



## The Broken Promise: The Legacy of War and Hypocrisy

**Mabior P. Mach**

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*The Broken Promise thoughtfully exemplifies the idea that freedom often comes at a price.*

Mabior P. Mach's *The Broken Promise* is a sweeping and tragic tale that depicts the horrors of wartime, conflicts with tradition, and the power of familial love.

Set in the early 1990s in Sudan, the novel follows a revolutionary, Makeer Cham, and his wife, Amada, as they lead a brood of young children into the throes of wartime. Makeer joins the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) in order to fight for a better future for his family. As time passes and the war takes tumultuous turns, the family is met with challenges that test each of their strengths and relationships.

This historical novel reveals crucial information about the war in a fluid and gratifying way and displays knowledge of cultural customs and traditions, creating a nuanced and thorough portrait of a time and place.

Amada becomes a heart-wrenchingly realistic portrait of women's strength; she overcomes obstacles including language barriers, hunger, and personal loss while fighting for her family's survival. Makeer's character is similarly well constructed and complex. He is written as a doting husband and father as well as a product of his culture—both progressive and traditional in turn. His decision to leave work to join the army is shown to be a difficult one, but he makes that choice for his family. At the same time, when the clan elders want him to take a second wife, he agrees despite his wife's feelings about it.

Descriptions of the violent realities of wartime are matter-of-fact; they become routine for the characters. Scenes of rape, mutilation, squalor, and violence are treated bluntly, without taking away from the gravity of the events.

The story is wide in scope, and as the plot unfolds, there are a lot of major topics to sift through. The various conflicts do not compete with each other, but a sense of seamlessness is missing.

Shifts between war scenes and more day-to-day life feel sudden, and conflicts are sometimes hastily wrapped up, as when a passage shifts from relating a battle scene to immediately conveying the aftermath of that battle, without a clear transition. As a result, the timeline becomes confusing, and developments are sometimes hard to follow.

Emotional and engrossing, *The Broken Promise* is a multigenerational story showcasing the changes brought about by war and the hope that parents have for their children. It thoughtfully exemplifies the idea that freedom often comes at a price.

RENATE CHILDS (January 17, 2019)

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