

PS Critical Area Studies: British and Anglophone Cultures:
Representing Child Soldiers in Fiction and Film
Summer term 2020
Mag. Dr. Pallua Ulrich

“Life Does Not Lose
Its Value” (2012)
Reintegration of former child
soldiers into society

Student: Mirjana Ljubojevic
Email: mirjana.ljubojevic@student.uibk.ac.at
Matriculation number: 11811410
Study code: UC 198 466 457 04

Submission date: September 1, 2020

Table of contents

1 Introduction	3
2 Reintegration into society	3
3 Analysis of the documentary	4
3.1 Short description of structure and content	4
3.2 Statements.....	4
3.2.1 Former child soldiers	5
3.2.2 Father Giuseppe Berton and the Family Homes Movement.....	6
3.2.3 Responsibles and their work at the Family Homes Movement	7
3.2.4 Psychologist Roberto Ravera and factors which make the reintegration process difficult.....	7
3.3 Use of pictures and music.....	8
3.4 Languages spoken in the interviews	9
4 Conclusion	9
Works Cited	10

1 Introduction

Being taken away from one's family as a child in order to join the fighting forces, seeing how people are being killed and being forced to kill leaves its marks even after these hard times are over. In order to raise awareness of the difficulties which former child soldiers have to face, the Italian director Wilma Massucco decided to create a documentary which focusses on the reintegration and rehabilitation process. The title of the movie is "La Vita Non Perde Valore" ("Life Does Not Lose Its Value"). It is a documentary about Father Berton's Family Homes Movement, which is a project that helps former child soldiers to reintegrate into society and to cope with the experiences they have made during their time as part of the fighting forces. The aim of this paper is to show how difficult the reintegration and rehabilitation process can be and which problems there might arise. This is done by outlining some notional baselines on reintegration into society. Furthermore, an analysis of the documentary is provided. Statements given by the former child soldiers, Father Giuseppe Berton, two responsables who are employed at the Family Homes Movement as well as the psychologist Dr. Roberto Ravera are analysed and discussed in terms of difficulties concerning the reintegration process.

2 Reintegration into society

To begin with, it is important to mention that reintegration and rehabilitation are complex, individual and long processes. Studies have shown that exposure to war trauma leads to poor mental health for former child soldiers. More precisely, it was found that mental health problems, anxiety disorder, symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder and also depression are part of lives of former child soldiers (Betancourt et al. 18). Furthermore, there may be a relationship between past experiences of violence, community stigma and family support when it comes to the mental health of the former child soldiers. It also has to be noted that many former child soldiers feel guilty and anxious because they were forced to do atrocious things. These experiences and the constant feeling of being guilty has negative effects on their mental health, too (Jayatunge and Somasundaram 214). Moreover, many former child soldiers experience discrimination when they come back from war. Thus, community and family acceptance seem to be crucial problems for many of them. Especially family support might be an essential factor in terms of healthier outcomes. In many cases, after child soldiers return from their time with the fighting forces, members of the community and/or family

members usually fear and mistrust them and thus do not want to welcome them back to the community (Betancourt et al. 19). The following example illustrates the problems related to family and community acceptance: In 2004/2005, over 300 child soldiers were rescued with the support of “Save The Children, Gulu, Uganda”. Three months later, none of the rescued children was found to live in the community in which they were reintegrated (Jayatunge and Somasundaram 215).

In brief, it can be said that children who have been used as child soldiers have to face various problems, such as living with physical injuries and disabilities, loss of family, long-term memories of violence and brutality, guilt and shame, stigma and rejection, and educational and economic marginalisation (Denov 796). According to Verhey (21), reintegration processes can be successful if family reunification, economic support, education and psychosocial support are equally stressed. Organisations such as Father Berton’s Family Homes Movement combine those four components and can thus be seen as a good starting point into a successful reintegration.

3 Analysis of the documentary

The aim of this chapter is to analyse the documentary by providing a short description of its structure and content, discussing statements given in the interviews about reintegration as well as examining how the use of images, music and the languages spoken affect the outcomes.

3.1 Short description of structure and content

“Life Does Not Lose Its Value” is a documentary by the Italian director Wilma Massucco. It was published in 2012. The documentary lasts 52 minutes and was shot in Sierra Leone. It consists of various interviews with former child soldiers, Father Giuseppe Berton, the psychologist Roberto Ravera as well as two responsables who work for the Family Homes Movement.

3.2 Statements

In this part, the statements provided by the former child soldiers, the responsables, the psychologist and Father Giuseppe Berton will be analysed. The focus lies on difficulties concerning the reintegration process.

3.2.1 Former child soldiers

Four former child soldiers, a woman who was a prisoner of the rebels for ten years and another woman who survived a rebel's attack were interviewed. This part contains a discussion of the information collected by Massucco. The first former child soldier who is interviewed is Sisqo. During the war he had to kill a pregnant woman and many other people. Furthermore, he consumed lots of drugs and his parents were shot in front of him. He outlines that other people fear that he will kill them, which is why he often feels lonely. As a result, he still experiences stress and panic attacks. These mental health problems have been identified in several studies, such as Betancourt et al. and Jayatunge and Somasundaram. It has been found that constant stress and panic attacks make it difficult to reintegrate into society and to forget about the past.

Abu's parents were killed as well. He says that the rebels protected him, and that the commandant told him that he has to fight for his rights, which is a common form of manipulation. Manipulation and intimidation are widely used strategies in order to turn the children into obedient soldiers. Children who were constantly exposed to such strategies have difficulties with the development of stable mental health mechanisms, which is another factor that might be an obstacle in terms of a successful reintegration process (Jayatunge and Somasundaram 219).

The third former child soldier, Betty, explains how everything started. The rebels told her to take the gun because otherwise they would have killed her. She had to cut people's hands and was forced to kill her own sister. She would not like to live with her family again because she is not used to them. Various studies about the reintegration of former child soldiers into society, such as the one conducted by Betancourt et al., have identified that the feeling of being guilty keeps many former child soldiers from going back to their communities.

The next former child soldier in the documentary is Tejan. The documentary contains a lot of scenes with him. This seems to be due to the fact that he is much more proficient in English than the other interviewees. He says that when you are forced to do such horrible things, you are not able to think clearly anymore. His parents were killed as well, and he also explains that during the war his ears never slept because he always had to be ready to fight. Furthermore, he was told that it is important to fight to defeat the government. This form of manipulation is similar to the way how Abu was manipulated.

Daniella survived a rebel's attack. The rebels chopped her eye, but when everything was over, she was able to go back to school again. She explains that at school, they were taught

civilisation, i.e. to be polite, not to steal etc. Daniela dreams of becoming a politician in order to stop corruption. She also states that the bible helps her to forgive the rebels. According to Verhey (23), access to education facilitates the reintegration process. As a result, one can conclude that providing both care and education to former child soldiers seem to be crucial steps which have to be taken in order to ensure that reintegration is successful.

3.2.2 Father Giuseppe Berton and the Family Homes Movement

This chapter contains a brief summary and analysis of Father Giuseppe Berton's statements about his work with former child soldiers and reintegration processes (Massucco).

All the former child soldiers were saved by the Family Homes Movement (FHM), which is a lay Christian non-governmental organization. Father Giuseppe Berton, an Italian missionary of the Catholic, established the organisation in 1985 in Bumbuna, Northern Sierra Leone. The aims are to support children who live under difficult circumstances by providing parental care and access to education. Furthermore, the children are helped to learn how to live a decent life with the help of the Catholic faith. At the beginning, the Family Homes Movement collaborated with UNICEF and the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender, and Children's Affairs in Freetown. The aim of the collaboration was to provide interim care to children who have experienced war. In total, the Family Homes Movement helped more than 5000 children. Now there are more than 300 children who receive direct support from the organisation. In some cases, the children remain in the interim care centre for a long period of time. A common reason for that is that their families cannot be found. Moreover, some families do not want to take their children back because they had been forced to fight and kill and some former child soldiers do not want to go back to their families and hometowns because they are afraid of the reactions (Family Homes Movement Sierra Leone).

In the documentary, Father Giuseppe Berton explains that the rebels tried to remove the children from their families and communities by letting them commit crimes, so that nobody would ever want them back. Child soldiers who wished and tried to go back soon realised that they are not welcome anymore, so they considered the fighting forces to be their new family. According to Berton, most former child soldiers feel lonely due to the rejection of the society. It seems clear that their only choice was to join the fighting forces. If they had rejected to do so, they would have been killed as well. Father Giuseppe Berton outlines that when the children come to the centre, it is extremely important to overcome one's fears and to overtly show that you trust them although they grew up among criminals. They will

immediately recognise that they are given a new chance to start a new life. Furthermore, according to Berton, it is essential to accept the former child soldiers as they are and not to form an opinion before you get to know who they really are. For him it is not acceptable to judge people because of their past and the life they were forced to live. To sum up, it can be said that the most important aspect in the reintegration process is trusting the former child soldiers (Massucco).

3.2.3 Responsibles and their work at the Family Homes Movement

Margaret Damba, a responsible who had been working for the Family Homes Movement for over seven years at the moment when the interview was held, explains that when she started working there, she was frightened because many of the former child soldiers were aggressive and addicted to drugs. However, she soon realized that the children were willing to start a new life and that their biggest wish was to forget about their past. She outlines that especially as a woman it is hard to be taken seriously by the former child soldiers, but Father Berton was a great support at the beginning of her time at the Family Homes Movement.

Fofonah, another responsible for a family home of the Family Homes Movement, explains that he had been working there for over ten years when the documentary was filmed. He is responsible for ten children and explains that you have to treat them like your own children. According to him, this makes them feel as if they had a real family. He also explains that feeling like a part of a family is an important step in order to be able to become part of the whole society. Fofonah also taught them how to become farmers and how to take care of animals. According to Denov (799), many former child soldiers feel as if they were only good enough to fight because this is the only thing they have been taught. It is, therefore, all the more important to give them new tasks to fulfil and to teach them new skills which are useful in life.

3.2.4 Psychologist Roberto Ravera and factors which make the reintegration process difficult

In this chapter, the utterances provided by the Italian psychologist Roberto Ravera will be discussed (Massucco). At the beginning of the documentary, he outlines that there is only one psychologist in Sierra Leone and that unfortunately, the work of psychologists is usually not recognised and valued. Furthermore, Ravera explains that child soldiers lose their own reference points, which can be diagnosed as an affective, emotional and social lability because they do not feel as if they were part of the normal world and society. Ravera explains

that the child soldiers are traumatized by the atrocities committed during the war. Furthermore, in his studies he also identifies the so-called “primary trauma”. This can be viewed as the result of the experience of being eradicated from their own family at an early age and in many cases also as seeing how their own parents are killed. According to the psychologist, these experiences destroy the children’s emotional stability and it is extremely difficult or even impossible to rebuild it. As a result, building a future with a stable social network seems to be the hardest part for former child soldiers because they feel guilty and do not feel capable of building stable relationships.

3.3 Use of pictures and music

At the beginning of the documentary, different pictures which should illustrate the difficulties of life in African countries which are war-affected are shown. Some examples include pictures of sick babies and wounded people. Furthermore, the documentary contains images of destroyed houses and people who live under horrible circumstances. Similar pictures are also shown at the end of the documentary as well as between some of the interviews when a new interviewee starts to speak. These pictures together with the stories told by the former child soldiers and the explanations provided by Dr. Ravera, the two responsables and Father Giuseppe Berton are well-balanced and help the viewer to understand the problems which the director Wilma Massucco tried to address in this documentary. The picture material is well-chosen and raises the documentary’s authenticity even further.

In terms of music used, it has to be noted that only at the beginning and at the end of the movie music was added. At the beginning, the history of the war in Sierra Leone is briefly explained and in the background, dramatic music is played. This, together with the pictures, helps to realize the gravity of the topic which is addressed in the documentary. At the end, the director of the Family Homes Movement concludes by saying “...and in the end, your fear disappears”. This statement is ideally suited for the end of the documentary and gives hope to all former child soldiers. In order to underpin the positivity conveyed in this statement, harmonic traditional African music was chosen to conclude the documentary. It can, thus, be concluded that Wilma Massucco’s documentary is not only aimed at describing Father Giuseppe Berton’s Family Homes Movement, but also at giving hope that reintegration processes can be successful with the help of the experts who work at this organisation.

3.4 Languages spoken in the interviews

Since Father Giuseppe Berton and the psychologist Roberto Ravera come from Italy and Wilma Massucco is an Italian director as well, the interviews with Ravera and Berton were held in Italian. There are English subtitles added to the parts where Ravera and Berton speak Italian.

All the interviews with the former child soldiers and responsables are held in English. It must, however, be noted that this might have distorted the results since it might be more difficult to narrate painful experiences in a foreign language that is normally not used in such situations. Therefore, it can be concluded that the outcomes would be even more authentic and real if the former child soldiers had narrated their experiences in the language they feel comfortable in because especially when it comes to emotional topics, it might be easier for them to share them in one's mother tongue.

4 Conclusion

This paper has addressed a number of significant issues which show that the reintegration process is a long and complex process and that former child soldiers need the help of organisations such as the Family Homes Movement in order to be able to become part of the society again. In the first chapter, the discussion of the problems which arise when it comes to reintegration has clearly shown that reintegration requires much time and effort in order to be successful and that various factors, such as access to education, psychological support, economic support etc. have to be considered. In the second chapter, the documentary "Life Does Not Lose Its Value" was analysed. From the analysis of the statements given by Father Giuseppe Berton, Dr. Roberto Ravera, the former child soldiers and the responsables it is evident that organisations which offer adequate assistance are essential in order to enable successful reintegration processes.

Finally, based on the evidence presented in this paper and the analysis of the documentary, it can be concluded that former child soldiers are traumatized and thus need professional support in order to be able to reintegrate into society. It should, however, also be noted that reintegration programmes such as Father Giuseppe Berton's Family Homes Movement are not always sufficient because in many cases, it is the family who does not want to take their child back. It should, therefore, be emphasized that these programmes should include support for families and communities as well. To conclude, it can be said that the documentary "Life

Does Not Lose Its Value” is a valuable collection of interviews with various people who are part of the reintegration process. It is ideally suited in order to raise awareness of this topic.

Works Cited

- Betancourt, Theresa S., et al. “Past Horrors, Present Struggles: The Role of Stigma in the Association Between War Experiences and Psychosocial Adjustment Among Former Child Soldiers in Sierra Leone.” *Social science & medicine* (1982), vol. 70, no. 1, 2010, pp. 17–26. doi:10.1016/j.socscimed.2009.09.038.
- Denov, Myriam. “Coping with the Trauma of War: Former Child Soldiers in Post-Conflict Sierra Leone.” *International Social Work*, vol. 53, no. 6, 2010, pp. 791–806. doi:10.1177/0020872809358400.
- Family Homes Movement Sierra Leone. *About Us - Background*. www.fhmberton.org/index.html.
- Jayatunge, Ruwan M., and Daya Somasundaram. “Child Soldiers.” *Essentials of Global Mental Health*, edited by Samuel O. Okpaku, Cambridge University Press, 2014, pp. 213–20. Cambridge Medicine.
- Massucco, Wilma, director. *Life Does Not Lose Its Value. Father Berton and the Former Child Soldiers of Sierra Leone*. Bluindaco Productions, 2012.
- Verhey, Beth. *Child Soldiers: Preventing, Demobilizing and Reintegrating*, World Bank, 2001. Africa Region Working Paper Series, books.google.at/books?id=jSc9twAACAAJ.