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### Relationships and Drive for Survival

Relationships are a significant characteristic of the human race. Like their close relatives, the great apes, humans are social creatures by nature; in order to survive, humans need some form of relationship with other human beings. Relationships are also dependent upon context, such as the individuals and circumstances involved. There are many different terms for human relationships—from familial relationships, to peer relationships—but it is undisputable that every individual experiences a number of significant relationships that have a substantial impact on their life. For Ishmael Beah, the relationships he experienced throughout the course of his journey in *A Long Way Gone* were essential to his continued drive for survival.

Ishmael's familial connections provided him with the motivation and means to survive his first contact with the war. In the first part of the book, Ishmael was ill-prepared to deal with his abrupt entrance into the war and heavily relied upon his brother, Junior. His brother's support was crucial in giving Ishmael the encouragement to continue forward. This can be seen early in the story when they were confronted by rebels in Mattru Jong and Junior guides Ishmael to safety (Beah 35). Additionally, Ishmael's desire to reunite with his mother and father provided him with a goal to strive toward. Rather than simply fleeing from the gunshots, moving toward a reunion with their family kept all of the boys in higher spirits (89). Without familial motivation or support, Ishmael had no direction for his own life and admitted that he would have preferred

to die alongside his family (95). As a combination, the relationships Ishmael had with his original family were crucial for his drive to survive in the initial portion of his journey.

In the next period of Ishmael's journey, he developed new relationships within the military, which provided a stable foundation for Ishmael to restore his motivation to survive. With the sudden disappearance of his family, Ishmael lost his purpose and fell into the grasp of the army (100). Ishmael was forced into becoming a child soldier against his will, however through the use of drugs and manipulation, he slowly grew to accept his life in the army. The adopted family Ishmael found in his military companions gave him a new objective and support structure. In the earliest days of his combat training, Ishmael was repeatedly told, "Visualize the enemy, the rebels who killed your parents, your family, and those who are responsible for everything that has happened to you," (112). In later battles, Ishmael recalled that whenever he looked at rebels, he thought of the men he saw in the ruins of his village where his family died (122). This gave Ishmael the motive of revenge as a new guiding principle in his life. The army also became his support, both physically and emotionally, as evidenced by how they tended to his gunshot wound and provided camaraderie in the form of watching movies (157, 121). Ishmael's army companions also bolstered his sense of kinship by celebrating his promotion to junior lieutenant (125). Altogether, Ishmael's drive for survival was saved by the relationship he developed with the military. This made Ishmael deeply loyal toward his adopted family, despite the fact that he was forced into the military and manipulated through drugs.

After Ishmael was released from the army, his relationship with Esther provided him with the strength necessary to move beyond the war and find a new motivation in life. When Ishmael was uprooted from his established life in the army, he did not adjust well to the rehabilitation center and participated in a number of destructive deeds due to the fact that he still considered

himself a soldier and desired to return to the military (138-139). However, after meeting with Esther a couple of times, Ishmael began to change. He and his friends began to want other things besides returning to the frontlines and getting drugs; they wanted to go to the city, even to the extent that they would willingly go to classes for the field trip reward (147-148). Esther also connected with Ishmael through music, which led to Ishmael awaiting her arrival and eventually sharing some horror stories of war (163). Ishmael's relationship with Esther provided the opportunity to finally look beyond his existence as a soldier and heal. Eventually, Ishmael was able to leave the rehabilitation center and present about his experience as a child soldier to the United Nations (180, 188). This can be attributed to the positive effects of Ishmael's relationship with Esther, without whom, Ishmael's recovery could have been much more difficult and his drive for survival toward a new life could have been severely impaired.

Ishmael's relationships with family, military companions, and Esther certainly had a significant influence on the evolution of his drive for survival throughout his journey. Without these relationships, it is possible that Ishmael would not have survived his experiences in Sierra Leone. Even outside of the extreme circumstances in Ishmael's life, all individuals can experience relationships that have a major impact on their motivation. It seems that in today's world, many of the relationships and connections between people are forged in an effort to attain something, such as coveted job opportunity or monetary gains. However, the product of an important relationship is not always tangible. Perhaps the intangible impacts bear the most importance in life, like Esther's impact on Ishmael's recovery or the lasting companionship of a life-long friend.

Works Cited

Beah, Ishmael. *A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007. Kindle Edition.