

***Loss, Trauma and Nostalgia in
Ugandan ‘Ex-Girl Child Soldiers’
War Narratives***

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Introduction

- The proliferation of autobiographies written by child soldiers, the time frame; 1990s – 2000s
- Rationale- the context of many wars
- Global trends on communication and self-disclosure
- Some stories still remain unwritten and especially girl children's stories of war

Argument

- This article argues that much as autobiographical narratives of loss and trauma may be seen to be subjective and personal, these narratives engage history and are subjectively critical. Social history and events that affect women and children are equally important parts of official history that need to be heard.
- These ex-girl-soldiers' autobiographies question dominant narratives by inserting personal experiences that are muted by authoritarian states, mass media, or any other persons in authority who overtly or covertly gag dissenting voices and erase “unwanted stories” from public discourse.

- It is also important to pay attention to the language and style of communication that each of the authors use to communicate these traumatic experiences/ stories of loss, death and sometimes regrets. The language, form and style of communication used in re-telling such personal sad , traumatic, nostalgic stories provide new insights into the theorization of such stories.

Theoretical perspective

- Feminist standpoint theory as used in the analysis of these texts represent an awareness about a position that women have in relation to others, that affects their interpretation of life. Feminist standpoint theory originates from Nancy Hartsock who argues that the positions of women within a class system cannot be generalizable.
- I use Donna Haraway's concept of 'situated knowledges' to decode the unique experience that each of the narrators present and show how these experiences inform the body of knowledge of the girls; of the female, the victim and the soldier's experiences.

Theoretical perspective cont.

- Situated knowledge as presented by Hartsock argues that what every body (which can be read as every woman's), knowledge is grounded in their contexts and circumstances.

Methodology

- Close textual analysis
- Analysis of words, structure of sentences and all other modes of expressions
- Focus on style, form and language and how these communicate the experiences of trauma and loss

Traumatic sub-themes used

- The irony of beginning a life story with a death story.
- Deaths, killings committed.

Sexual gender based violence

- Rape, the wording of rape experiences
- Belonging to the family of... belonging to the house of...
- Demand for sexual services by NRM bosses
- Notice the inability to articulate stories of sexual violence, the cultural perspectives to SGBV- 'when a girl looks ready...', readiness measured by breasts, menstruation, and or misogynistic cultural norms

Fear

- The fears came from many angles; fear of the unknown, fear of death and generally the fear of being among men who were known as murderers. These were haunting.
- Use of flashbacks, re-remembering as opposed to remembering fear

Guilt

- Guilt of being alive
- Flashbacks, recourse to history- McDonnell

Loss of memory

- Keitetsi couldn't remember who her mother was
- Gaps in the narration as evidence of loss and trauma

Conclusion

- Autobiographical narratives are vehicles, which authors use to connect readers to their experiences, their world of joy or of loss and trauma as is seen in these selected texts. But these individual personal experiences still need to be understood as hyphenated, as connected to a larger history, to a larger community in order for it to make meaning.