their ascension to power. UNICEF's study on the consequences of child abuse and war on political stability reports that its result is "the creation of whole generations of psychologically scarred children who contribute to the long-term social instability" (Kaplan, R.D, 1994: 68), and a security threat to one country is a threat to the whole East African region.

It is therefore our recommendation that child soldiers and other young war victims found to be endowed with a special leadership gift should be identified early and relocated to less oppressive environments, where they would be allowed to attend schools specially designed for them, in order to prepare them for future leadership roles. Parents are specially recommended to play their educational responsibilities in every circumstance because, as Rosen David still observes, a child moving without parental control in times of violence is an easy prey to human predators – rebels, rapists, or kidnappers (Rosen, David, 2017: 2). In case of a total absence of a caring parent, the child should benefit from responsible emergency parental substitution, to cut short an unnecessary elongation of the chain of suffering and violence.

The fate reserved to Monique and Lamunu by the writers beckons on the need for more care, particularly in war times. The stories demonstrate that children's safety is function of their parents' own, and that it is imperative to create a peaceful environment for everybody. Monique and Lamunu's indifference to their relatives' presence seems to express their disappointment with the adults, whom they may be querying: "Where were you when the rebels came and took our young ones? Where did you go to when the rebels came and raped our women as we watched?" (Lamwaka, Beatrice, 2011:53). The present study has demonstrated that failure to address security problems in the East African region will maintain children in constant victimization. A victim is, by definition, an innocent who suffers for others' offences. As such, the narratives considered in this article seem to be pleading for adults' greater consideration of the future generations' welfare, which will certainly result from the importance given to peace and respect of human dignity in environments where children live and move.

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