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Forgetting to Heal: Transitional Justice in Sierra Leone

How And Why Transitional Justice Efforts Can Make Peace Less Inclusive?

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THESIS

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Abstract

As the understanding of post-conflict societies broadened, the emergence of transitional justice was seen as the future of creating long-term sustainable peace in a society. But what is often described as peace is not inclusive. This research analyzes the way the international transitional justice mechanisms that were applied in Sierra Leone created a non-inclusive peace. Although the country has been praised for its ability to maintain peace twenty years after the end of its civil war, persons with disabilities, and female ex-combatants have been forgotten in the creation of this peace. This research finds that the way international actors impose themselves on a transitional justice process impedes on creating an inclusive, sustainable peace. The struggle between the implementation of international goals and standards while trying to incorporate local mechanisms may have been able to keep Sierra Leone from war. But persons with disabilities and female ex-combatants continue to face immense structural and cultural difficulties exacerbated by the non-inclusive peace that emerged from the transitional justice process.

"To have great pain is to have certainty; to hear that another person has pain is to have doubt"

Elaine Scarry, The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World, 1987

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"May my eyes never see, and my feet never take me to a society where half the people are held in silence" – Thomas Sankara

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Introduction

The challenges of creating peace after a civil war are not new. People become displaced, lose their lives, gain injuries, and are likely to be traumatized for the rest of their lives. The issue is only complicated during intrastate conflicts, as people must learn to live amongst the same people that threatened their lives and fought in the conflict. After World War II and the wave of decolonization that followed, intrastate conflicts became more common (Goldsmith & Baogang, 2008), forcing international, regional, and national actors to face the challenge of creating peace and stability after times of extreme violence and insecurity. As the understanding of post-conflict societies broadened, the concept of transitional justice became one of the pillars in the perception of what can build sustainable peace (Boraine, 2006). With peacebuilding becoming a more mainstream approach, there was a recognition, of the need to balance the need for peace with the desire for justice. Transitional justice (TJ) has been established as a way for victims to voice their experiences, and grievances while aiding in the fight for justice against perpetrators of atrocities, in hopes of never repeating them (Méndez, 2016). The concept of TJ intends to restructure political systems and respond to mass atrocities and human rights violations. The United Nations (UN) describes the two goals of TJ as gaining justice for victims and strengthening the chances of reconciliation, democracy, and peace (United Nations Peacekeeping). The victim-centered approach is framed as a productive and positive way of reconciling communities and for society to move on from the atrocities of civil war (Laplante, 2008). Likewise, it provides an opportunity for perpetrators of violence to also confess to their crimes and ask for forgiveness. Commonly, this takes place during truth commissions or special courts. It has allowed international courts to conduct trials and prosecute war criminals, aiding in strengthening international law and humanitarian law, and reinforcing the judicial lens of TJ.

This thesis seeks to answer the question, "How and why transitional justice efforts can make peace less inclusive?" As TJ rose in popularity, more criticisms and shortcomings were pointed out. This project will be exploring how the mechanisms established by international organizations that are the foundation of TJ have the potential to create a non-inclusive peace for underrepresented groups within a society. I argue that the international approach to TJ limits the peace that can be created in a state. This is through the exploitation of underrepresented and

disenfranchised groups without incorporating their needs and wants into the new peace and society that is created through their accounts and testimonies recorded during TJ efforts. Thus, a state that could be described as peaceful after TJ, can be a peace that not every group has access to.

At its core, TJ tries to create a new slate for a country and population to start again after a conflict (Goldsmith & Baogang, 2008). However, achieving this goal is done through the mechanisms laid out by the international actors involved, and their standards (Lundy & McGovern, 2008). The focus on creating an environment for democracy, peace, and reconciliation can limit the approaches of TJ. For example, the focus on creating institutions that can provide democracy post-conflict can overlook empowering grassroots initiatives that cater to more local concerns such as systems of support for newly disabled people. (Okolie-Osemene, 2021). A major critique is the lack of significant involvement of local mechanisms and approaches. This has resulted in different kinds of TJ to develop, such as hybrid TJ, or cases in which TJ is led fully by the affected population without international involvement (Costi, 2006). But hybrid TJ still struggles with creating a balance between the approaches and power of international actors and the local approaches and mechanisms. This research will focus on the difficulty of this balance, and how it has resulted in underrepresented groups being excluded in much of the mechanisms and efforts conducted in TJ. Although the groups may be recognized and included in the process, the mainstreaming of the needs of these groups is rarely prioritized. This results in the creation of a non-inclusive society and peace become the standard. It leaves groups trying and find peace and justice in a society that has largely moved on or wants to put their past and trauma behind them. But for these groups, there is no option to forgive and forget as their situation has remained the same. Because of the lack of inclusivity resulting from this process, they must continue trying to carve their place into it, which is often met with resistance from governments, society, and their communities.

I will demonstrate this argument through the case study of Sierra Leone and the TJ process that took place from 2002 until 2004 after the country's brutal decade-long civil war. The underrepresented groups that will further support this argument are persons with disabilities (PWD) and former female combatants. Sierra Leone has been described as a peaceful country since its civil war, and the TJ process was deemed to be successful. But years after all the TJ efforts

ended PWD and former female combatants still face significant structural and cultural challenges in Sierra Leone. Although they were involved in the TJ process it did not result in these groups benefiting from the peace Sierra Leone built. PWD are still waiting for post-conflict reparations to be paid and female ex-combatants have faced significant exclusion from their communities due to their past. These are just some instances of how these groups and their needs have been left out of Sierra Leone's efforts to move on from the war.

To support exploring this argument, the thesis will have the following structure. A literature review that will introduce the most relevant arguments in the discourse about TJ, its origins, intentions, and results. It will expand on concepts such as trauma, communal memory, peace, and justice, as well as literature discussing the experiences of PWD and women in conflict. This is followed by an overview of the theories used to establish the theoretical framework of this thesis. The utilized method is explaining outcome process tracing. This will look at the mechanisms and processes that occurred during the TJ efforts and establish how they led to the current state of Sierra Leone and the lives of PWD and ex-female combatants. Finally, this is to be followed by an analysis of the case study to find mechanisms and events during the TJ process. The analysis will assemble the puzzle of how TJ, its implications, and expectations can create a non-inclusive peace for underrepresented groups.

Ultimately this thesis argues that while the goals of TJ to reconcile a war-affected population and harbor an environment that creates peace have the potential to support a long-lasting peace, the process also has the potential to overlook underrepresented groups from this peace. As the goals and mechanisms of the international approach take precedence, engaging in local and familiar mechanisms is not given as much attention and resources. As these two approaches try to be balanced, underrepresented groups such as PWD and ex-female combatants are lost in the flurry of trying to reconcile and restructure a post-conflict state and create the conditions for the population to move on and live in peace. Thus, the nuances that are needed in structural and cultural changes that can create an inclusive peace for underrepresented groups are often omitted, and these groups are left to try and move on from the trauma of war and find peace within a society that has left them behind.

Literature Review

This section will define the key terms that will guide this thesis and its arguments. It will then follow with a literature review on TJ and what role it has in creating peace. Then key literature on PWD in conflict and former female combatants will be discussed. While much has been written on each of these topics, more robust research and studies of how these concepts interact with one another would greatly strengthen the discourse. This review will show the current arguments and discussions of these concepts while highlighting essential gaps within it, that this research will address and explore further.

Definitions

TJ was briefly defined in the introduction of this paper. However, this research will benefit from a more thorough definition. Armstrong and Ntegeye define it as the full range of "processes, strategies, and institutions that assist post-conflict and post-authoritarian societies in accounting for histories of mass abuse as they build peaceful and just states" (Armstrong & Ntegeye, 2006, p. 3). An example of a process that is foundational to TJ is recording the events of the conflict to establish a shared narrative or 'truth' and to create accountability (Avruch, 2010; Elster, 2012). This can be through creating institutions such as Truth and Reconciliation Commissions (TRC) or Special Courts (SC). In the efforts of strengthening civil societies and communal bonds TJ strategies also include reintegration programs for former combatants (Okolie-Osemene, 2021). These can be disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) efforts. Over the years different kinds of TJ models developed. The involvement of international actors in this process is common, as TJ is often needed in countries where national institutions and structures lack the legitimacy or capacity to conduct them alone (Reychler & Langer, 2020). The depth of the involvement of international actors depends on the model. Hybrid TJ sees international actors and their strategies trying to balance the inclusion of local mechanisms or figureheads. For example, Rwanda's post-conflict process can be described as a model of hybrid TJ as it was supported by international organizations, while it centered on a local approach to justice, the Gacaca courts (Corey & Joireman, 2004). On the other hand, some states choose to approach TJ

themselves, with minimal or no foreign involvement. This was seen in South Africa, especially in their Truth and Reconciliation Commission (Leman-Langlois, 2002). All these elements are applied in different ways depending on the country in question, and how the concept of TJ is introduced or agreed upon. For example, an existing international presence in a country post-conflict can make it more likely for them to be involved in the TJ process, as was seen with Sierra Leone (Langmack, 2020).

To determine the success of peace, and how it can lack inclusivity, it must first be defined. Often the dichotomy of negative and positive peace is referred to, first coined by Johan Galtung. Negative peace refers to the absence of violence, however, there are tensions present within society, that can result in violence being seen as a viable option for some groups (Galtung, 1996). The tensions in society can be described as structural and cultural violence. Structural violence refers to social structures or institutions that cause harm to groups of people either by restricting their access to basic needs or impeding their well-being (Galtung, 1969). Similarly, cultural violence is defined as specific cultural aspects or values that justify the mistreatment, inequality, or violence towards certain groups (Galtung, 1990). Alternatively, positive peace is a society in which violence is not seen as an option, although instances of structural and cultural violence may still be present. But within the concept of positive peace, inclusive peace needs to be examined.

The notion of inclusive peace stems from the efforts of making peace processes more inclusive (Francis, 2018). An inclusive peace process entails the incorporation of underrepresented groups in the negotiating processes and what follows. For example, the Colombian peace process is regarded as one of the most inclusive peace processes to date, because of its attention to the support women, ethnic minorities, and LGBTQ+ communities may need post-conflict (Koopman, 2020). It seeks to create an accepting civil society and inclusive institutions that understand the structural or cultural difficulties underrepresented groups face while trying to address them. Non-inclusive peace is not uncommon, and because of its familiarity, these nuances can be overlooked, and a country can be defined as peaceful, even when certain groups and their experience are excluded from the narrative (Van Tuijl, 2016). One of the most common examples of non-inclusive peace can be observed through the experiences of PWD and the structural and cultural barriers they face. A country can still largely be seen as peaceful even though PWD face incredible

inequalities (Finkelstein, 1993). For example, a post-conflict country can hold free and fair democratic elections but voting sites may be inaccessible for people with physical disabilities (Virendrakumar et al., 2018). The existence of these elections can symbolize a peaceful country, but this peace must be questioned when a group within the population cannot participate. Thus, to answer the research question, inclusive peace represents the meaningful inclusion of the experience, needs, and potential barriers underrepresented groups may experience in a country, and the effort to address them by institutions and the civil society.

With these core concepts defined, it is important to note a significant gap between them. In the definition of TJ, the kind of peace sought out is not specified. Either peace outlined above can arguably make for a successful TJ process. While it is common for negative peace to be seen as the first step for a state to reach positive peace, TJ does not make a distinction or ensure stable mechanisms that address structural and cultural inequalities are enforced, instead, the responsibility falls on the state (Sriram, 2007). Although the country may be at peace in the sense that direct violence is absent, the presence of structural or cultural violence may still be rampant. This creates a non-inclusive peace, as the society and peace that has been built through TJ does not account for the needs and experiences of an underrepresented group (Irvine, 2018). The standard of achieving peace cannot simply be no direct violence at a state level. This disregards the kind of violence vulnerable groups experience, such as cultural and structural violence, which can result in direct violence over time. While a country may be safe from another bout of civil war, and people seem to live in peace, it does not mean it is a peaceful society for all. This makes the struggle of groups such as PWD and women to address these grievances and combat them, even more difficult. The violence that they experience is almost seen as expected, and thus, not given adequate attention when examining peace post-conflict (Berghs & Kabbara, 2016). This results in inequalities such as public spaces being inaccessible, and limited access to education, medical care, or employment. It leads to people who are in these groups not being fully integrated into the communities they had before the conflict, and are prone to experiencing discrimination and violence (Van Tuijl, 2016). Thus, after the TJ process ends, PWD and women are left trying to access the spaces in their communities and society because they were not meaningfully included in its making.

Transitional Justice

The inception of TJ stems from the post-WWII Nuremberg Trials (Teitel, 2003). It intended to set an international standard to guard and defend humanity after the atrocities committed during the war. The process was legal, in nature, focusing on establishing jurisprudence[1] and prosecuting human rights abuses through legal and political means (ibid). However, over time TJ became a central part of the human rights movement, especially in post-conflict scenarios. Gradually, it started being seen as an integral part of democratization and strengthening the civil society after a conflict (Boraine, 2006).

But with the rise of intrastate conflict as a result of decolonization, the standards of peacemaking and peacekeeping developed into the concept of peacebuilding (Babbitt, 2009; Reychler & Langer, 2020). The goals of peacebuilding are "to reduce the risk of lapsing or relapsing into conflict by strengthening national capacities at all levels for conflict management and to lay the foundation for sustainable peace and development" (Baker & Obradovic-Wochnik, 2016). It focused more on grassroots action and collaborating with NGOs as opposed to the far-removed involvement of only international organizations which was the prior approach (Reychler & Langer, 2020). Peacebuilding gave way for human rights to become central to the conversation and to address structural and cultural inequalities that were present in societies and fueled the conflict, in hopes of creating sustainable, positive peace (Autesserre, 2011). TJ and peacebuilding started being intertwined with the establishment of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) in 1993 (Baker & Obradovic-Wochnik, 2016). The victim-centric human rights-based approach of both concepts gradually created a new method for post-conflict resolution. It intended to strengthen the civil society, work out grievances that existed before the conflict, and build sustainable national capacities through specific mechanisms and strategies (Baker & Obradovic-Wochnik, 2016; Laplante, 2008).

As mentioned earlier, some of these core mechanisms are truth commissions, Special Courts and Tribunals, and DDR. Truth, or truth and reconciliation commissions have become a

[1] The study, knowledge, or science of law. Intend to create a legal understanding of international legal protection of human rights

defining characteristic of TJ. Truth commissions are bodies tasked with documenting past wrongdoings such as human rights violations committed during the conflict by either the government or fighting parties (Brahm, 2007). They rely on the testimonies of the population, especially of victims and perpetrators. The commissions are intended to be a space where victims can share their pain and experience which hopefully is cathartic and allows them to process this trauma and heal (Avruch, 2010). They also allow perpetrators to confess their actions in the conflict and ask for forgiveness. Truth commissions can be especially impactful when a post-conflict process chooses amnesty as opposed to judicial measures. The process of sharing one's pain and taking accountability for this pain is meant to reconcile society and allow people to live together in peace again (Elster, 2012). If a country also chooses judicial measures these are often done through Special Courts or Tribunals. These institutions are usually supported by the United Nations, as the crimes in question are tried through either national law, international law, or a mixture of the two (Costi, 2006). The judicial elementS of TJ also tie in with a core concept in truth commissions, which is if these atrocities are recorded, known, punished, and hopefully will not happen again (Baker & Obradovic-Wochnik, 2016). DDR programs are one of the strategies that hope to prevent atrocities and conflict from erupting again within the post-conflict society. It establishes programs that try to reintegrate former combatants into society (Stark, 2006). This can be done by providing them with education, teaching them practical work skills, and involving them in community activities (Okolie-Osemene, 2021). The element of disarmament and demobilization is done in agreement with rebel fighting groups, where they agree to hand over their arms and cease to operate as an organization (Peters, 2007). This is process is naturally delicate and varies between cases as it is tailored to the needs and demands of each group and peace process. All these strategies are applied in different ways depending on the case, the conflict, and its population. But overall, TJ has been praised for its success in helping post-conflict societies find stable peace.

However, this peace is not always inclusive, and several shortcomings within TJ allow non-inclusive peace to be established. Firstly, the involvement of international actors can be a factor in creating non-inclusive peace. There is an inherent power imbalance when international actors become involved in post-conflict endeavors (Fletcher & Weinstein, 2018). International actors giving resources and attention to the conflict and the people affected by it legitimizes their struggle and suffering. But these actors also come with their mechanisms and strategies to

implement during the peacebuilding and TJ process. Because of the power and influence of international organizations, the models they introduce are rarely challenged. This can be interpreted as one of the manifestations of Foucault's concept of 'governmentality' where knowledge becomes embedded in institutions and everyday principles which fundamentally alters the scene and the approaches, suppressing any alternatives from being considered (Burchell & Foucault, 2009). Thus, broad international mechanisms are implemented on nuanced conflicts, introducing new approaches and concepts to the population in question (Avruch, 2010). Sriram notes how TJ and liberal peacebuilding depend on 'marketization and democratization' (Sriram, 2007) for their success. Thus, they must extract a narrative and lessons from this conflict that can be amplified internationally as horrific atrocities we must never repeat (Brahm, 2007). Likewise, the need for a state to become democratic to be deemed peaceful narrows the scope of what systems should be implemented for this transition (Goldsmith & He, 2008). Because of how intertwined international organizations and the models of peacebuilding and TJ are, the priority for democracy is embedded within the international model of TJ. It determines how success, peace, and justice are defined by the international actors.

The debate between peace and justice is prominent in the discourse of TJ. Ideally, TJ can offer both, as justice is achieved through the mechanisms and leads to peace. However, the international model sees the mechanisms mentioned earlier as the way to achieve these goals (Pouligny, 2005). But peace and justice can be interpreted differently by different societies. For example, Igreja noted in his research on post-conflict Mozambique the importance of local rituals and approaches for people to find peace after the war. The approach is commonly described as silence and denial within the broad discourse, as it is the opposite of the vocal and dramatic truth commissions (Graybill, 2004). But Mozambique's TJ constituted of community-led "gamba" rituals. These were small gatherings where people who still felt haunted by the trauma of war would come to religious leaders to make amends with the spirit, they believed was with them (Igreja, 2012). Igreja emphasizes that what made them successful in helping the population move on was "the right to talk, to accuse and to disagree is indicative of the trust that the presence of the spirits nurtures amid the family and community fragmentation that resulted from protracted political violence" (Igreja, 2012). This highlights how different societies approach finding peace and justice while healing. It also shows how the concept of vocalizing one's pain is not inherent

in every society. While people share their pain in the gamba rituals it is done in a familiar and local context that is a pillar within the society and their processing of pain and grief (Waldorf, 2017).

The concept of sharing and vocalizing one's experience and suffering is integral to TJ and helping people "move on". The assumption is rooted in Western and Judeo-Christian understandings and ideals of pain and forgiveness (Berghs, 2011; Shaw, 2007). This element can be seen through the deeply religious approach of The South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which is dubbed as one of the most successful examples of TJ (Allan & Allan, 2000; Leman-Langlois, 2002). The process in itself was deeply religious, as it was led by religious leaders, and the language surrounding the entire process followed the same theme (Shore, 2008; Shore & Kline, 2006). The concept of verbalizing your pain has its roots in Catholicism and confessing one's sins (Berghs, 2015). It also ties in with understanding violence through a primitive Hobbesian lens in which it is brutal, it is mindless an act of destruction that can only be transformed through the 'civilizing power of language' (Shaw, 2007). We can move on from this internal struggle and physical pain by putting it in words, only then can we transform and feel healed. Thus, the different approaches to healing that the international model brings against the local approaches ask the question of how can peace become inclusive, if people must achieve it through unfamiliar means? This international approach is also centered on the individual and overlooks the collective identity and dimensions of society (Asiedu & Berghs, 2012; Mutua, 2011; Park, 2010).

The individualistic nature of TJ complicates post-conflict dynamics in several ways. Separating people into certain groups, such as victims or perpetrators asks the often-muddled identities in a civil war to become explicit (Rooney & Aoláin, 2018). This is further complicated when people belonging to certain groups can be perceived to receive more support than people who do not belong to that group, causing tensions and resentment to brew. For example, during the Sierra Leone TJ efforts, amputees were identified as a group and prioritized in resource allocation (Berghs, 2008). The international model has been criticized for not approaching healing more communally. The focus is placed on those who faced atrocities, and those who committed them. But the people who did not fit into either definition, are overlooked (Avruch, 2010). The struggle of identifying with one of these groups introduced by the international model is only

exacerbated as TJ follows a very linear understanding of time and trauma. TJ often happens very quickly after a conflict. In the case of ICTY, the tribunals began before the war was even over (Brants & Klep, 2013). It expects people to have processed the conflict and their traumatic experiences and to share their testimony and suffering almost immediately after it happened (Berghs, 2016). Furthermore, it expects everything to be addressed and dealt with by the time TJ has ended (Igreja, 2012). But this is not conducive to how people and communities heal and process traumatic events. Igreja notes how Mozambican, and other Sub-Saharan societies process violent events, they "would be identified by the place of its occurrence rather than its timing" (Igreja, 2012). Thus, trying to remember and recollect past experiences through the expectations of a truth commission would be difficult. Moreover, memories of both individuals and communities change with time. People may not be able to offer what TRCs want, simply because they cannot remember it due to the trauma it caused them (Van der Kolk, 2014). All the challenges mentioned above create a space that is riddled with international actors imposing their understanding on communities that want to heal and move on. The tension this causes leaves underrepresented groups to fall between the cracks as some balance and cohesive process that creates "peace" tries to be achieved.

Persons with Disabilities

It is important to distinguish between the different kinds of disability before this topic is expanded on. Disability commonly refers to physical impairment, such as people who are amputees or have limited physical mobility (Kett & van Ommeren, 2009). While disabilities can also be psychosocial, this research will largely be discussing physical disabilities. The existence of PWD after a conflict is not new, however, they have been largely ignored in mainstream post-conflict literature and research.

In its nature, conflict is disabling. It tears through social structures, communal bonds, and everyday life. It disables an individual's spiritual, communal, psychological, and physical body. The act of causing disabling harm to a body has been seen in many conflicts (ibid). It causes a permanent mark and reminder of the war on the person, and the community they are in. It is a visual representation of the violence of the conflict, and it is a perpetual embodiment of both the

pain they experienced and the collective pain of the war (Scarry, 1987). It intends to limit the ability they have to return to a state of 'normal' even after the conflict has ended (Berghs, 2008, 2015; Kelsall, 2005). Because of their prominence post-conflict, PWD are recognized within peacebuilding and TJ efforts, but this recognition is superficial. It acknowledges that their bodies have become disabled, and it allocates specific perceived needs, such as medical assistance for their injuries (Berghs & Santos-Zingale, 2011). The imagery of PWD has often been used to depict the brutality of war and the need for intervention and international action (Dubisar, 2015). As mentioned earlier by Sriram peacebuilding and TJ focus on the marketization of their process and results (Sriram, 2007). Garland -Thomson describes how the visual of disabled bodies, especially in the context of war "is considered illicit looking, the disabled body is at once the to-be-looked-at and not-to-be-looked-at, further dramatizing the staring encounter by making viewers furtive and the viewed defensive. Staring thus creates disability as a state of absolute difference rather than simply one more variation in human form" (Garland-Thomson et al., 2002, p. 57). The difference she describes is especially important to note, as it forms the creation of the "disabled" identity in TJ.

The understanding and approach to disability adopted by the international system are rooted in a medical and individualistic perspective, often referred to by disability scholars as to the "Western model of disability" (Chataika et al., 2015; Sheldon, 2005). When disabled bodies are acknowledged post-conflict, they are addressed through these perspectives (Berghs, 2015). Support is seen as medical assistance, such as providing prosthetics or wheelchairs to aid someone if they have limited mobility (Kett & van Ommeren, 2009). But this is a limited interpretation of what kind of support PWD may need. As Garland-Thompson mentioned, PWD is immediately identified as different and is treated as such. Changes must be made to the disabled body to be able to access society, instead of changing the environment around them to be more accessible (Finkelstein, 2001). This understanding forms an identity of what being disabled is post-conflict and how it is addressed during peacebuilding and TJ efforts (Berghs & Kabbara, 2016). PWD have reported there is little effort from international actors to communicate with them to establish the difficulties they face and what they need. For instance, PWD in Lebanon shared how they had to pay extra for medical treatments and support, which drained their already limited resources, something overlooked during peacebuilding efforts (Berghs, 2015). The way PWD are not

included in post-conflict peace efforts allows their most basic needs and issues to not be addressed, thus becoming more prominent, as they become embedded in cultural and societal structures. This especially comes into play in TJ.

As was mentioned earlier, the creation of identities is very important within TJ. If an international actor is involved, because of their influence, their definitions are likely to be used. In the case of disability, the international system approaches it through an individualistic, medical lens, overlooking the communal impact it has (Kim, 2011). While disability is something an individual experiences, they do not exist in a vacuum. TJ has often been applied in collectivist societies, where the bonds of a community are foundational to the structure of society (Balint et al., 2014). For instance, the polygamous family structure is found in sub-Saharan and West Africa. These families form communities that support and provide for one another. A person becoming disabled after a conflict shifts the entire dynamic as they are not able to contribute in the same way (Mugeere et al., 2020). A TJ process that does not address this shift within communities is bound to be non-inclusive as it overlooks key internal dynamics that form a stable civil society. Furthermore, the way TJ defines disability can clash with how PWD are defined within their society. There is a range of definitions and perceptions towards PWD depending on the culture; some see PWD as cursed and facing punishment for mistakes in their past life, while others see them as miracles sent from God (Nyangweso, 2018). Approaching and treating disability only through the international definition, and through an individualistic approach separates the person from their community. It isolates them from how they would usually identify, to align with the definitions of the international actors (Cole, 2013). This complicates how PWD are reintroduced and reintegrated into their communities after TJ. A new identity can ostracize them from local ways of identity and perception, straining the bonds within their community. This mechanism also strays from using community-based support systems that are crucial for the well-being and integration of PWD (Park, 2010). These factors make for PWD to be involved in TJ, but in ways that are not beneficial or impactful to them. TJ efforts that do not know the needs of PWD or mainstream them in their work are bound to leave PWD behind. Thus, whatever peace is created is one without the perspectives of PWD, making it very prone to structural and cultural inequalities towards them persist.

Women in Conflict

Women in conflict have broad and ever-changing roles. Within the literature they have developed from being seen as just bystanders, to victims, to essential actors in creating peace (Braithwaite & Ruiz, 2018; Buckley-Zistel, 2013; Kaufman & Williams, 2013; Scully, 2010). But regardless of the nature of conflict, it is gendered. Patriarchal structures are embedded within war and violence, subjecting women to gendered experiences in conflict (Kirby, 2020; Skjelsbæk, 2001). The identity of women in conflict continues to become more complex as women begin to be studied as fighters as well. But despite women stepping into traditionally male roles, the patriarchal structures that are deeply engrained in society still follow them (Gilmartin, 2018). As it stands, regardless of how women may behave or be perceived in war, their gender identity and the expectations and feelings assigned to them will remain (Handrahan, 2004; Rai et al., 2019; True, 2018). Feelings of responsibility, purity, shame, and guilt are assigned more liberally to women and their actions compared to men (Coulter, 2009; Gilmartin, 2018; Shekhawat & Pathak, 2015). Because of this, the role of and experiences of women in conflict are integral to understanding it. As the perceptions of women in conflict continue to develop, their perspectives need to be mainstreamed in TJ and peacebuilding, to be able to address any potential cultural and structural violence that can emerge in society after the conflict ends (Handrahan, 2004; Henshaw, 2020; Puechguirbal, 2012). Female fighters have been a difficult group to navigate for the international TJ model because of how gender roles are embedded within the expectations and strategies the model applies.

TJ processes have been criticized for their gender-blind approach and omitting the experience of women in their efforts (Puechguirbal, 2012). Even after UN Resolution 1325 was signed, women are still not meaningfully included in post-conflict efforts enough (Scully, 2010). This is an issue when approaching women who are in "traditional" roles in conflict, and the issue only becomes more complex when accounting for female fighters. The international model approaches to conflict through the traditional gendered perspective that sees men as fighters and women as victims or holding other domestic roles as the conflict rages on. (Coulter, 2008) Thus, programs established to help either soldiers or victims reintegrate into society will also have a gendered approach (MacKenzie, 2009). But this internal structure is rattled when women are also

fighters and do not fit in either definition. For example, a way to demobilize militia groups post-conflict is to recruit soldiers into the state's military. However, this is a traditionally male role in many countries, thus women who fought alongside men, would not be given this option (Kaufman & Williams, 2013). Although many women have been reported to be brutal and ruthless soldiers in conflicts, they often do not face the same consequences (Denov, 2008). The identity of female fighters is hard to define within the gendered bounds of international TJ. As many female fighters were abducted, forced to fight, and abused by their groups, making them victims as well (Abdullah et al., 2010). However, they were also active participants and perpetrators of violence in the conflict. This complexity leads to female fighters receiving different treatment from their male counterparts. Depending on the conflict and the societal perception of women in it, their experience varies. Some female fighters can walk away without consequences for their actions and be welcomed back into their communities (Martin, 2021). This was seen in Uganda as one of the most ruthless fighters of the Lord's Resistance Army Lily Atim was able to return to life as normal (Baines, 2011). On the other hand, the Colombian Peace Process made a conscious effort to integrate the experience and needs of female rebel fighters (Koopman, 2020). But these stories are exceptional, as many ex-female combatants who go through the TJ process are ashamed to come forward about their past as soldiers (Coulter, 2009).

Because the international mechanism of TJ operates under traditional gender roles and expectations former female fighters get lost in this system. Programs for the reintegration and support of soldiers are tailored to the male experience, subsequently creating male-dominant spaces, and allowing female fighters to be forgotten in the process (Puechguirbal, 2012). While both men and women fought together, women had vastly different experiences both during the conflict and afterward. Many ex-female combatants reported facing extreme physical and sexual violence within militia groups (Cohen, 2013). The trauma they experience during their time fighting is rarely ever given the proper attention (Coulter, 2009). When TJ does not acknowledge this fear and put adequate systems in place for former female combatants to access, they are left with little support. In a broad sense, the international TJ mechanism offers two potential paths for reintegration, both deeply gendered (Baines, 2011). Men who were soldiers have access to the DDR program that is structured to serve the traditional male experience of soldiers, and women who were victims are given support systems and places to voice their trauma and suffering through

the truth commissions, and tailored programs and support systems for victims (Méndez, 2016). Former soldiers also have the truth commissions, depending on the country and their approach, they can ask for forgiveness.

Female fighters, however, face barriers in all these options. Because of the extremely gendered approach of the DDR, the programs in place simply do not cater to the needs and sensitivities of former female fighters (Asal & Jadoon, 2020). Some of these include trauma from sexual assault, the power dynamics that would be present in the rebel militias, and how this can be traumatizing. Women would have to be in these programs with their perpetrators of violence, likely further retraumatizing them (Coulter, 2009). In truth commissions, many women do not want to share their past as soldiers, thus they cannot have the space to air their grievances or express themselves (Avruch, 2010; Brahm, 2007). Thus, ex-female combatants do not have a space in TJ they can go to. They are not the perfect perpetrator, and they are not the perfect victims. Former female fighters are stuck within the gray areas created by the patriarchal structures of war that are only exacerbated by TJ and that will form the peace it is working towards. As former female fighters are not able to share their experience or take part in any of the other systems laid out by TJ, it is set to create a non-inclusive peace. Because these women departed from their expected role in society, they are ostracized from accessing help or support, both in TJ and in their communities. The subaltern remains in their position, unable to move forward and away from the role they have been given in their society (Mannergren Selimovic, 2020; Spivak, 1988). Female fighters face immense difficulty post-conflict, especially since mechanisms intended to create peace do not integrate their experience. Because of the gender bias that is deeply rooted in international TJ, female soldiers stand to be left behind because of their unconventional experiences and identity. Therefore, any peace that is created through this process is not one that female ex-combatants can enjoy.

Through this literature review, I have illustrated some key gaps and discussions in the existing literature. While underrepresented and vulnerable groups are acknowledged in TJ, the meaningful implementation of their needs and perspectives is rarely done. The international approach overlooks local models, definitions, and approaches to prioritize their strategies and models. This allows for groups like PWD and former female combatants to be seen but not heard. As the

international model has a vague definition of peace and justice, cultural and structural instances these small groups consistently face are not of importance. Without paying attention to these very important nuances that ultimately impact the way society will be structured for these groups, TJ stands to achieve peace, at the expense of underrepresented and vulnerable groups. With the extensive resources provided by the literature on the case studies and theoretical foundations provided by the literature above, this thesis will begin addressing the gaps in the literature, through the following theoretical framework.

Theory

To answer the research question, the theoretical framework will be guided by a few key existing theories. These are feminist conflict theory, disability justice theory, post-colonial, and post-structuralist theory. Feminist conflict theory argues that patriarchal structures that reinforce gender roles in society are replicated in conflict and post-conflict efforts (Puechguirbal, 2012; Weber, 2006). Regardless of their roles in the conflict, they will face inequalities based on their gender and the perceptions of it. For example, female fighters may be recruited by some militias, but many abduct and coerce women into fighting with them (Henshaw, 2020). The denial of autonomy and control exerted on women by men and masculine institutions continues (Martin, 2021). Disability justice theory argues that the current model of understanding disability, that is applied in most of the Global North is one with a very limited understanding and inefficient system of support. This model is also referred to as the Western disability model, coined by Vic Finkelstein (Finkelstein, 2001). It approaches disability through a medical and individualistic lens. The model reduces disability to a body that is no longer able to perform labor. Traditionally, the laboring able body is seen as worthy because of its ability to perform and create value through its work, and labor (Berghs, 2015; Somers & Soldatic, 2020; Tani, 2021). The disabled body is a burden, it does not provide the same possibilities and values (Somers & Soldatic, 2020). The disability justice theory further argues that the structure of society is disabling. It asserts that disabled bodies are neutral, and the conditions, standards, perceptions, and societal structures are what disable a person (Finkelstein, 1993). The disability justice theory offers an alternative to the Western model of disability. This model is rooted in societal change that allows spaces to be accessible for PWD, both physical and psychosocial (Finkelstein, 2001; Sheldon, 2005). Furthermore, it advocates for

the medical, individualist approach to be replaced with a communal approach (Berghs, 2008). One that supports and encourages community-based rehabilitation, that allows PWD to have a role in society where they can support and be supported by their community as much as an able-bodied person can.

Both theories can be seen as subsections within two larger theories, postcolonial theory, and post-structuralist theory. The post-colonial theory argues that the impact of the colonial reign of the 18th to 20th century continues to have an impact on society and the world order (Jabri, 2016). When talking about international models and responses to peace, including TJ, the post-colonial theory argues that the mechanisms these models apply are an extension of colonial models. International organizations are usually supported by powerful Western states, which were also former empires (Fletcher & Weinstein, 2018). Thus, they prioritize and apply the values of Western states, for them to continue to hold this power. Post-colonial theory advocates for indigenous and local models to become more mainstream, as they platform the values, needs, and traditions of indigenous populations that have become silenced through colonialism (Balint et al., 2014). Meanwhile, post-structuralism theory challenges dominant narratives, definitions, and values (Giddens, 1987). International bodies and actors involved in TJ operate within their established definitions. However, they are not universal definitions and concepts. Taking post-structuralist approach questions these meanings and values, and their authority in TJ. It argues that the definitions and concepts that guide TJ are a way to reinforce power and dominance (Kent, 2018). In this context, it aligns with the post-colonialist approach as one can argue the structures imposed by international actors facilitate maintaining their power and dominance.

Each of these theories can support and further build on one another. Feminist conflict theory questions the patriarchic structures that exist within the conflict, how women and their roles are perceived and how it affects them within the peacebuilding and TJ process (Kaufman & Williams, 2013). The same can be said about the disability justice process as it challenges the existing structures and views on disability and the models PWD must exist in (Sheldon, 2005). Post-colonial theory can also be applied as it brings in alternative indigenous models for the way PWD and women are perceived in different societies and cultures (Mekonnen, 2011). The application of post-colonial and post-structuralist theories can assert that the use of international

meanings and standards is intentional, as it imposes a certain way of thinking and approaching the world, post-conflict (Kent, 2018). Therefore, the society that is created through international peacebuilding measures and values is built on the foundation of the international principles, overriding indigenous ones. Moreover, I argue that post-colonial and post-structuralist theory can explain why TJ efforts, especially truth commissions seek out the most traumatic accounts when trying to create a record and 'shared truth' of the conflict. Because these accounts reinforce the need for their existence, and how without the guiding international principles and standards of human rights, democracy, and justice, these atrocities can take place. Thus, the suffering of people and the details of their suffering justify these mechanisms and why they must continue to exist and be applied.

These theories combined can create a foundation and the theoretical framework that answers the research question. They all challenge and analyze the dominant international structures and values of TJ. The theories also highlight how the existing models overlook cultural nuances and when they operate within the established Western-based models, naturally, they are bound to leave behind underrepresented groups. The presented theories can bring different, and indigenous perspectives that can create a deeper understanding of how societies process conflict, and how they can approach peace.

The theoretical framework is as follows. After a conflict, usually intrastate, that has exhibited significant brutality and violence there is an acknowledgment of a need to mend the social relations and grievances that have formed. Usually, international actors that have responded to the crisis while violence is ongoing support TJ. Often, the approach taken is of the international model of TJ. Although hybrid elements may be present, the depth of their integration in the entire process can be very limited, thus still making it a largely international approach as it is meant to platform victims and their experiences while allowing them to heal by sharing what happened to them. Simultaneously perpetrators of violence have a chance to show remorse by confessing their involvement and asking for forgiveness from the victims and their communities. Although well-intentioned, it is a misguided approach. Because this process and these foreign actors come with their expectations for what the testimonies would look like, and what peace and justice mean. As a result, different interpretations of these terms, especially local mechanisms and meanings are

overlooked. This forces people to look at their experience of pain and suffering through a different lens that they are not familiar with and express their emotions in what may feel like an unnatural manner. International actors allocate abundant resources for the TJ process to ensure its success, while these resources could have been used to support local mechanisms and healing practices. Instead, systems like TRCs platform brutal accounts of the war and what people experienced, at the expense of vulnerable groups such as PWD and female ex-combatants. Seeking out a certain account or experience does not provide a thorough understanding of the conflict overall. If TJ does not listen to underrepresented groups, most importantly, what, and how they describe their suffering, the peace and society that is being created will overlook these elements. Thus, the accounts of PWD and former female fighters, as the daily struggles they face, which are often forms of political or structural violence are not addressed. To know what these groups need to move and be at peace, the bodies tasked with TJ must communicate with them. This communication and understanding of their needs must then be mainstreamed into every level of the TJ process. Without this meaningful integration issues carry on even after the TJ process has ended, and they become a part of the new society and peace that is built. Instead of allocating attention and resources to reintegrating vulnerable groups into their communities through local mechanisms that would create stronger, more trustworthy bonds, TJ focuses on what peace means in an international setting. Thus, the cultural and structural violence PWD and female soldiers experience carries through into the new 'peaceful' society. This does not allow these groups to move on from the trauma of war and enjoy the peace they have been promised through sharing their experience. The immense focus within TJ on performing and meeting the international definitions they work under leaves vulnerable underrepresented groups to be left behind and trying to navigate the trauma of war, along with the trauma of being forgotten in a post-war society.

The main hypothesis of this thesis is that the international model of TJ is intensely focused on achieving its definition of peace and justice, subsequently platforming what they see fit as suffering and violence. This dominance in the narrative and approach does not make room for alternatives, such as indigenous or local mechanisms. Along with perceptions, international actors also have their understanding of the basic needs of groups to heal from conflict and create peace. But these definitions may not align with those of the community. Thus, post-conflict societies must construct peace and justice through the lens and systems created by international actors. Because

of this prioritization, there is no time or resources allocated to understanding what an inclusive peace is to the specific case, and how it could be achieved. TJ, although operating within a community and societal structures it is trying to rebuild has very individualistic tendencies. Furthermore, it relies on the most violent and difficult experiences of people who went through war, only placing focus on these, instead of focusing on how to support them post-conflict. This leads to vulnerable and underrepresented groups such as PWD and female combatants having their experiences exploited without any tangible solutions for how to move on. Overall, the theoretical framework claims that TJ misuses the momentum present after a conflict to reintegrate and support vulnerable groups in society to accomplish their goals and achieve their understanding of peace and justice.

Methods

The analysis of this case study and theory will employ process tracing as its main method of analysis. More specifically, explaining outcome process tracing. This method looks at the current situation, and the outcomes of the process, while working backward in this process to create a theory that finds and explains the causal mechanisms found in this study (Beach & Pedersen, 2019). The process that is being traced is how the groups of interest were consistently left out of meaningful implementation within the process. It will analyze the three systems of international TJ that have been introduced: TRCs and SCs, DDRs, and other reintegration programs established. Furthermore, it will look at how the limited understanding of the needs of PWD and female ex-combatants influenced these systems that ultimately excluded these groups. Finally, how local mechanisms were, and could have been applied will be discussed, and how these were also exclusionary to the groups of interest. This process will test the theory established earlier that states a lack of meaningful inclusion of underrepresented groups and attention to cultural values and nuance in a TJ process leads to a non-inclusive peace. It creates an environment where people who need the most support are overlooked and left to fend for themselves in within the new systems, societies, and communities built after TJ, that did not try to incorporate and integrate their needs and experiences.

The underrepresented groups that have been chosen are persons with disabilities and former female combatants. PWD were chosen due to the rise in people gaining disabilities after a

conflict. Despite their prominence in the aftermath of a conflict, they are often left out of the conversations on what peace should look like and their most basic needs are overlooked. This makes for an inaccessible society and peace to be founded. Former female combatants have been chosen, because I argue they are incredibly interesting actors in the conflict, that can almost fully encompass the experiences of women during the war. Many women do not join the fights of their own free will but are abducted and coerced to fight (Asal & Jadoon, 2020). Their autonomy is taken away and decisions are made by the dominant, male figures in the group. But women who are in rebel groups and fight are tasked with doing far more than just that. Traditionally, in military groups, some members would be tasked with cooking and routine chores to support those who are fighting. These traditionally feminine tasks are now assigned to the women who have been captured and are in the groups (Martin, 2021). Furthermore, the trust and vulnerability that are associated with women in patriarchal societies are further weaponized by these groups. Women are sent to be spies and gather information in villages, as they are more easily trusted than the men (Kaufman & Williams, 2013). Finally, despite women being integral to the functionality of these groups, it does not spare them from facing horrific violence within them. The women who fight alongside these men, and often help them in committing atrocities are left to suffer the same fate. They are often sexually assaulted and face general physical violence at the hands of these groups (Cohen, 2013). Because of these experiences, I believe it encompasses women in war well, because they are integral to the way it works, but regardless of times of war or peace, the patriarchal systems that oppress women remain present. Even though these women are ultimately victims as well because of their involvement in the aggression, it is easier to overlook them.

This analysis will be done by carefully and thoroughly looking at a case study. An appropriate case study is of a country that has gone through intrastate conflict, and as part of its peacebuilding efforts, it was agreed for a TJ process to be conducted. The country chosen as a case study for this project is Sierra Leone.

Sierra Leone: The Case Study

Sierra Leone is a resource-rich country in Western Africa (Collier & Duponchel, 2013). It was colonized by the British Empire until 1961. Following its independence, the country faced a

tumultuous time as the political landscape was plagued by corruption, electoral violence, and a lack of social services and support that ultimately led to a weak civil society (Mitton, 2015). Another element of tension has been Sierra Leone’s dense and varied natural resources. These resources could create a thriving mining, agricultural, and fishing industry, however, the lack of government regulations and easy access to much of these resources led to furthering the country’s deep social and economic inequalities (Bellows & Miguel, 2006). Most famously, the Eastern and Southern parts of the country have an abundance of diamonds, which fueled much of the country’s corruption. It is important to note that there was such an abundance of diamonds that in the districts mentioned people could find them simply by digging the ground (Silberfein, 2004). This incredibly easy access to diamonds was able to fund the main rebel group the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), in the war that used diamonds they harvested to buy their weapons (Hirsch, 2001).

The war lasted from the 23rd of March 1991 until the 18th of January 2002. The main fighting groups in the conflict were, the RUF, the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC), and West Side Boys. The RUF and ARFC eventually formed a coalition against the Sierra Leone Army (SLA) (Mitton, 2015). The war originated as the RUF mobilizing against the corrupt government and trying to redistribute the available resources in the country as most of the population was living in extreme poverty (Zack-Williams, 1999). However, this goal soon shifted to the RUF becoming a belligerent group intending to gain control of the country by overthrowing the government (Mitton, 2015). The SLA was incredibly unprepared for the rebellion led by the RUF, especially since they were being supported by the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL), the special forces of Charles Taylor (Hirsch, 2001). This support gave the RUF the manpower and weaponry necessary to take control of parts of the country and maintain it. The brutality of the conflict is especially important to note. One of the main tactics RUF fighters used against civilians was limb amputation (Cole, 2013). A majority, namely 70%, of amputations were done on young to middle-aged men (Allen et al., 2020). Another defining characteristic of the civil war was the abductions committed by the rebels. Children and women would be abducted when their villages would be raided and taken by the rebels (Aning & Mcintyre, 2022). Many children were trained to fight, and

so were many women. The girls and women that were abducted and taken to ‘the bush’[2] were not only fighters but also victims of the aggression and violence of the rebels (Millar, 2012).

After years of fighting, the Lomé Peace Agreement was signed in 1999 (Binningsbø & Dupuy, 2009). However, there was still significant violence in the country until 2002 when the war was officially declared over. Despite the Peace Agreement being signed by the conflicting parties, the situation was still unstable in Sierra Leone (Mitton, 2015). The Lomé Peace Agreement mentioned efforts intended to help Sierra Leone establish peace. One of these was establishing a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR), and the eventual Special Court for Sierra Leone (Okolie-Osemene, 2021). The DDR along with the rest of the peacekeeping efforts was to be assisted by the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) (Montague, 2002). The overall brutality and disarray the conflict caused brought immense international attention to the country and the victims of the conflict, resulting in a plethora of international aid and support from countries and international organizations alike (Pemunta, 2012). This led to refugee camps, and medical and support centers being established in the capital and surrounding areas. People were given access to shelter, food, medical assistance, and general support as people would slowly begin returning to their homes. Because of the perceived success of previous commissions and courts, this was seen as a step in the right direction for Sierra Leone’s peace and ability to move forward (Rooney & Aoláin, 2018). However, its implementation left much to be desired. The TJ efforts in Sierra Leone included the establishment of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission along with the creation of a Special Court which had offices in the country’s capital, Freetown, The Hague, and New York City. The process also established reintegration efforts, which were DDR programs for former soldiers and other skill-based programs for victims of the conflict (Okolie-Osemene, 2021).

The TRC concluded in 2004 with a final report published in October of that year. Twenty years from the end of the war, Sierra Leone has not faced any major violent conflict (Mitton, 2013). From a distance, the country seems like it has found peace since its brutal civil war. However, the

[2] Sierra Leonean term to describe wilderness. The term carries a negative connotation as bad things are said to happen and belong to the bush.

question of how peace is defined once again must be asked again. PWD has faced significant inequalities, such as a lack of access to education, medical care, and employment (Berghs & Santos-Zingale, 2011). Ex-female combatants have had to stay quiet, during and after the TJ process, making them incapable of accessing basic support systems for fear of having their past as soldiers exposed (Cullen, 2020). Although the TRC seems to have created a peaceful Sierra Leone, after people were able to share their pain, that is not the reality for some groups. PWD, specifically amputees and women are in incredibly vulnerable positions today. The peace that exists in Sierra Leone, does not include them and their experience, because the foundation of this peace was one that never included their perspectives and needs. The TRC lacked a focus on reintegrating and supporting these groups in their communities sustainably. Many of these issues are also because of the extreme poverty and corruption in Sierra Leone, however, the TRC had an opportunity to center their efforts on using local mechanisms to help people move on from conflict. This was not the case. But it is important to unpack the mechanisms that the TRC created that result in the situation today.

Analysis

The analysis of the Sierra Leone case study will be structured as follows. First, the power dynamics between international and local actors to establish TJ in Sierra Leone will be explored, as to how the standards of international actors created the foundation of the process and its limitations. This will be followed by examining the different meanings and values that existed within the process, and how these impacted the process of TJ, the outcome, and the groups in question. Finally, the way the international mechanisms functioned within Sierra Leone, and how these compare to the local mechanisms the population engaged in post-conflict.

International and Local: A Power Struggle

The Sierra Leone Civil War garnered a lot of international attention both during its time of active violence, as well as during the negotiation process of the Lomé Peace Agreement, most notably the United Nations, and the Economic Community of West African States (Mitton, 2013). Once the country started moving towards implementing the TJ process, the involvement of international actors was visible. The Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission (SLTRC)

was composed of four Sierra Leone nationals, and three international members (SLTRC, 2004). National authorities invited the UN to establish hybrid Special Courts, to address the serious crimes committed during the conflict (Jalloh, 2010). These courts would take place in Freetown, The Hague, and New York City, which would prosecute cases under a combination of national and international law. Finally, the DDR program was established with the support of the UN, and further reintegration programs for victims were also established under the organization's guidance (Humphreys & Weinstein, 2008). At the time of the peace negotiations and the actors involved in trying to find a peaceful resolution to the conflict, the 1995 South African Truth and Reconciliation was still extremely prevalent (Graham, 2003). To this day it continues to be regarded as an incredibly progressive and productive approach to peacebuilding and repairing grievances post-conflict (Olsen et al., 2010). Naturally, this success influenced decision-making on how to approach peace in Sierra Leone, and ultimately it was implemented as well. However, because the UN was already heavily involved in Sierra Leone, TJ and the truth commission was very influenced by the organization's international approach (Newman, 2002). But most of all, the presence of international actors, and their resources legitimized the conflict, and the struggle of the people (Fletcher & Weinstein, 2018; Sriram, 2007). The introduction of an international presence came at a time when the people of Sierra Leone had little to rely on.

Since international organizations and actors come in during highly fragile times and offer support for a population in need, the already existing power imbalance is further reinforced. The conflict in Sierra Leone was met with a large humanitarian response. Resources flocked the country and created refugee camps for the displaced population, offering a semblance of stability, although temporary. The camps provided civilians with stability and access to basic resources, such as food, water, and shelter they did not have easy access to before (Pemunta, 2012). However, even in these first stages of international involvement, these spaces were not inclusive. PWD was virtually unable to navigate the refugee camps, and often they would be denied access to services (Virendrakumar et al., 2018). Furthermore, women were at risk of gender-based violence in these camps, and there was little done by the international actors to prevent and help them (Baines, 2011). These programs were overwhelmed and often could not keep up with the demand, but they were promising enough to people. Even though the waits were long, people were willing to wait in hopes for their turn to come (Ferme, 2018). This created the expectation of receiving aid from

international actors and the government. It also made the association to Sierra Leoneans that being involved with international actors and their programs meant access to material resources, as these actors were viewed as wealthy, and capable of providing these services. For many, these camps were important centers that provided some stability and assistance. Thus, when TJ programs began, they were welcomed (Sriram, 2005). Coulter states that during her fieldwork there was a consensus in the population and their post-conflict approach, "Both civilians and ex-combatants were war-weary and at the end of the war, and welcomed peace, at whatever price" (Coulter, 2009, p. 176). But this eagerness created dependence, as the population continued to expect support and resources from international actors and subsequently the government (Langmack, 2020). The leverage the international system had was one of the key ways people were willing to participate in the TJ process, mainly the TRC (Menzel, 2020). Sierra Leoneans did not have stability after the conflict, and they were hoping this process would provide it.

The need that Sierra Leoneans had, and the perception that international TJ systems could provide them, led to a process built on miscommunication, a system unable to provide what people needed, and an indifference to this limitation. One of the most significant shortcomings of the process was the miscommunication between the TRC and the population. To familiarize and encourage the population to testify in the TRC representatives were sent throughout the country to explain the process (Shaw, 2007). This was accompanied by advertisements on the radio and flyers shared in communities. The TRC was introduced as a way for the population can move on and heal from the conflict (Kelsall, 2005). But because of the relationship established between Sierra Leoneans and international actors, to much of the local population, this meant material assistance, similar to what they received through humanitarian assistance (Shaw, 2005). Once people realized this was not the case, it resulted in mass dissatisfaction from much of the population (Kelsall, 2005). The core miscommunication of the TRC was not the only instance of international TJ systems implementing what it considers the appropriate approach.

TJ and especially the TRC were committed to creating a shared truth that highlighted the brutality of the Sierra Leonean Civil War. An example of this brutality was the amputation of civilians' limbs, mostly done by the RUF (SLTRC, 2004). Amputees were not just victims of the conflict, but a visual representation of its brutality (Garland-Thomson et al., 2002). Because of this

TRC and the international TJ system, sought out amputees and, their testimonies (Berghs, 2016). International organizations positioned themselves as helpers and actors who could provide support, something they used as leverage to encourage people to testify in the TRC (Asiedu & Berghs, 2012). Amputees and other PWD did testify, but the suffering they expressed was not one that the TRC was looking for. The victims would describe the issues they are facing as newly disabled people, and how they need support (Kelsall, 2005). One amputee shared their frustration in their testimony saying, “We the amputees, how are we in the world now? […] If you say peace should come, we the amputees should bring peace. I cannot be struggling and say that I am living in peace. […] If our problem is left behind, the war will not end” (SLTRC, 2004, p. 239). However, this was not what the TRC was looking for in testimonies (Menzel, 2020). The goal of the international system was to create a shared truth of the past, not to solve the issues of the present. In many ways, TJ in Sierra Leone was further disabling to its disabled population.

The international system approached the conflict through its lens and understanding, intending to help but at times only aggravating the situation. This is most evident through their approach in trying to support PWD and the DDR program. The response of the TJ mission to the many new PWD that emerged out of the conflict was to establish camps or ‘communities’ where PWD could live together and support each other (Berghs, 2008). These camps were close to the capital, and its residents would have access to some external support from the government and international actors. This support varied from caretakers being present, and at times access to medical needs. It is important to note that because of Sierra Leone’s immense poverty, the medical access was limited, but receiving it outside the camps would have been significantly more difficult (Gottschalk, 2007). These camps housed both amputees, and war-wounded people, a distinction made during the TJ process (van den Brink et al., 2021). The camps further complicated the existence and experience of PWD in post-conflict Sierra Leone. Some people described how they saw this to be another traumatic experience that only aggravated what they were already going through (Mugeere et al., 2020). People described how their disability left them without autonomy, and now living in these camps removed their identities as adults. It reinforced a dependency they had on support, but also ways in which they were exploited, as these camps were often visited by international representatives and the media (Kim, 2011). The PWD that came out of the Sierra Leone war and their imagery were especially exploited for international attention. During one of

the interviews conducted with PWD in the camps by Berghs, an elderly man, Alhaji Mohammed said "… they left me here and I am damaged." (Berghs, 2016b, p. 91) The camps alienated PWD from their communities and everyday life. Because they were in their own spaces, they did not have chances to interact and heal together with the rest of the population. Within the camps themselves, distinctions were made between the kinds of disabilities, and the treatment they would receive. Through the efforts of TJ, amputees were and their needs were prioritized compared to other war-wounded people (Berghs, 2016b). Many PWD expressed their frustration at the lack of community reintegration, especially since it was perceived more was done to reintegrate ex-combatants than their victims, reinforcing the resentment PWD held against their perpetrators (Peters, 2007).

The world moved on, and so did PWD but not together, creating a disjointed perception of healing, and what a peaceful society looked like. People who did not live in the camps or have PWD in their communities were unfamiliar with their struggles and needs. Amputees and other PWD became a visual reminder of the war (Berghs, 2016b). Because of the visual embodiment of their trauma and pain, non-disabled people would be reminded of the war and its suffering, and ultimately their individual pain (Scarry, 1987). Because PWD was not part of communal healing efforts, the new peace created in Sierra Leone hid PWD, who would appear occasionally on the sidelines (Berghs, 2016a). It is important to note that this is not the universal experience of PWD in Sierra Leone, however. Some returned to their families and homes, trying to move on and find ways of getting peace after the war. Many of them faced struggles reintegrating and healing, as most of them struggled with the trauma of everyday life and not being able to 'go back to normal' and work and provide for themselves and their families (Berghs, 2008; Martin, 2016). During an interview conducted by Shaw, Adama, an amputee who testified in the TRC and returned to her village described the difficulties she faced after sharing her testimony, "If I get help, I'll forget about the war. But if you don't have help, you'll remember the war all the time. Now I remember because no one helps me … What happened to the paper carried by the government? Right now, we're taking care of ourselves" (Shaw, 2007). The sentiment of feeling forgotten and unable to move past the war was common amongst the disabled population in Sierra Leone (van den Brink et al., 2021). It is further exacerbated, considering the institutional acknowledgment and promises PWD received. In the final report of the TRC, one of the most fundamental things addressed was

the need for reparations for victims[3] (SLTRC, 2004, Chapter 4.69). But most of the amputees have yet to receive their reparations (Langmack, 2020). The Sierra Leonean government has been proactive in passing laws intended to protect PWD, most notably the Sierra Leone Persons with Disability Act (*The Persons with Disability Act*, 2011). The government was also praised for passing a law that prioritized PWD access during elections, and its general effort in complying with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (Virendrakumar et al., 2018). Once again, the priority is appeasing international standards through institutional action, which has yet to be implemented (Berghs & Santos-Zingale, 2011). It emphasizes how the international TJ system did not account for the needs of PWD, and what it would take for them to move on.

The DDR programs created with the support of international organizations followed a model based on a limited understanding of who fights in a war, and what their needs are post-conflict. During the DDR 5% of the participants were female ex-combatants (SLTRC, 2004). The exact number of women who fought in the civil war is still unknown, as many women did not want to come forward, especially during the DDR process (MacKenzie, 2009b). Arguably, the biggest shortcoming of the DDR was creating a program to support former fighters, and fighters being synonymous with men. Female fighters were scared to share their experience, and have their past exposed, thus they were reluctant to participate in both the TRC and DDR (Cullen, 2020). The DDR and subsequent reintegration programs were extremely gendered and did not take into account the issue female ex-combatants may face participating in them.

One example is the struggle between female ex-combatants wanting anonymity and the DDR needing identity. The only way one could be registered in the DDR and participate in the program was by handing in a weapon and disclosing their identity (Okolie-Osemene, 2021). Many women who were fighters did not have access to weapons, as they were usually in the possession of men, and this was especially the case if the women married their 'bush husbands' (Millar, 2012). Women were only given weapons when the DDR established a monetary compensation approach due to the low turnout rates. This led to women being given weapons to turn in for money which would be taken by their husbands. These systems were easily corruptible and did not take into

[3] The TRC Act did not use the term "reparations" explicitly, instead, it talked about addressing the needs of the victims. This included compensation plans.

consideration how women would be immensely left out and even used by men for them to exploit the programs. Furthermore, the women who did join the DDR reported facing sexual violence in those camps as well (Coulter, 2009). The program knew it would force men and women in a shared space, men who have had a history of abusing and violating women, and did not implement any precautionary methods. But despite all of these limitations, that sidelined women from benefiting from these programs, and putting them in more danger, the DDR program was considered a success. The Sierra Leone government, along with the UN and many others used it as a model for other countries that implemented DDR programs (Mazurana & Carlson, 2004). The international TJ system was able to overlook essentially completely overlook female ex-combatants and their needs, as the DDR worked for the groups the international approach saw as soldiers. Female ex-combatants were left without support and without the safety of seeking it out because of their identity (Coulter, 2009). The way the international approach dictated who could be helped, and what their role was in TJ massively contributed to how inclusive its outcome was.

Meaning and Value

The international TJ system imposed itself and its standards on the efforts to create peace in Sierra Leone. International approaches come with meaning and values that adhere to the goals and standards of the international actors (Pouligny, 2005). Because of the power dynamics present when an international actor is involved in a highly contextual process, such as creating peace after a civil war, there is a risk the local meanings and values are different from the international ones (Waldorf, 2017). This struggle between international and local concepts was evident throughout the Sierra Leone TJ process. The creation of identities within TJ, and their subsequent treatment, along with the disconnect between the population and TJ institutions regarding the TRC demonstrate the tension between the local and international approaches to meaning and value. Identities are a necessary part of this process. The TRC needs people who are victims, and people who are perpetrators as their testimonies provide specific perspectives of the conflict that form the shared truth the commission tries to establish (Brants & Klep, 2013). Likewise, the TJ process used identities to determine the kind of support or needs different groups had (Rooney & Aoláin, 2018). As mentioned in the section above, PWD in Sierra Leone was further differentiated as amputees or war-wounded people. Amputees were prioritized compared to war-wounded people in the TJ process because of the perception their needs were more urgent (dos Santos-Zingale &

Ann McColl, 2006). But these distinctions led to frictions within communities, people being assigned new identities without adequate systems to support them, and further distancing them from their communities.

The TRC arguably operated in binaries, people were either a victim or a perpetrator, they either were an amputee or war-wounded, and they either were disabled or able-bodied. Making people have to fit in these boxes perpetuated the frustration people were already feeling post-conflict, and the helplessness they felt within the TJ process. This helplessness was exacerbated when international actors would introduce new identities and concepts, without support systems to follow. The international TJ model looked at disability through the Western model of disability (Berghs, 2015). It approached the concept of disability through an individualistic lens and equated support to medical assistance (Allen et al., 2020). TJ further sustained that disability emerges from society, not from the body having different capacities or being injured. The Western model of disability, and the way TJ saw PWD was as needing assistance and being helpless (Cole, 2013). Very little focus was placed on how these disabilities impacted a community and the role of the individual in their community. Large polygamous households are the most common family and community structure found in Sierra Leone (Berghs, 2016a). While women are very involved in their families and communities, often working as well as overseeing domestic duties, men are still expected to be the main providers of a family (Renner, 2015). Over 70% of the recorded amputees were middle-aged men (SLTRC, 2004). Because of the demographic of amputees, many families and communities became destabilized. But this communal impact was ignored in what TJ offered PWD. Instead of trying to create systems and an environment where amputees and other PWD can still provide for their communities, they were offered to live in a camp with other PWD and promised to be paid reparations (Berghs & Santos-Zingale, 2011). PWD did not have the option to express what their needs to reintegrate into society were, thus manufacturing an exclusive peace.

The laboring body is seen to provide value and is a "signifier of a 'morally worthy'" citizen, unlike the disabled body, which cannot perform the same labor, and thus cannot provide value (Berghs, 2015). PWD described how this treatment was traumatizing, as they felt stripped of their "adult identity" and became dependent on the support TJ offered, as they had nothing else (Mugeere et al., 2020). These feelings of frustration were felt by many PWD and non-disabled

people, especially since able-bodied people believed that everyone suffered during the war (Berghs, 2011). The need to fit into the definitions created by TJ allowed communal grievances to form, as the way Sierra Leoneans perceived the war, was as communal pain, felt by all. No one group had greater suffering than another, as they were all affected and traumatized. Thus, the distinctions made by the TRC led to people who fit the descriptions of the desired groups having difficulty reintegrating into their communities afterward, as their communities resented the special treatment (dos Santos-Zingale & Ann McColl, 2006). PWD started facing discrimination and at times violence because of their status (Hughes et al., 2012; Murray, 2021). Because of the pushback from people outside these groups, many PWD started to prefer living in these communities, as they felt more supported and understood compared to how others treated them (Berghs & Santos-Zingale, 2011). TJ imposing a definition and excluding people from accessing support because they did not fit it, created a lot of resentment.

The TRC and TJ are built on the victim-centric approach that centers their experiences as crucial to creating peace post-conflict. But this approach becomes increasingly difficult when the identity of a victim diverges from the traditional perceptions. Through the lens of the international TJ system, a victim has become someone with a lack of agency (de Waardt, 2016). Female fighters in Sierra Leone complicated the understanding of this identity. Most of the women who fought alongside rebel militias were abducted, trained, and forced to fight (MacKenzie, 2009b). The women were active participants in the conflict, and to civilians outside the rebel groups, they were seen as perpetrators of violence. However, female soldiers faced significant abuse at the hands of the men in their rebel groups (Cohen, 2013). But the violence they were subject to was overlooked within the Sierra Leonean society, they were perceived as perpetrators of violence, who were active in the conflict, not victims subject to violence (Coulter, 2009).

The TRC sought out female fighters to testify, but very few were willing to out of fear of being stigmatized or people seeking revenge (Cohen, 2013). Regardless of how much trauma, violence, and abuse ex-female combatants endured, they were seen as perpetrators, not victims by their communities (Coulter, 2008). The work done by Chris Coulter is by far the most extensive and thorough account of the experience of female ex-combatants in Sierra Leone, as to this day, many continue to hide their identities out of fear and shame. She states how many of the women

she interviewed were left confused about their legal and social status (Coulter, 2009). Female fighters were not able to claim the identity of a victim, and thus they were unable to access most of the programs established by the TJ efforts for victims (Ager et al., 2010). Many of the programs intended to rehabilitate and reintegrate victims of the conflict required people to share their experiences, essentially proving their victimhood (Coulter, 2009). But female ex-combatants were hesitant to share their past, making these programs inaccessible to them, and leaving them with little support as they felt isolated from their communities. Aminata, a former female soldier describes how she was treated by her community when she returned "[…] when we came back, people were afraid of us. They were even afraid to speak to us" (Coulter, 2009, p. 154). This sentiment was shared by other female ex-combatants as well, and it illustrates the isolation these women faced because they were not victims enough.

While the TRC recognized the abuse women felt, they did establish systems of support tailored to them. Former female fighters were so consumed by their shame and fear of being discovered they did not feel like they have places to seek out support (Gilmartin, 2018). The inefficiency of the TJ approach to mainstream the needs of former female soldiers, combined with the shame the women felt, and the fear and resentment their communities held for them, isolated these women, and left them with no support. This illustrates how the introduction of identities by TJ, isolated vulnerable groups who were in dire need of support, creating a society that maintains this limited access. While in this case, it was the local population that rejected the identity of a victim towards female ex-combatants, the TJ efforts could have done more to humanize the women, or simply provide systems of support tailored to their needs.

As it has been illustrated through two examples of how the different meanings and values of the local and international approaches, the TRC is another clear example of how TJ, through its foundation can create a non-inclusive peace. TJ runs under the assumption that if everything is shared, and if the suffering is expressed it will be easier for people and communities to heal and move on (Kelsall, 2005). To create a shared truth, the experience and brutality of the conflict must be expressed through accounts of the victims. As Scarry argues, pain destroys language, but once language can express pain, that is when it is relieved (Scarry, 1987). Through the international TJ lens, this is the basis of truth commissions. But language does not have to only mean a person

describing their pain through a TRC, language can also be practicing rituals and living within your community and participating in it (Waldorf, 2017). This miscommunication was one of the biggest shortcomings of TJ in Sierra Leone. The concept of publicly expressing your suffering was not customary in Sierra Leone (Waldorf, 2017). It was widely believed that verbalizing and expressing your suffering would not only not let you heal, but it would bring the suffering back into your life (Shaw, 2007). But representatives would extensively talk to locals trying to help them understand why they should share their stories at the TRC. The representatives, along with the radio and flyer advertisements were calling for Sierra Leoneans to come together and make a 'cool heart' to rebuild the nation and move past the pain of the war (Coulter, 2009; Shaw, 2007). This is significant because the concept of a 'cool heart' is the base for life in a community in Sierra Leone (Millar, 2010). It represents calmness and patience. Similarly, representatives would use phrases such as, testifying would 'make their heart feel better' because if they keep their pain inside this would 'burn their heart' (Shaw, 2007). Even though this approach was meant to resonate with communities more, it was a surface-level attempt. This language was used just to motivate people to testify, other local approaches that would have achieved a 'cool heart' were not applied (Kelsall, 2005). Even though representatives tried to frame the TRC through a cultural lens by using familiar language, many people understood that testifying, and thus being able to move on would entail more than gaining spiritual ease.

The TRC in Sierra Leone overall is regarded as a success. But scholars who research underrepresented groups such as PWD and former female combatants highlight the immense limitations these groups faced because of what the TRC defined as support and creating peace. Able-bodied people who still had the opportunity to provide for themselves and their families were seen to be able to internalize the goals and values of the TRC (Kelsall, 2005). The people who understood the goal of the TRC through its standards and definitions did report feeling better after testifying (Kelsall, 2005). But this was not the case for many PWD and former female fighters. To many PWD, to move on and heal meant the ability to build a future and provide for oneself. This meant financial support or anything that could create enough stability for them to build a future (Berghs, 2011). Because of the way people internalized the presence of international actors, and they related it with the provision of resources, the hopes for this outcome were legitimate (Menzel, 2020). Thus, people came forward and testified, but their testimonies were not what was expected

out of a TRC. Because many Sierra Leoneans still held their beliefs and discomfort with publicly talking about their suffering, many were described as seeming cold and removed from their testimonies (Kelsall, 2005; Menzel, 2020). When describing their suffering, especially PWD would talk about their current suffering, which was political, and rooted in their disability (Asiedu & Berghs, 2012). They would express how hard it is to go through everyday life as they cannot work, and are left without support (Berghs, 2011). But when describing the tragedies they went through in war their demeanor was described as cold and detached (Brown, 2012). This was extremely different from what testimonies in the TRC usually look like. The expectations of how victims are meant to act and describe their pain showed how disconnected the international TJ approach was from the population and its most vulnerable groups. People were willing to share their suffering in hopes of being provided with the ability to move on as TJ would support them, only to be left disappointed. This was especially difficult since the process of the TRC went directly against some of the local mechanisms present in the society (Shaw, 2007). The concept of forgetting was familiar to Sierra Leoneans, but inaccessible through this process.

The "Perfect" Mechanism

The international TJ system based its approach in Sierra Leone on the belief that peace and healing need to be built on a shared truth and the expression of pain, but the local population was hesitant. The mechanism of social forgetting is an indigenous practice found in many African communities, including Sierra Leone, used by communities to move past difficult or traumatic events (Esposito, 2008). Social forgetting is a process that does not have a linear approach, meaning there are no explicit mechanisms and systems established like the ones seen in TJ. Instead, it is a long-term communal effort where people try to forget the suffering and trauma of the past by moving forward and trying to create stability and a new 'normal' (Martin, 2016). Unlike the international TJ model, the focus is not placed on the individual and their role, but instead on the community, and their collective pain is dealt with (McGrattan & Hopkins, 2017). Social forgetting also does not follow an explicit timeline, it allows the population and people who have suffered to process their emotions and creates a space to address them through community or religious rituals (Waldorf, 2017). This indigenous TJ approach was observed in Mozambique, and although the country's peace has been turbulent, this method to try and reconcile the population has been praised (Bueno, 2019). The rituals performed in Mozambique have already been discussed, but one

significant similarity between the approach in Mozambique, and what Sierra Leoneans shared they resented about the TJ process was time. The indigenous approach in Mozambique never specified an end date, instead, people could reach out to families and local leaders for rituals and to express their pain, as it came to them (Igreja, 2012). The Sierra Leone TRC was active for only two years, and it was established as soon as the war was declared to be over (SLTRC, 2004). Many Sierra Leoneans expressed 'bitterness' towards the demand of international actors and the TRC for the people to express and share their trauma, one which they barely had time to process (Berghs, 2011). The TRC was especially successful in quelling social forgetting being the dominant approach people in Sierra Leone engaged in to move on.

Even though Sierra Leoneans wished to move on, and forget the war, the dominant international models that dictated the peace efforts insisted they share their experience, forcing people to relive the trauma they wished to forget. Another pillar the TRC rests on is that through people sharing their experiences, one of the ways they can move on is by forgiving and forgetting (Millar, 2011). But as the TRC took place, and years after, researchers such as Shaw reported how many Sierra Leoneans said they could "forgive, but we can never forget" (Shaw, 2007, p. 202). This was how many PWD described their experience, especially as they did not have the means to forget since they were unable to work and create a future for themselves (Berghs, 2011). People quickly became disinterested in the TRC, especially once they realized the commission could not support them and were there simply to collect testimonies (Millar, 2015). But Sierra Leoneans still wanted to move on. While the TRC was ongoing in the background of their lives, people tried to create a normal they could return to (Martin, 2016). People were trying to create spaces that resembled life before the war, that could provide them with stability, and eventually peace (de Certeau, 2013). This practice was observed as people came together to farm, or during religious ceremonies (Martin, 2016). Sierra Leoneans could overlook if someone was a victim or perpetrator when engaging in these rituals, as people simply wanted to find peace (Kelsall, 2005). The importance of combining local mechanisms was made evident during a specific TRC session.

There were several commissions held throughout the country in hopes of making them accessible for anyone who wished to attend them. Tim Kelsall was present at the TRC in the Tonkolili District, where he documented the process and the reactions and behavior of the Sierra

Leoneans in attendance. Some of the victims were cold and removed from their testimony, while others were very emotional in sharing their experiences (Kelsall, 2005, pp. 367–369). But the RUF soldiers who chose to testify were also removed from their testimony, but in sense they refused to take personal responsibility for their actions, blaming the entity of the RUF (ibid, p. 372). Throughout the TRC, frustrations began to grow between the victims and other locals in attendance, and the nonchalant demeanor of the soldiers (ibid, p. 386). On the final day, the tensions were so high, that people were worried fighting would break out (ibid, p. 389). But the TRC ended with a ceremony held by religious leaders in the district. This decision was crucial, as it had been the most effective in achieving the TRCs goal. Kelsall describes it as "This feeling reverberated around the audience, unleashing emotions of solidarity and forgiveness in its members" (ibid, p. 388). The inclusion of local figureheads who performed rituals that had significance to the people who committed the suffering, and those who suffered was what achieved the goal of the commission. This anecdote is important because even though the TJ efforts in Sierra Leone are referred to as hybrid at times, the inclusion of local mechanisms was very limited (Berghs, 2016a). Local and religious leaders were allowed to join the TRC, but they had to operate under the international system most of the time, limiting the impact they had on the population, as they could typically perform local rituals (Millar, 2015).

In recent years, there has been a push for indigenous practices and mechanisms to be prioritized in peacebuilding efforts (Mekonnen, 2011). But there is a danger in romanticizing the locals. While international systems perpetuate and benefit from the structures created during colonial times, indigenous models are not perfect (McAuliffe, 2013). After a civil war, a state and its structures are incredibly fragile and susceptible to power grabs and people taking advantage of the instability for their gain (Costi, 2006). This was seen in Sierra Leone as well on a small scale. During the DDR programs, once money was offered in exchange for weapons to try and demilitarize the rebel groups, the system was quickly taken advantage of (Coulter, 2009). Former fighters would give their wives, or other women weapons, to receive more money, which the men would keep (Doucet & Denov, 2012). There is no perfect model, conflicts are complex, and they are answered and resolved through a balance and mixture of different approaches, values, and perspectives. TJ needs to make a committed effort to understand what peace and justice mean to society, and how it can be achieved through a combination of both local approaches people are

comfortable with while introducing international standards that can create a more inclusive environment.

Furthermore, the participation of PWD or female ex-combatants in these local mechanisms is sparse (Balint et al., 2014). While researchers describe these rituals, the presence of these groups is rarely specified. I argue that this is due to the resentment that built between these newly formed groups and general society. Because PWD was isolated from their communities as they lived in the compounds built for them, and female ex-combatants were reluctant to make themselves known, they were excluded from the local mechanisms the same way they were in the international ones. The struggle to balance international TJ and local mechanisms continue to this day. But in this struggle, PWD and women who are especially vulnerable, such as female soldiers, continue to be overlooked (Berghs & Santos-Zingale, 2011; Coulter, 2009). Both approaches fail to platform these groups, listen to their needs, and implement them. Sierra Leone tried to move on from the civil war through international TJ, while the population also relied on their familiar local mechanisms at a smaller scale. Even with two different mechanisms happening simultaneously, PWD and female ex-combatants were excluded. Many amputees have yet to receive the reparations they were promised by the government and TRC and have resorted to begging in Sierra Leone's cities as it is one of the only ways they can earn money (Murray, 2021). Female ex-combatants were forced to remain silent as the shame of their past, and the fear of what they would face if their communities knew their identity (Coulter, 2009). This isolated them and put them in vulnerable positions, where their belief to hide, also concealed their need for support (Abdullah et al., 2010; Mullen, 2015).

Discussion

This section will provide an overview of the findings of this research. It will also outline what an inclusive transitional justice process could have looked like for Sierra Leone, given the limitations that were highlighted in the sections above. Some key limitations of this study will be covered also be discussed. Finally, it will answer how transitional justice efforts can make for a non-inclusive peace.

The entirety of the DDR program was not suited for the needs of female soldiers in Sierra Leone. I argue that one of the most significant changes to help create a more sustainable and inclusive peace would have been DDR programs intended just for female fighters. They would not require women to prove participation by handing over guns, or them identifying themselves and their former participations. These safe spaces, where women who had similar experiences could have provided strong communal bonds for women, who otherwise have felt shame and ostracization (Henshaw, 2020). Furthermore, the reintegration efforts and skills workshops would have benefited from conversations with women in communities, to understand what tasks are valuable and needed (Martin, 2021). This could have been accompanied by education efforts within the communities. Most of all, the reintegration programs that were provided by transitional justice could have slowly transitioned women who were part of the DDR into communal activities. These could have been activities such as community farming or other skills-based workshops that "victims" of the conflict were part of (Ager et al., 2010). Since former female combatants who were able to be in programs and workshops with other women said how helpful it was for them to be involved in something and spend time with other people instead of being isolated, this integration would be crucial (Coulter, 2009). Slowly bringing former female combatants into a community, can help build safety and trust again. But if there is still uncertainty from the female soldiers or their communities, this would be a time to resort to local rituals.

There have been many instances reported in Sierra Leone where the use of local religious rituals was very cathartic and allowed perpetrators and victims to in a way forgive and forget. The ritual that took place in the Tonkolili District and the practices highlighted by Martin and Kelsall, to name a few (Kelsall, 2005; Martin, 2016). It also gives people in the community the ability to choose when and how they want to talk about their experiences, grievances, and traumas, in a safe familiar place. Like it was seen in Mozambique, the concept of healing and people reintegrating into society was not linear (Igreja, 2012). Years after the conflict families and individuals would come forward as their pain and understanding of the conflict develops. As time passes and people live and work together trust bonds can form, and if the local mechanisms are encouraged to heal and address the traumas of conflict, they remain after international attention and presence phases out. It does not create a dependency and hierarchy of a system that is only attainable through international actors. But as mentioned, local mechanisms are not perfect and are the singular

solution to maintaining peace. A balance must be created between how to establish institutional mechanisms that can hinder the reemergence of conflict because of structural issues, and how to create communal bonds that limit conflict and grievances emerging culturally.

This is especially important when discussing peace for PWD. Disabilities carry a lot of stigmas and misunderstandings worldwide (Tani, 2021). When a conflict physically disables much of the population, there needs to be a significant effort made to understand how society viewed PWD before the conflict and how they view people who have become disabled after the conflict. Likewise, understanding the self-perception of people who have become disabled during the conflict is crucial. This entails knowing what PWD need to not feel isolated and to feel like part of their communities again. Most importantly, community-based rehabilitation should be used as an alternative to the medical approach. Medical allocations can be made, but they should not be the only support they are given by transitional justice. Community-based rehabilitation strengthens the entirety of the community, and it can also tackle some of the stigmas and perceptions able-bodied people have toward PWD (Asiedu & Berghs, 2012). It can challenge the mentality that the only way someone can provide value is if they have a non-disabled body that can perform traditional labor (Finkelstein, 1993). International organizations can step in to provide support for establishing these community rehabilitation centers or approaches. One way international actors and resources can be incredibly impactful is by providing education about disabilities, especially psychosocial ones, that can demystify any local perceptions of disability (Virendrakumar et al., 2018). This is an instance where local mechanisms stand to further isolate PWD and are not the ideal approach. A combination of community action, that is guided by education and empathy that can be initially provided by international actors and then local organizations and initiatives could help PWD be more included in their communities (Nyangweso, 2018). Approaching disability through a communal means was shown to be more productive as seen by Human Rights Watch in their extensive work on how PWD benefit from community-based rehabilitation (Sharma, 2020). Ideally, healing from war would be a bottom-up effort. It would be led by communities supporting each other, incorporating approaches from international actors that enhance the accessibility of support for groups that have the potential to be overlooked, while still operating through local rituals and mechanisms.

The reason much of the alternative approach focuses on community-led action that is informed by the experiences of PWD and female ex-combatants is because of the limited capacities of a state post-conflict. As it was noted, Sierra Leone struggled with poverty and providing necessary support to its population after the conflict, and to this day (Vitalis Pemunta, 2012). Amputees and war-wounded people in Sierra Leone have stressed how they cannot move on without help and "the ability to build a future" (Shaw, 2007). Many female soldiers who were interviewed expressed a similar sentiment, that they must stay quiet for their safety. Most of the interviewed by Coulter stated how they do not feel like they would be rejected and ostracized from their communities if they found out they used to be fighters (Coulter, 2009). While the state may continue to fail them, having a community they can rely on and that they belong to, and can provide for, can be a way of healing and forgetting (Park, 2010). PWD and female ex-combatants have seen little support from the government and society (Allen et al., 2020; Cullen, 2020). Because of the transitional justice process using them and their experience to highlight the atrocities of the civil war without implanting anything that can help them move, they are left trying to find their place in a Sierra Leone that has moved on from the war. There is little transitional justice and peacebuilding measures can do to ensure a state builds institutions with the necessary capacities to answer to the needs of the population, especially its most underrepresented groups (Van Tuijl, 2016). However, creating systems of support and trust at a community level is more attainable, and can build sustainable and peaceful societies that include people who are often left out of the process.

There are a few key limitations to this research. Trying to answer this research question and explore this theory would have greatly benefited from creating original data by being in Sierra Leone and conducting research and interviews within the civil society. This would have provided a more accurate account of how these groups feel years after the conflict, and how they processed transitional justice and its impact. Further research on this topic would greatly benefit from talking to the people most impacted by transitional justice. As this research was conducted through a case study, inherently it is limiting. But the theory and question could be applied to many more conflicts. PWD is prevalent wherever there is violence, and female fighters continue to be more researched. Thus, exploring how all different approaches to transitional justice have impacted their access to peace would provide more knowledge on how peace can become more inclusive. Lastly,

PWD and female fighters are very specific groups, however, there is overlap between them. Women with disabilities post-conflict is a field of research that is not studied enough. Underrepresented groups are important to research, but the intersectionality between them also matters (Ortoleva, 2010). By doing this, an effort can be made to truly not leave anyone behind after suffering the experience of war and rebuilding society, meant for everybody. Further research on this topic would greatly benefit from prioritizing intersectionality. Especially, since every conflict varies in communities and underrepresented groups.

Conclusions

Even though Sierra Leone's transitional justice process happened almost twenty years ago, many of these criticisms remain. Through this analysis, I have illustrated how the Western values and standards that transitional justice operates under maximize the vulnerability of underrepresented groups. PWD and female ex-combatants have their trauma and experiences exploited, gaining little in return. While countries may appear peaceful and like they have moved on from the conflict, some groups never had the opportunity to. By overlooking local mechanisms, and focusing on utilizing community-based reconciliation practices, transitional justice becomes individualistic and has the potential to distance people from their communities instead of bringing them together.

In sum, I have illustrated how the existing literature on transitional justice has failed to consider local contexts for justice, and this limitation combined with overlooking vulnerable groups after conflict leads to a non-inclusive peace. Transitional justice needs to be aware of what justice means to a community, and who may be at risk of not benefiting from either peace or justice. There is much this research was not able to cover, such as taking a further, intersectional approach. The way female ex-combatants who have also become disabled and their treatment in society could provide even more insight into the lack of inclusivity in peace.

While Sierra Leone may be able to claim a successful transitional justice process, PWD and female combatants were used for this success without the ability to heal and move on. Now

many PWD and ex-combatants are left trying to find their peace and legitimacy in a society that has chosen to move on, without them.

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