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Unusual Suspects: Religion, Chieftaincy, and Post-Conflict Reintegration in Sierra Leone

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UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

Unusual Suspects: Religion, Chieftaincy, and Post-Conflict Reintegration in Sierra Leone

by

Tobey Evonne Berriault

A THESIS

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Abstract

This thesis is concerned with the long-term reintegration of Sierra Leone's ex-combatants. Using the indicators of education, employment, inter-marriage, social stigma, and crime, this thesis argues that the long-term social, economic, and political reintegration of Sierra Leone's ex-combatants has been widely successful. This research then identifies the initiatives of pre-existing civil society organizations (CSOs) in the form of mosques, churches, and the Inter-Religious Council of Sierra Leone as the primary facilitators of this success. Complementing these efforts is the contribution of traditional authorities in reinforcing the notions of acceptance and by performing cleansing ceremonies and rituals. Through their joint efforts, these institutions were able to foster and reinforce the pre-existing discourse and shared values of national cohesion, tolerance, and acceptance familiar to the majority of Sierra Leoneans.

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Dedication

To the people of:
the Small Bo, Nongowa, Kakua, and Tikonko chiefdoms,
and the country of Sierra Leone.

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List of Symbols, Abbreviations and Nomenclature

Symbol	Definition
AFRC	Armed Forces Revolutionary Council
APC	All People's Congress
ATR	African Traditional Religion
BRA	Bike Rider's Association
CID	Criminal Investigation Department
CDF	Civil Defense Forces
CSO	Civil Society Organizations
CVT	Center for Victims of Torture
DDR	Disarmament, Demobilization, Reintegration
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
FSU	Family Support Unit
IDP	Internally Displaced Persons
IGO	Inter-Governmental Organizations
IRCSSL	Inter-Religious Council of Sierra Leone
NEC	National Electoral Commission
NGO	Non-Governmental Organizations
NPRC	National Provisional Ruling Council
	Post-Conflict Reintegration Initiative for
PRIDE	Development and Empowerment
PROCMURA	Project of Christian-Muslim Relations in Africa
RUF	Revolutionary United Front
RUFPP	Revolutionary United Front Party
SCSL	Special Court for Sierra Leone
SLA	Sierra Leone Army
	Sierra Leone Association for Non-Governmental
SLANGO	Organizations
SLP	Sierra Leone Police
TRC	Truth and Reconciliation Commission
UN	United Nations
UNAMSIL	United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
	United States Agency for International
USAID	Development

CHAPTER 1: POST-CONFLICT REINTEGRATION IN SIERRA LEONE

Introduction

Post-conflict reintegration in Sub-Saharan Africa is commonly associated with two assumptions. The first assumption is that despite the best efforts of the international community's humanitarian interventions, ex-combatants, as a result of the atrocious nature of their crimes and the weaknesses of the programs designed for them, will face too many challenges to be sustainably reintegrated back into their communities. Shortages of financial resources and the lack of provisions for medium and long-term reintegration are commonly cited challenges for the programs themselves. Moreover, challenges such as the on-going communal and individual stigma directed towards ex-combatants, the levels of destruction endured by all affected communities, the challenge of reintegrating traditionally disenfranchised groups such as women and children, and the difficulty of economically reintegrating into a shattered economy are commonly cited as obstacles for the ex-combatants and their communities. Although no one theory has stated that complete reintegration is impossible, the general sense one gets from the literature surrounding post-conflict reintegration is that complete and sustainable reintegration is unrealistic and will always fall short of its intended goals.

The second assumption is that when reintegration has been successful, it is largely the product of intergovernmental organization (IGO) and non-governmental organization (NGO) intervention. Reintegration programs tend to rely heavily on IGO and NGO subcontracting for programs designed around trauma-healing, psycho-social counselling, sensitization programs,

vocational training, and civic education.¹ As explanations for post-conflict success almost exclusively focus on the impact of newly-created internationally-guided programs, it is not surprising that these programs appear to be the primary agents of success. Although many cases across Africa can justify these claims, this thesis will present a case that dispels these misconceptions. Based on an assessment of reintegration in post-conflict Sierra Leone taken ten years after the end of the civil war, Sierra Leone presents itself as a case where the long-term reintegration of ex-combatants has been largely successful. These findings bring about the primary research question guiding this thesis: *What accounts for successful reintegration in post-conflict Sierra Leone?*

This study reveals that reintegration has been widely successful because of the intervention of pre-existing, faith-based civil society organizations (CSOs) in the form of mosques, churches, and the Inter-Religious Council of Sierra Leone (IRCSL). While these CSOs played a leading role in promoting reconciliation to the majority of the population, their efforts were complemented by the intervention of traditional authorities and their utilization of traditional cleansing ceremonies and rituals. Traditional authorities in this study will refer to traditional rulers such as local chiefs and elders who ruled before the colonial period and continue to wield social, political, and economic influence over their chiefdoms. Together, these pre-existing CSOs have been active in spreading messages of acceptance and reconciliation across the country, have effectively restored a sense of unity and tolerance, and have contributed to lasting peace.

¹ Ginifer, Jeremy, "Reintegration of Ex-Combatants" in eds. Sarah Meek, Thokozani Thusi, Jeremy Ginifer, and Patrick Coke, *Sierra Leone: Building the Road to Recovery*, Institute for Security Studies Monograph no. 80. (Pretoria, South Africa: Institute for Security Studies, 2003): 39-52. And Stovel, Laura, "'There's no bad bush to throw away a bad child':- 'tradition'-inspired reintegration in post-war Sierra Leone", *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 42(2), (2008):305-324

Conceptualizing Reintegration

Post-conflict intervention has increasingly relied on programs aimed at reducing the threat that ex-combatants could pose to stable and durable peace. Ex-combatants are particularly seen as a threat to security should they be left idle and disgruntled because of their “military know how, the experience, the tools, and often the will to turn to violent means of achieving change.”² By the end of Sierra Leone’s ten year civil war, approximately 76,000 combatants went through the United Nations’ disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) program.³ While the disarmament and demobilization components are seen as short-term objectives, reintegration is seen as the long-term development component of the program as it incorporates both goals of financial independence and the acceptance of returning combatants by their communities and leaders.⁴

‘Reintegration’ as a concept, typically refers to “the process whereby former combatants and their families are integrated into the social, economic, and political life of (civilian) communities”.⁵ The concept of social reintegration, however, can be problematic as it overlaps to varying degrees with the concept of reconciliation. In order to have social reintegration, a certain degree of acceptance is required, trespassing on the process of reconciliation. Humphreys and

² Humphreys, Macartan and Weinstein, Jeremy, “What the fighters say: A survey of ex-combatants in Sierra Leone June-August 2003”, Center for Globalization and Sustainable Development working paper, Columbia University, New York (2004): 39

³ Molloy, Desmond, *The DDR process in Sierra Leone: An Overview and Lessons Learned*, (Freetown, United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone, 2004). The DDR signifies the Disarmament of combatants, the Demobilization of all warring groups, and the Reintegration of individual ex-combatants into their communities.

⁴ Willibald, Sigrid, “Does money work? Cash transfers to ex-combatants in disarmament, demobilization and reintegration processes”, *Disasters*, 30(3), (2006): 318-319

⁵ Knight, Mark and Özerdem, Alpaslan, “Guns, Camps and Cash: Disarmament, Demobilization and Reinsertion of Former Combatants in Transitions from War to Peace”, *Journal of Peace Research*, 41(4) (2004): 499-516

Weinstein explain that:

To the extent that ex-combatants gain acceptance from family members, friends, and neighbors through formal or informal processes of reconciliation (which often accompany DDR programs), communities are in a better position to reintegrate former soldiers and facilitate their reinsertion into civilian life⁶

The process of reintegration is therefore dependent on the acceptance and reconciliation of the community in which one wishes to reintegrate. Reconciliation, however, can also depend on the levels of reintegration. If ex-combatants are not reintegrated properly it will disrupt long-term communal reconciliation. Alternatively, if there is little long-term reconciliation, ex-combatants will have limited opportunities to be economically, socially, and politically reintegrated.

Reintegration and reconciliation can therefore be seen as two interrelated processes that are dependent on one another. For the purposes of conceptual clarity, reintegration and reconciliation will be considered as the same process. By acknowledging that both have reinforcing relationships, this study will gain the ability to look at reintegration as a multi-faceted dependent variable which takes into account both economic and social dynamics. Reintegration therefore, will refer to both a person's functional role in society, as well as the reestablishment of both familial and communal relationships. It should be emphasized that the contribution of this study is not to test the differences in definitions; rather it is to identify the causal mechanisms that lead to successful reintegration in Sierra Leone.

Overview of the Findings

Five indicators have been chosen to monitor whether the reintegration of ex-combatants has been sustainable. The indicators include: education, employment, social stigma, inter-marriage, and

⁶ Humphreys, Macartan and Weinstein, Jeremy, "What the fighters say":50

crime. While the education, inter-marriage, and crime indicators revealed that there is little to no difference between populations of ex-combatants and other groups, the indicators of employment interacted with indicators of social stigma in a distinct way. Although the acceptance of ex-combatants back into their communities is widespread, two instances exist where individuals still classify ex-combatants as a group. The first instance is a particular brand of stigma that interacts with the vocational training they received in the DDR process, where a craftsman will usually be referred to as a “DDR-Trainee” should their craftsmanship be deemed inferior to others. The second instance of stigma is attached to the Revolutionary United Front Party (RUF) and the Ex-Fighter’s Organization: a sub-group of the RUF⁷. Both the RUF and Ex-Fighter’s Organization are self-created groups where ex-combatants voluntarily hold membership and consequently end up distinguishing themselves from the rest of society.

Based on an analysis of the data collected for these chosen indicators, the findings suggest that after ten years of peace, ex-combatants seem to enjoy an equal level of acceptance back into society. Aside from the particular brand of stigma attached to inadequate vocational training and the self-separation of the RUF and Ex-Fighter’s Organization, the chosen socioeconomic indicators reveal that long-term reintegration in Sierra Leone has been widely successful.

Theory Explaining Reintegration in Sierra Leone

What accounts for the successes in the social, economic, and political reintegration of Sierra Leone’s ex-combatants? Working from the premise that successful reintegration is dependent on lasting and meaningful reconciliation at the community and individual levels, this thesis argues

⁷ The Ex-Fighter’s Organization claims political neutrality however there are many unspoken actions that indicate the close cooperation between these two groups.

that successful reintegration in the case of Sierra Leone is primarily the product of initiatives from pre-existing faith-based CSOs and traditional authorities⁸. These institutions both pre-date the colonial period and have rich histories in the social, political, and economic lives of Sierra Leoneans. Through the joint efforts of mosques, churches, and the Inter-Religious Council of Sierra Leone (IRCSL), these religious institutions were able to reinforce the historical discourse of national cohesion, tolerance, and acceptance familiar to the majority of Sierra Leoneans. As the IRCSL worked to bring an end to the war and to promote reconciliation at the national level, individual churches and mosques preached messages of acceptance, tolerance, and forgiveness, all while creating a social space for the ex-combatants to reintegrate into.

Simultaneously, the institution of chieftaincy worked primarily at the level of communal healing by utilizing traditional ceremonies and rituals of sacrifice, cleansing, and purification, thus complementing the efforts of the religious institutions. These ceremonies promoted the acceptance of ex-combatants back into their communities by allowing the communities to symbolically gesture their acceptance, by allowing the ex-combatants to mentally shed their contamination and the negative perceptions of their wartime experiences, as well as by helping to restore the spiritual and environmental order to their pre-war states⁹. While the faith-based CSOs were able to influence the majority of the population adhering to either Christianity or Islam, the traditional authorities were able to influence those who hold more traditional beliefs associated with African Traditional Religion (ATR). By drawing from the three most prevalent religions of Islam, Christianity, and ATR, these institutions were able to provide both victims and

⁸ This thesis does not wish to discredit the efforts and results of other programs, it simply wishes to convey to the point that the work of these specific CSOs had the most meaningful and sustainable contribution.

⁹ Traditional authorities also wield significant political influence over their chiefdoms through their roles in the customary courts and as the custodians of the land, making their endorsement of ex-combatant reintegration vital for post-conflict resettlement.

perpetrators with familiar institutional processes, values, and beliefs which contributed to individual and communal reconciliation. Moreover, because of their status as pre-existing, these actors were typically perceived as the legitimate and credible authorities to do so, thus allowing their efforts to further resonate with the local population. Together, these institutions utilized the culturally appropriate mechanisms for fostering and sustaining a meaningful sense of reconciliation.

This observation is overlooked in other studies that tend to focus their evaluations on standardized post-conflict peacebuilding programs such as the Truth and Reconciliation Commissions (TRCs) and various IGO and NGO humanitarian programs. Despite the successes of these programs, however, they cannot account for perfect acceptance as some groups have chosen to hold on to their former identities as ex-combatants and a small minority are reported to have taken up arms in neighboring conflicts.¹⁰

Literature Review

Within the literature on post-conflict reintegration, the process of reintegration is more often than not criticized for its shortcomings. Some of the challenges faced by ex-combatants include having too few skills, little education, limited access to land,¹¹ health and psychological problems, communal stigma- particularly for marginalized groups such as women, children, and the disabled,¹² the potential to be victims of revenge¹³ and an economy that offers little to be

¹⁰ Taking up arms in neighboring conflicts does not necessarily equate to a failure of reintegration. This topic will be addressed in a later section.

¹¹ Van Gog, J.G., *Coming Back from the Bush: Gender, Youth and Reintegration in Northern Sierra Leone*. (Leiden: African Studies Centre, 2008): 43

¹² Dzines, Gwinyayi, A, "Post conflict disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration for former combatants in Southern Africa", *International Studies Perspectives*, 8(1), (2007): 86; Knight, Andy W., "Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration and Post-Conflict Peacebuilding in Africa: An Overview", *African Security*, 1(1), (2008): 44

reintegrated into.¹⁴ Taking this argument further, some have indicated that reintegration in the rural setting is further challenged where ex-combatants have expectations given by the national programs that their rural communities may not have the capacities to support.¹⁵ Some demonstrate that should ex-combatants fail to reintegrate properly, they may be prompted to take up arms again or to get involved in the informal markets in the form of arms trading, contract assassinations, money-laundering, and drug trafficking thus threatening peace and security and also communal reconciliation.¹⁶

Research specific to DDR in Sierra Leone commonly expresses predictions of failed reintegration. Sola-Martin¹⁷ has argued that as issues of unemployment persist, certain groups such as ex-combatants, risk becoming more prone to drug abuse and violent behavior, thus threatening the prospects of sustainable social reintegration. Likewise, a study of various factions in Sierra Leone has suggested that as a result of the political, economic, and social marginalization of certain factions, a number of ex-combatants have failed to reintegrate and have consequently aligned themselves and taken up arms with various factions in neighboring Liberia's civil war.¹⁸ This particular study records that of the approximated 76,000 combatants to circulate through the DDR programs, approximately 2000 are predicted to have taken up arms

¹³ Shaw, Rosalind "Memory Fictions: Localizing the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Sierra Leone" *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 1(2), (2007): 194

¹⁴ Van Gog, J.G, *Coming Back from the Bush*: 43

¹⁵ Specker, Leotine, "The R-phase of the DDR process: An overview of key lessons learned and practical experiences" Netherlands Institute of International Relations- Clingendael Conflict Research Unit (2008): 27-28

¹⁶ Dzines, Gwinyayi, A, "Post conflict disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration for former combatants in Southern Africa", *International Studies Perspectives*, 8(1), (2007): 73-89

¹⁷ Sola-Martin, Andreu, "Is peacebuilding sustainable in Sierra Leone?", *Global Change, Peace, and Security: formerly Pacifica Review: Peace, Security, and Global Change*, 21(3), (2009): 306

¹⁸ Themner, Anders, *Political Violence in Post-Conflict Societies: Remarginalisation, Remobilisers, and Relationships*, (Florence: Routledge, 2011): 129. Approximately 2000 ex-combatants are reported to have joined with fighting forces in Liberia. This number is small in comparison to the approximated 76,000 ex-combatants who went through DDR in Sierra Leone.

across borders. Although shedding light on a small minority of ex-combatants who failed to reintegrate and left, this study downplays the overwhelming majority that stayed and reintegrated. Alternatively, a study released by the United Nations also exposed that many of Sierra Leone's ex-combatants have crossed the borders on account of increased financial incentives to disarm and demobilize in neighboring countries. While Sierra Leone's ex-combatants typically received less than \$200 USD, those who enrolled in DDR in Liberia and Côte D'Ivoire received \$300 USD and \$900 USD respectively.¹⁹ This finding is reinforced by an account that appears in Danny Hoffman's book where an ex-combatant tells him in an interview that he went to fight in Liberia after to help overthrow Charles Taylor, mostly because he miscalculated that the international community would applaud him and pay him great rewards for his hard work.²⁰ Evidently, taking up arms in a neighbouring conflict does not necessarily equate to failed reintegration.

Other studies on reintegration in Sierra Leone argue that in general, reintegration programs tended to overlook the relationship between ex-combatants and their communities.²¹ Furthermore, studies by Knight²² and Ginifer²³ have criticized the DDR processes for emphasizing the realization of short-term goals rather than long-term objectives such as reconciliation and healing, and that further emphasis should be placed on national capacity

¹⁹ Miller, Derek, Ladouceur, Daniel, and Dugal, Zoe, *From Research to Road Map: Learning from the Arms for Development Initiative in Sierra Leone*, (UNIDIR, United Nations Publications, 2006): 33

²⁰ Hoffman, Danny, Hoffman, Danny, *The War Machines: Young Men and Violence in Sierra Leone and Liberia*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011): 115

²¹ Specker, Leotine, "The R-Phase of the DDR process: An overview of key lessons learned and practical experiences", Netherlands Institute of International Relations, "Clingendael" Conflict Research Unit, 2008): 27-28

²² Knight, Andy W., "Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration and Post-Conflict Peacebuilding in Africa: An Overview", *African Security*, 1(1), (2008): 45

²³ Ginifer, Jeremy, "Reintegration of Ex-Combatants" in eds. Sarah Meek, Thokozani Thusi, Jeremy Ginifer, and Patrick Coke, *Sierra Leone: Building the Road to Recovery*, Institute for Security Studies Monograph no. 80. (Pretoria, South Africa: Institute for Security Studies, 2003): 42

building such as providing more education and employment opportunities. Building on these findings is Stovel's study of Sierra Leone suggesting that even amongst reintegration processes that sought to promote a more traditionalist view of reconciliation, they lacked sufficient mechanisms for building long-term trust within each community²⁴. Finally, a 2009 study by Humphreys and Weinstein has demonstrated that participation in a UN DDR program did not necessarily increase the likelihood of an ex-combatant to be successfully reintegrated.²⁵

Academic research surrounding the concept of reconciliation tends to be more abstract and open to interpretation with much debate surrounding the ultimate goals of reconciliation. While Daly and Sarkin²⁶ have explained the minimalist approach which conceives of successful reconciliation when all sides of the conflict are able to co-exist without harming one another, Daniel Bar-Tal²⁷ conceives of reconciliation as a richer psychological process. Reconciliation, according to this more extensive interpretation, can be achieved only when a society is capable to shifting from the 'conflictive ethos' - that which allowed a society to adapt to the volatile experience of war and struggle successfully with the adversary- to the 'peace ethos' - that which transforms images of themselves, the adversary, the interrelations between both groups, and the meaning of peace²⁸. Laura Stovel²⁹ blends both notions as she argues that peacebuilding initiatives in Sierra Leone have focused more on what she terms "rational reconciliation": that

²⁴ Stovel, Laura, "There's no bad bush to throw away a bad child" - 'tradition'-inspired reintegration in post-war Sierra Leone", *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 42(2), (2008): 311

²⁵ Humphreys, Macartan and Weinstein, Jeremy, "Demobilization and reintegration in Sierra Leone: Assessing progress" in ed. Robert Muggah, *Security and Post-Conflict Reconstruction: Dealing with Fighters in the Aftermath of War*, (London: Routledge, 2009): 64

²⁶ Daly, Erin and Sarkin, Jeremy. *Reconciliation in Divided Societies*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007): 183

²⁷ Bar-Tal, Daniel, "From Intractable Conflict through Conflict Resolution to Reconciliation: Psychological Analysis", *Political Psychology*, 21(2), (2000): 352

²⁸ Bar-Tal however argues that reconciliation of this nature would only be necessary in a long-lasting conflict of over two decades, therefore disqualifying the conflict of Sierra Leone. Pg. 355

²⁹ Stovel, Laura, "There's no bad bush to throw away a bad child": 310-311

which can be measured or seen in the initial phases, such as cooperation between groups of people, but has fallen short of “sentient reconciliation”: that which is felt and fosters a sense of long-term trust and healing.

Moving beyond the theoretical definitions of reconciliation, many case studies have focused on the contributions of various IGO and NGO programs. Recognizing the need for national cooperation, cohesion, and reconciliation, development programs began to focus their efforts around repatriation, reintegration, rehabilitation, and reconstruction.³⁰ Commonly cited suggestions for reintegration and reconciliation include counselling and psychotherapy programs, vocational and skills training centers, and family-tracing programs.³¹ The push for more programs centered on psycho-social counselling draws from literature such as Fisher’s 2001 study which suggests that as conflict often arises within the social interaction of all parties, the best way to resolve it is to facilitate mutual apologies and forgiveness.³² Through this conclusion, many programs have focused their attention on individual and group counselling sessions. Criticisms of these programs center on the ways in which these projects are carried out, as they adhere more to the agendas of the donors and less to the needs of the individuals,³³ that NGO intervention has led to further divisions in the society by creating categories of ‘victims’ and hierarchies of the war-wounded for skills training or housing projects,³⁴ while other studies have

³⁰ Baker, Bruce and May, Roy, “Reconstructing Sierra Leone”, *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics*, 42(1), (2004): 36

³¹ Mac-Ikemenjima, Dabesaki, “Youth development, reintegration, reconciliation and rehabilitation in Post-conflict West Africa: A framework for Sierra Leone, Liberia and Cote d’Ivoire” *International NGO Journal*, 3(9), (2008): 150

³² Fisher, Ronald J. “Social-psychological processes in interactive conflict analysis and reconciliation” in ed. Mohammed Abu-Nimmer, *Reconciliation, Justice, and Coexistence: Theory and Practice*, (Maryland: Lexington Books, 2001): 28; 39

³³ Baker, Bruce and May, Roy, “Reconstructing Sierra Leone”: 50

³⁴ Berghs, Maria, “Embodiment and emotion in Sierra Leone”, *Third World Quarterly*, 32(8), (2011): 1407

suggested that peacebuilding initiatives such as these are becoming too commoditized and are mass-produced according to Northern standards and short-term interests.³⁵

Within the literature on reconciliation, there is, however, consensus that initiatives aimed at achieving reconciliation must meaningfully resonate with the local population in order to be successful.³⁶ From this conclusion, studies demonstrate the importance of incorporating traditional forms of reconciliation practices into peacebuilding, particularly in contexts with a rich cultural heritage such as Sierra Leone. Research of this nature tends to stress the need for reconciliation initiatives to be centered on traditional methods of conflict resolution and performed at the individual and village level in order to bring the most success.³⁷ These conclusions about traditional reconciliation has brought about the creation of many new NGOs working in post-conflict settings³⁸ aimed at bringing grassroots traditionally-inspired mechanisms of reconciliation to the doorsteps of the people. The problem with these new organizations, however, is that though they are attempting to incorporate traditional processes of reconciliation, they are often not the proper authorities to be doing so.

Although numerous initial academic case studies cast doubt on the ability of a post-conflict society such as Sierra Leone to experience successful social, political and economic

³⁵ Bush, Kenneth, "Commodification, Compartmentalization, and Militarization for Peacebuilding" in eds. Tom Keating and W. Andy Knight, *Building Sustainable Peace*, (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2004): 24

³⁶ Lederach, John Paul, *The Moral Imagination: The Art and Soul of Building Peace*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Alie, Joe A.D., "Reconciliation and traditional justice: tradition-based practices of the Kpaa Mende in Sierra Leone", in *Traditional Justice and Reconciliation after Violent Conflict: Learning from the African Experiences*, (International Institution for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, 2008):128-144; Kelsall, Tim, "Truth, lies, Ritual: Preliminary Reflections on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Sierra Leone", *Human Rights Quarterly* 27(2), (2005): 361-391; Shaw, Rosalind "Memory Fictions: Localizing the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Sierra Leone", *International Journal of Transitional Justice*, 1(2), (2007):183-207

³⁷ Hoffman, Elisabeth, "Reconciliation in Sierra Leone: Local Processes Yield Global Lessons", 32 *Fletcher F. World Aff.* 32(2), (2008): 130

³⁸ Fambul Tok International, Forum of Conscience, and Catalyst of Peace are often seen as the primary organizations utilizing traditional reconciliation methods in Sierra Leone.

reintegration, what lacks in the academic literature is a long-term study assessing the consequences of IGO and NGO programs and how they interact with the initiatives of pre-existing CSOs for the purposes of reintegration and reconciliation. An assessment of the contribution of pre-existing CSOs, how they impact both communities and individuals, and whether this impact can produce sustainable results is required in order to fully explore different avenues to reconciliation.

Case Selection and Methodology

The choice of post-conflict Sierra Leone as a case study is based on many reasons. First, it is a society in which formal DDR programs can be found. Many countries have experienced civil war and have had to disband their warring groups, however not all of them have made use of the United Nations' DDR programs. The second reason is the presence of pre-colonial traditional authorities. Drawing from the emerging literature surrounding the resurgence of traditional authorities in post-colonial Africa and understanding the influence they wield, it is important to look at their contribution to post-conflict peacebuilding. The third reason to choose Sierra Leone is the presence of numerous international reintegration and reconciliation programs whose efforts could be assessed alongside those of the traditional authorities. The fourth reason to choose Sierra Leone as a case study is because of the specific period of time that has elapsed since the end of the civil war. As the conflict officially ended in 2002, studying reintegration in 2012 allows for the assessment of the long-term consequences of various reintegration and reconciliation initiatives. Finally, Sierra Leone presents itself as a paradigmatic case that has significantly shaped the way that many theorize about intrastate conflicts in Sub-Saharan Africa. Sierra Leone's conflict has attracted a lot of scholarly attention as it is characterized by the atrocious nature of human rights violations, state paramilitaries, community defense militias,

proxy armies from foreign governments, regional peacekeepers, multinational security operations, natural resources, and an influx of international and national post-conflict aid. Accordingly, Sierra Leone is consistent with Flyvbjerg's categorization of a paradigmatic case in that it has been used as a reference point for many theories and schools of thought directing how we think of armed insurgency in Sub-Saharan Africa. Not only has it been used as a reference point for many other studies, it has been typically used as a "case that highlights more general characteristics of the societies in question."³⁹

Within Sierra Leone, the research is focused on the South and East Provinces, specifically the districts of Bo and Kenema, making this analysis a case study within a case study. These districts have been chosen for a number of reasons, together presenting these regions as a critical case. The first reason justifying this selection is based on the duration and intensity of conflict experienced. As the RUF began its insurgency in the Eastern province, then moving down into the South, these provinces were among the first in the country to suffer from war. In addition, because of their proximity to natural resources such as gold and diamond mines, conflict and violence was maintained in these areas throughout the course of the war as both the RUF and the SLA-coalitions sought to control these key areas to fuel their efforts. The third reason for the choice of these districts is because they house a large presence of ex-combatants who demobilized from the two major factions, the RUF and the Civil Defense Forces (CDF). As these areas were among the first to suffer, much of the RUF's rank and file was initially recruited from these areas. Similarly, the CDF is composed of both Sierra Leone Army (SLA) and a traditional Mende hunting group known as the Komajors. As the South and the East are

³⁹ Flyvbjerg, Bent, "Five misunderstandings about case-study research" *Qualitative Inquiry* 12(219), (2006): 232

dominated by the Mende ethnicity, most of the Komajors who fought with the CDF originated from these areas. The combination of these factors would seemingly indicate a great need sustained reintegration and reconciliation and therefore are suitable for this analysis.

Within each district, two chiefdoms were chosen- one larger which allowed for the collection of data for the indicators of education, employment, and crime, and one smaller which allowed for the collection of data for the social stigma and inter-marriage indicators as the relations tend to be closer in smaller villages. Within the Bo district, the Kakua chiefdom was chosen as the larger sample and the Tikonko chiefdom was chosen as the smaller. Within the Kenema district, the Nongowa chiefdom was chosen as the large sample, while the Small Bo chiefdom was selected as the smaller. For maps of Sierra Leone and both districts, please see Appendix A.

In addition to researching academic studies on the topic, this research draws from fieldwork over the course of three months in Sierra Leone. Fieldwork was necessary as it allowed for the acquisition of statistical and interview data that has yet to be published on the internet. Being based out of Freetown, frequent travels to the provinces to collect data specific to the chosen cases was essential. Within each chiefdom, interviews were conducted with paramount chiefs, section chiefs, school masters, Imams, Sheiks, Reverends, representatives for the Inter-Religious Council, police forces, city mayors, the RUF branches, Ex-fighter's Organizations, paralegals, local court chairpersons, district councils, Bike Riders Associations, human rights officers, and various local and international NGOs. It was often the case where one interviewee would suggest another and would facilitate professional networking within the country. This technique of snowballing allowed interviews to be conducted with the relevant authorities who worked either directly or indirectly with the different peacebuilding programs.

In Freetown, data was collected for the national population as a whole to act as a baseline in which the data on ex-combatants could be compared and contrasted. Interviews in Freetown included international and local development and reconciliation NGOs, Ministers, the Sierra Leone Association for NGOs (SLANGO), professors from the Fourah Bay College, and newspaper editors. Simultaneously, an attempt was made to collect statistical data to complement the findings of the interviews. The data collected came from the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Local Government, the Justice and Security Sector, the Criminal Investigation Department, Sierra Leone Police Headquarters, the National Electoral Commission website (NEC), and newspaper articles. In addition to these primary resources, academic peer-reviewed articles were also utilized. In full recognition that the majority of these sources have come from local actors, it should be emphasized that this study draws primarily from the perceptions of reconciliation and reintegration from the locals as it is they who live with the consequences of these different programs. While some of these interviews risk not being completely objective, they are complemented by informal interviews with regular people outside of these big institutions who arguably have nothing at stake and no ulterior agenda to push.

In developing the argument that successful reintegration in Sierra Leone is primarily the result of religious and traditionally-based CSO intervention, this research has utilized the method of process-tracing. As Sierra Leone has presented itself as a case that commonly challenges our notions of post-conflict reintegration, the method of process-tracing was best suited to identify which among all causal mechanisms had the most causal significance for this particular outcome. Because the methods of process-tracing have “the capacity for disproving claims that a single

variable is necessary or sufficient for an outcome”⁴⁰, this research identifies the initiatives of local religious CSOs and traditional authorities as the primary causal mechanisms to facilitate the social, economic, and political reintegration of ex-combatants. These CSOs and traditional authorities, as proven by this research, are viable alternatives to the commonly-analyzed IGO and NGO initiatives. By tracing the historical developments of religious and ethnic tolerance and how these particular social factors created an environment conducive for these CSOs to flourish, this study demonstrates how specific time periods, policies, and social factors have laid the foundation for the acceptance and sustainable reintegration of ex-combatants back into society. In addition, this research relies on the qualitative analysis of the data to address the research question of what accounts for the successful long-term reintegration experienced in Sierra Leone. The qualitative analysis is used because it makes use of archival research, ethnology, and discourse analysis to understand the extent of reintegration while taking into account cultural sensitivities and self-interpretations of those who participated in the interviews. Additionally, qualitative analysis has allowed this thesis to effectively gauge and interpret the perceptions of all participants through formal interviews and informal discussions on issues of reintegration and reconciliation.

Limitations

The fieldwork in Sierra Leone was not without its challenges. Interactions with those in positions of authority were often unpredictable. Generally, men in all levels of authoritative positions and women in high positions were more willing to offer their help and cooperation and would often voluntarily recommend other relevant contacts. Situations such as these opened many doors for

⁴⁰ George, Alexander L. and Bennet, Andrew, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2005): 220

networking and allowed for some interviews and data that might not have been available otherwise. Unfortunately the same cannot be said about women working in mid-level jobs such as secretaries. These women often made it very difficult to pursue the research and unless otherwise ordered by a superior, would do almost anything in their power to discourage it.

Another challenge was that of acquiring statistical data. Because Sierra Leone is a post-conflict society, many of their formal government and security institutions took years to restructure and re-establish. An example of this is best illustrated by the attempts to gain all the national and regional crime statistics since the end of the war in 2002 to present. Unfortunately, it was not until 2007 that the National Police Headquarters began to effectively store detailed yearly reports of all crimes reported across the country. Similarly, data on employment is virtually non-existent as most of the country's employment comes from unregistered street vendors in the informal markets. The post-conflict phase is a time of reconstruction meaning that many of these institutions were not able to systematically keep track of records as they rebuilt and reformed their internal structures.

The final challenge regarding the acquisition of data is that, much of the time, the most interesting phenomena are difficult to prove by academic standards. This was especially evident leading up to the 2012 Presidential Elections. In one instance, allegations began to surface over some Paramount Chiefs abandoning their political neutrality- a pre-requisite to their post- and would declare political allegiance to one party or another. Potential repercussions of this include the loss of legitimacy of the Paramount Chief within his chiefdom and ultimately a loss of influence over his/her subjects. During one of the interviews with a Paramount Chief, his whole committee and all his sub-chiefs were dressed in one of the political party's attire. Many interviews insinuated these abuses, yet any officials affiliated with Paramount Chiefs, including

the Ministry of Local Governance, denied these allegations because of the need to protect their legitimacy and potentially because of the fear of reprisals.

Another interesting phenomenon was the allegations of both main political parties secretly recruiting ex-combatants into their political wings in case violence erupted after a winner was declared. Everybody questioned about this would grow silent and would keep their comments as cryptic insinuations. One member of the Ex-Fighter's Organization simply whispered "it is happening", but refused to disclose any details because of fear of reprisals from his fellow ex-combatants. Alongside these instances, many interesting phenomena occurred 'between the lines' that arguably do have social, political, and economic repercussions. In another instance, one interviewee brought up the use of an Obeah Man or traditional healer for personal reconciliation. As many in Sierra Leone attach a certain degree of legitimacy to these types of authorities, it is crucial to assess their contribution to the reconciliation process, particularly at the individual level. However, because this type of treatment is typically kept underground, it was difficult to assess exactly how influential and widespread these practices were.

The dilemma in all three of these instances resides in the fact that, most of the time, people are simply unwilling to talk about it. This particular challenge influences the thesis as it demonstrates that those in positions of authority may attempt to conceal the real underlying issues. Alternatively, those who are experiencing the real issues on a day to day basis may be more reluctant to provide information as they have more at stake. In collecting data relating to the reintegration of ex-combatants and the reconciliation of individuals, it is possible that the full extent of certain issues or practices was not revealed. This study has a limited capacity to distinguish whether these underlying issues were significant or not to the success of

reintegration. It is however, capable of identifying those mechanisms that operate in public and in the open, in which most people participated.

Despite these challenges, the following chapters of this thesis seek to use post-conflict Sierra Leone as a case study that defies the commonly held assumptions that ex-combatants typically face too many challenges to be sustainably reintegrated and that when reintegration has been successful, it is largely the product of IGO and NGO intervention. The reintegration of Sierra Leone's ex-combatants has been successful as a result of CSO intervention in the form of pre-existing religious organizations and the utilization of traditional ceremonies and rituals by traditional authorities. While Chapter One has presented the context in which the research question was developed, Chapter Two will demonstrate that the social, economic, and political reintegration of the majority of Sierra Leone's ex-combatants has been successful. Chapter Three will explore the impacts and limitations of IGO and NGO intervention in the reintegration process, while demonstrating that these mechanisms lack the capacity to produce long-term reintegration. Chapter Four will then assess of the contribution and historical development of the religious and traditional institutional structures that led to the successful reintegration of Sierra Leone's ex-combatants. By tracing the historical development of Sierra Leone's religious and ethnic tolerance, this chapter will explain the events and decisions that lay the foundation for the widespread acceptance of ex-combatants back into their communities. Finally, Chapter Five will provide an overall conclusion and a discussion of the findings.

CHAPTER 2: MAKING THE CASE FOR SUCCESSFUL REINTEGRATION

Within this chapter, the indicators of education, employment, inter-marriage, social stigma, and crime are analyzed to assess the long-term reintegration of Sierra Leone's ex-combatants. While focusing primarily on those who participated in the United Nation's DDR programs, this chapter argues that the social, political, and economic reintegration of Sierra Leone's ex-combatants has been largely successful. Before reviewing the indicators for long-term reintegration, a brief historical account of the conflict is necessary to understand the context within which the social, economic, and political reintegration took place.

Background

Although the civil war officially started in 1991, the roots of the conflict date back to the 1970s as a student response to the All People's Congress (APC) party's authoritarian practices. In 1978, as the APC declared a one-party state, formal opposition began to manifest itself in the form of a student movement. Drawing upon lessons from Marx and Lenin, Castro, Wallace Johnson, and ideas of Pan-Africanism, university students began socializing with the local underclass, marking the 1970s as a transformative period in which the underclasses integrated with the university-educated and middle-class youth. The result of this interaction was the political socialization of this class and an increase in counter-culture activism, shifting identities from the notion of the disenfranchised individual towards that of the disenfranchised collective.⁴¹ With the gradual worsening of socioeconomic conditions and the increase in unemployment, Sierra Leone saw the rise of the "army of the unemployed" basing the bulk of their new found collectivity on ideas of radical change. Inspired by Colonel Gaddafi's Green Book, student revolutionaries began

⁴¹ Abdullah, Ibrahim, "Bush path to destruction: The origin and character of the Revolutionary United Front/Sierra Leone", *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 36(2), (1998): 208-209

making ties with the government of Libya who eventually housed and trained small groups of revolutionaries.⁴² Over time however, the movement began to fragment over the issue of taking up arms. By mid-1989, Libya-trained Foday Sankoh struck a deal with Liberian Charles Taylor to help liberate Liberia in exchange for Liberian rebel support in Sierra Leone. By March 1991, Sankoh's RUF entered the Kailahun District from Liberia and began their armed struggle.⁴³

Although most Sierra Leoneans who eventually fought within the ranks of the RUF were forcibly recruited, a few volunteered their services as a way of expressing their political frustrations with the status quo. At the time that the RUF began its armed struggle, there was a deep-rooted discontent amongst many segments of the population linked to grievances and frustrations with the APC government.⁴⁴ Within the RUF itself, it is widely accepted that most ex-combatants who participated in the war came from impoverished rural backgrounds.⁴⁵ Originally a movement against the oppressive one-party state, the RUF went on to target all forms of authority including traditional authorities, alongside civilian populations.⁴⁶ As a result, many civilians were killed or displaced, while many authorities were made to flee to neighboring countries.⁴⁷

In 1992 following the first year of the war, Captain Valentine Strasser and a small group of poorly-paid and disgruntled SLA officers successfully overthrew the APC government in a military coup resulting in the establishment of the National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC).

⁴² Ibid: 212

⁴³ Ibid: 220-221

⁴⁴ *Witness to Truth: Report of the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2004)*: Vol. 3A: 137

⁴⁵ Richards, Paul, "To fight or to farm? Agrarian dimensions of the Mano River conflicts (Liberia and Sierra Leone)", *African Affairs*, 104(417), (2005):571

⁴⁶ *Witness to Truth: Report of the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2004)*: Vol. 3A: 497 for testimonies in which participants describe all the targets and atrocities committed by all factions.

⁴⁷ Day, Linda, *Gender and Power in Sierra Leone: Women Chiefs of the Last Two Centuries*, (New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2012): 159

Over the next few years, fighting between the NPRC and the RUF would ravage the entire country, especially around diamond-mining areas where both groups would attempt to control and use these resources to fuel their war and enrich themselves.⁴⁸ In addition to reaping the benefits of diamond mining, SLA ‘sobels’- rebels by day and soldiers by night- are reported to have attacked numerous villages under the guise of rebels and looted property in much of the same way as the RUF, thus further confusing and devastating the communities under attack.⁴⁹

In 1996, as a result of international pressure and the disintegration of relations within the NPRC, Sierra Leoneans participated in their first democratic presidential elections in over thirty years. Under the new leadership of Ahmed Tejan Kabbah the government of Sierra Leone and the SLA began to coordinate its actions with some of the local civil defense militias, the most prominent being the Komajors: a traditional Mende hunting group predominantly found in the South and East that began to emerge in 1993-1994. Other civil defense militias operated in other regions such as the Tamaboro in the North, the Temne Gbethis and Kapras, and the Kono Donsos.⁵⁰ The newfound cooperation between the SLA and the civil defense militias led to the consolidation of a new paramilitary force known as the Civil Defense Forces (CDF) made to counter the efforts of the RUF.⁵¹ In 1997 however, the government of Tejan Kabbah was overthrown in a prison-break coup which then led to the establishment of the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC), a military junta composed of both former NPRC members and

⁴⁸ Kpundeh, Sahr, “Corruption and Political Insurgence in Sierra Leone” in. ed. Abdullah, Ibrahim, *Between Democracy and Terror: The Sierra Leone Civil War*, (Dakar: CODESRIA, 2004): 95

⁴⁹ Abraham, Arthur, “State complicity as a factor in perpetuating the Sierra Leone civil war” in ed. Abdullah, Ibrahim, *Between Democracy and Terror: The Sierra Leone Civil War*, (Dakar: CODESRIA, 2004): 106

⁵⁰ Hoffman, Danny, *The War Machines: Young Men and Violence in Sierra Leone and Liberia*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011): 45

⁵¹ Humphreys, Macartan and Weinstein, Jeremy, “Demobilization and reintegration in Sierra Leone”: 51

RUF.⁵² In 1998, following the efforts of Nigerian-led ECOWAS, power was restored to Kabbah's civilian government. Despite their loss of power, the AFRC/RUF returned to the bush, regrouped, and led a devastating attack on Freetown in 1999.⁵³ Over the next few years, despite various peace talks and accords⁵⁴, fighting continued.

It was not until June 1999 that prospects for peace began to manifest themselves through the Lomé Accords. This peace agreement called for a ceasefire, a general amnesty for the RUF, the creation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRCs), and the installment of UNAMSIL to ensure that the agreement was respected by all parties.⁵⁵ Despite the ceasefires and amnesty rights granted, violence re-emerged once again in the country. In response, the United Nations Security Council passed Resolution 1315 in August 2000 which created the Special Court for Sierra Leone. The Special Court was created to work alongside the TRCs, both coordinating their efforts in the hopes of bringing sustainable justice and reconciliation to the people.⁵⁶ In 2002, peace was finally declared by the reinstated President Ahmed Tejan Kabbah.

Disarming, Demobilizing, and Reintegrating the Factions

In terms of the DDR programs, the first wave of disarmament began in 1998. DDR reception centers were distributed around the country, where they handled the assembly of combatants, the acquisition of their personal identification information, and the collection of their weapons.⁵⁷ Once their weapons were collected, the combatants were given a certification of eligibility for certain benefits and would then be transported to a demobilization centre. Within the

⁵² Ibid: 51

⁵³ Ibid: 51

⁵⁴ Abidjan Accords in 1996 and the Conakry Peace Agreements of 1997.

⁵⁵ Hall, Laura R. and Kazemi, Nahal, "Prospect for justice and reconciliation in Sierra Leone" *Recent Developments* Harvard International Law Journal, 44(1), (2003): 288

⁵⁶ Ibid: 294

⁵⁷ Humphreys, Macartan and Weinstein, Jeremy, "Demobilization and reintegration in Sierra Leone":52-53

demobilization centre, the ex-combatants received a small sum of reinsertion money, basic necessities, and counselling. Upon completion, ex-combatants would then be transported back to their community of origin or choice.⁵⁸ Having had their weapons taken away in exchange for a cash reward and their fighting factions disbanded, ex-combatants now faced the challenge of carving out a space for themselves in the new post-conflict society. Once back in their communities of choice, ex-combatants were offered education or skills training such as soap-making, gara-dying, carpentry, and tailoring, amongst others. Sierra Leone experienced three waves of DDR programs in which approximately 73,5000 combatants had participated.⁵⁹ A breakdown of the actual numbers shows that 72,490 ex-combatants disarmed, 71,043 demobilized, and 63,545 utilized reintegration programs.⁶⁰ The disarmament component of the program alone yielded approximately 42, 3000 weapons and 1.2 million pieces of ammunition.⁶¹

Assessing Long-Term Reintegration

At first glance, the biggest indicator of successful reintegration in Sierra Leone is the continuation of peace and no resumption of violence. Across all factions, including the RUF and CDF, ex-combatant participation in the DDR program and satisfaction with the training offered was relatively equal.⁶² This finding is relevant as it shows that the program was able to successfully include all sides of the conflict without favoring one over another.⁶³ Looking

⁵⁸ Ibid: 52-53

⁵⁹ Ibid: 52

⁶⁰ Solomon, Christiana and Ginfifer, Jeremy, "Disarmament, demobilization and reintegration in Sierra Leone", *Centre for International Cooperation and Security*, (2008): 4

⁶¹ Hoffman, Danny, "West African warscapes: Violent events as narrative blocs: The disarmament at Bo, Sierra Leone" *Anthropological Quarterly*, 78(2), (2005):335

⁶² Humphreys, Macartan and Weinstein, Jeremy, "Demobilization and reintegration in Sierra Leone": 54

⁶³ Hoffman, Danny, *The War Machines*: 150 it is described how some of the CDF may not have had weapons to turn in because many of them were using weapons on loan from ECOWAS. Because his study did not show how many were affected by this, this thesis will rely primarily on the findings from the Humphreys/Weinstein study.

beyond the operational successes of these programs however, communities now faced the challenge of accepting and reconciling with those who committed the crimes. Amongst the atrocities committed by all factions over the course of the war are abduction, amputation, arbitrary detention, assault and beatings, destruction of property, drugging, extortion, forced cannibalism, forced displacement, forced labor, forced recruitment, killing, looting, physical torture, rape, sexual abuse, and sexual slavery.⁶⁴

Initial studies of reintegration in Sierra Leone suggested that complete reintegration would be hampered as it faced many challenges including acceptance of ex-combatants back into the community. An analysis of the five indicators of education, employment, inter-marriage, social stigma, and crime taken ten years after the war however, indicate that the long-term reintegration of Sierra Leone's ex-combatants has been largely successful. Acknowledging that a relatively small number of ex-combatants have migrated to neighboring countries, these measures strictly focus on the experiences of those who have chosen to stay in Sierra Leone.

Indicator 1: Education

In a war that lasted over ten years, many ex-combatants missed opportunities for education. For those who missed opportunities during the war, the prospect of accessing formal education was an attractive option primarily among child ex-combatants.⁶⁵

Although many programs existed to cater to the needs of those children who were demobilized, two prominent internationally-led programs will be explained here. The first program was the Community Rapid Education Program which facilitated a fast-track avenue to education. This program sought to offer both ex-combatants and those who were displaced

⁶⁴ *Witness to Truth*, Appendix 1: 9

⁶⁵ Solomon, Christiana and Ginifer, Jeremy, "Disarmament, demobilization and reintegration": 17

during the war a typical six year education over the span of three years. Consequently, resentment grew within the communities as ex-combatants were seen as being rewarded by receiving material incentives such as uniforms and books while the families of other children bore the brunt of these additional costs.⁶⁶ As a result of the growing resentment at the community level, the National Committee for DDR coordinated its efforts with UNICEF to create the Community Education Investment Program: a program that allowed both ex-combatants and communities to benefit. Within this program, in addition to the school fees allocated to ex-combatants, schools were given additional packages of educational material assistance, thus creating an incentive for schools to enroll ex-combatants and a form of material benefit for all who attended.⁶⁷

In addition to the major educational initiatives, various NGOs and donor governments designed and implemented similar programs. These programs would typically focus on delivering basic literacy skills, life skills, and access to vocational training. An example of a program of this type is USAID's Youth Reintegration Training and Education for Peace program in which students would enroll for training lasting between six to twelve months. As the duration of training was limited, this program, and others like it, were typically designed for those youth who did not wish to return to school for long due to the external demands of their families.⁶⁸ For those who were involved with the armed factions and participated in the conflict directly or indirectly, some of their school fees were paid by various other NGOs. In many cases however,

⁶⁶ Ibid: 17

⁶⁷ Ibid: 17

⁶⁸ Betancourt, Theresa et al. "High hopes, grim reality: Reintegration and the education of former child soldiers in Sierra Leone" *Comp. Education Review*, 52(4): 565-587

this aid was not enough to provide continued support until they graduated.⁶⁹ For many, once their school fees could no longer be sponsored, dropping out and trying to find a sustainable source of income was the next best option.

For ex-combatants who were able to continue their education, interviews reveal that ex-combatants, for the most part, did not struggle or underachieve in comparison to other groups of students. In terms of cooperation between the students, interviews conducted with various school-masters and educational authorities across the Nongowa, Small Bo, Kakua, and Tikonko chiefdoms reveal that few divisions existed between populations of ex-combatants and other groups. Recalling the interaction between ex-combatants and other students, one educational authority explained that once the programs got going and the ex-combatants were enrolled, “there were no problems; they were working hand in hand”.⁷⁰ Variations of statements such as these were frequently reiterated by related authorities across the three other chiefdoms.

In addition to emphasizing the cooperation between ex-combatants and other students, interviews indicated that in terms of academic performance, ex-combatants were equally as likely to graduate and to attain higher degrees, diplomas, or certifications as their peers.⁷¹ In an interview with the Ex-Fighter’s Organization in Bo, ex-combatants now in their mid to late twenties spoke of attaining education, some of which had attended higher education institutions such as the Human Resource Development College. It was explained that for those who hold superior qualifications, whether they are ex-combatants or not, many are still unable to secure sustainable employment.⁷² Moreover, it was emphasized that although some have achieved

⁶⁹ *Witness to Truth*, Appendix 3: 252

⁷⁰ Interview: School-Master, Nongowa 2012

⁷¹ Interview: School-Master, Nongowa 2012

⁷² Interview: Ex-Fighter’s Organization, Kakua 2012

relatively high levels of education, many ex-combatants, as well as those from other groups, are unable to reach these higher levels due in large part to financial constraints. In light of the successes of ex-combatants to match the performance and levels of their peers, it is worth emphasizing that the attainment of higher levels of education remains a challenge beyond the categorization of ex-combatants.

Across Sierra Leone, access and continuation of education remains a larger national issue. The 2010-2011 School Census Report issued by the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology sheds light on the largest issue with education in Sierra Leone: the higher the levels of education, the smaller the enrollment gets. In the Eastern Province, where the Nongowa and Small Bo chiefdoms are located, enrollment totals decrease as education increases.

Table 1: Enrollment Totals for the Eastern Province (2010-2011)

Eastern Province	Primary	Junior Secondary	Senior Secondary
Boys	135,479	28,076	11,841
Girls	134,342	22,057	5,523

Enrollment among males is recorded at 135,479 for primary school, 28,076 for Junior Secondary School, and 11,841 for Senior Secondary School. Amongst the female population, primary school enrollment was 134,342 while Junior Secondary School is recorded at 22,057 and Senior Secondary at 5,523. Evidently, the higher a student goes in education, the more likely they are to drop out. This trend is not only evident in the Eastern province, as the Southern Province, which houses the Kakua and the Tikonko chiefdoms, follows a similar pattern.

Table 2: Enrollment Totals for the Southern Province (2010-2011)

Southern Province	Primary	Junior Secondary	Senior Secondary
Boys	150,986	25,909	13,804
Girls	144,795	20,283	7,883

In the Southern province, the numbers for male enrollment in primary school, junior secondary, and senior secondary respectively are: 150,986, 25,909 and 13,804. For girls, the enrollment for these schools is totaled at: 144,795, 20,283 and 7,883.⁷³ The data from these two provinces reflect the overall national enrollment trends which are totaled at 1,194,503 for primary school, 244,489 for junior secondary school, and 108,243 for senior secondary school.⁷⁴

Table 3: National Enrollment and Female Representation (2010-2011)

National Trends	Primary	Junior Secondary	Senior Secondary
Girls and Boys	1,194,503	244,489	108,243
% Girls Enrolled	49%	45%	38%

Disaggregation of this enrollment data further reveals the disparity between both genders as the percentage of girls enrolled drops from 49% in primary school, to 45% in junior secondary, and 38% in senior secondary.⁷⁵ Reasons for this disparity are frequently described as a combination

⁷³ Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, *Making Progress: Schools and Students in Sierra Leone: The 2010/2011 School Census Report*, Vol.1: 25-26

⁷⁴ Ibid: 2-4

⁷⁵ Ibid: 2

of poverty, where it becomes crucial to utilize all the manpower within one family⁷⁶, and cultural norms such as the legacy of patrilineal society⁷⁷, the value of virginity⁷⁸, and cultural practices.⁷⁹

In addition, schools also have many obstacles to overcome. After the war the national government in Freetown devised a program to ensure that enrollment in primary education would be free for government-run schools.⁸⁰ One interview with a school-master described the unique challenges faced by his primary and junior secondary schools. Making clear that the salaries of the primary school teachers from the government were irregular, he explained how he often has to take money acquired from the junior secondary school, which is non-government funded and paid for by the students, to pay his primary school teachers.⁸¹ As a result of the irregular pay, primary school teachers are reported to become disgruntled and careless, making government-funded schools the inferior option next to private schools which charge considerably more.⁸²

To conclude, the education indicator reveals that ex-combatants who chose education for the reintegration component of the DDR program did not struggle or underachieve in comparison

⁷⁶ Interview: School-Master, Nongowa 2012. Oftentimes, if a family cannot afford the cost of education and is struggling to support itself, children will be taken out of school and made to work around the house or to go make a profit by selling things.

⁷⁷ Interviews: School-Master Nongowa 2012; Interview: National Coordinator, Sierra Leone Association for Non-Governmental Organizations (SLANGO), Freetown 2012 ; Interview: Minister of Social Welfare, Women's and Children's Issues Freetown 2012. Interviews explained that historically, a young boy is seen as having greater value to his family because it was expected that the young girl would marry into another family. The only economic benefit that she could bring into the family is who she married, making the young man a better investment for the future.

⁷⁸ Interview: National Coordinator, Sierra Leone Association for Non-Governmental Organizations (SLANGO), Freetown 2012. In rural areas, mothers typically wanted their daughters to be virgins at the time of marriage or they would have to pay a fine. As explained, one of the only ways to ensure virginity is to marry her off young, thus limiting the prospects of her getting a complete education.

⁷⁹ Cultural practices may include initiation into secret societies where a girl comes out a woman who is then deemed fit for marriage. Should she marry young, educational opportunities are missed.

⁸⁰ Though enrollment is free, families must still pay the cost of books, uniforms, and other classroom materials.

⁸¹ Interview: School-Master, Nongowa 2012

⁸² Interview: Regular Citizen, Freetown 2012

to other students as some went as far as college-trained. Education in Sierra Leone is now a larger national issue as the country struggles with national education levels, especially in the area of girl-child education. Based on the findings of this indicator, these issues stem more from widespread poverty and traditional cultural norms than they do a legacy of the war.⁸³ Although those who were still of young age typically chose formal education, the majority of ex-combatants focused their reintegration training on the acquisition of vocational skills.⁸⁴

Indicator 2: Employment

Alongside the opportunity for formal education, ex-combatants were also offered the alternative of vocational training in various trades such as gara-dying, tailoring, carpentry, automotive repair, soap making, catering.⁸⁵ As seen from the standpoint of the DDR programs, the acquisition of skills through vocational training and apprenticeships “was seen as a key component in keeping ex-combatants from returning to violence and to help ease their re-entry into the local community.”⁸⁶ The aims of these programs were to provide ex-combatants with a set of marketable skills, certifications, and activities linked with the needs of the local labor market.⁸⁷ In practice however, research demonstrates that these programs inadequately assessed the needs of the local market, inadequately trained the ex-combatants, and left ex-combatants in a position of unemployment or of employment in quick-money industries.⁸⁸

⁸³ Interview: Minister of Social Welfare, Women’s and Children’s Issues, Freetown 2012

⁸⁴ Interview: Founder/ Chief Executive Director, Thorough Empowerment and Development for Women and Girls in Crisis (TEDEWOSIL), Freetown 2012. Echoed by Head of Advocacy and Community, Health for All Coalition Sierra Leone, Freetown 2012

⁸⁵ Interview: Ex-Fighter’s Organization, Kakua 2012

⁸⁶ Solomon, Christiana and Ginifer, Jeremy, “Disarmament, demobilization and reintegration”: 15

⁸⁷ United Nations Inter-Agency Working Group on DDR, *Operational Guide to the Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Standards*, (2011): 164

⁸⁸ Solomon, Christiana and Ginifer, Jeremy, “Disarmament, demobilization and reintegration”: 15, 17

One of the challenges widely cited in the literature is in regards to the quality of training. Amongst the trainers for the skills programs, many were not necessarily qualified or motivated to deliver proper training. As lessons were almost entirely classroom-based, the training itself suffered from poor quality and was not able to deliver the type of hands-on experience required by such trades.⁸⁹

In addition to the poor in-class quality of instruction, a series of interviews reiterated that the time allotted for the training programs was too short.⁹⁰ Across all chiefdoms surveyed, various authorities from local Mayors, to Paramount Chiefs, to development NGOs, to Ex-Fighter's Organizations have all placed the greatest emphasis on the duration of the skills training. In the case of tailors, for example, by the time the programs came to a close "they had difficulties, they couldn't really cut the dresses well, they couldn't really sew well, because time wasn't sufficient."⁹¹ As a result of the poor training received, many ex-combatants lost the ability to compete in the job market as their skills were deemed inferior to those of other tradesmen.⁹²

For somebody that was trained as a tailor, one interviewee explained that:

They didn't have the skills to compete because we have tailors coming from Guinea and they are very specialized and have that French finishing etc... I wouldn't go to any of the tailors trained there [DDR] because they didn't have the skills to actually do something appropriate to what you wanted.⁹³

Reinforcing this common perception of the poor quality of training offered:

Imagine if you had never done the task before... three to six months would not be enough. Who would hire you as a carpenter or mason with such short training?⁹⁴

⁸⁹ Ibid: 14

⁹⁰ Interview: Ex-Fighter's Organization, Nongowa 2012

⁹¹ Interview: Paramount Chief, Small Bo 2012

⁹² Interview: National Coordinator, Sierra Leone Association for Non-Governmental Organizations (SLANGO), Freetown 2012

⁹³ Interview: National Coordinator, Sierra Leone Association for Non-Governmental Organizations (SLANGO), Freetown 2012

As a result of the short duration of training, the quality of the product was oftentimes not up to the standards that Sierra Leone needed.⁹⁵ Consequently, many ex-combatants sold their start up kits often to more established tradesmen, and went out to find new sources of daily income.⁹⁶ Within his community, the Paramount Chief of the Small Bo chiefdom remarked that generally those that came out of the programs ended up abandoning their newly found skills in search for something more sustainable. This observation was reiterated by Paramount Chiefs and Chiefdom Speakers across all four chiefdoms.

Another common complaint that arose in the interviews was that the programs failed to provide ex-combatants with job start up opportunities. Reintegration, as one interviewee remarked, “[is] not just about allowing the person to come back to society, but it’s for you to build the capacity of that person and for you to give he/she a future.”⁹⁷ Furthering this statement, he continued to explain that:

They cannot be sitting at their tailoring shop for the rest of the day and only making 10,000 leones which cannot be enough to even take care of themselves. [...] but in some other countries, they will sit, they design, they will be in their tailoring shop and they export some of the things they design to be sold.

Reinforcing this notion are the ideas put forth by the Revolutionary United Front Party (RUF) who acknowledged that it is not enough to train the ex-combatants, development programs have to work to create a space for those who were trained.⁹⁸

⁹⁴ Interview: Paramount Chief, Small Bo 2012

⁹⁵ Interview: National Coordinator, Sierra Leone Association for Non-Governmental Organizations (SLANGO), Freetown 2012

⁹⁶ Interview: Head of Advocacy and Community, Health for All Coalition Sierra Leone, Freetown 2012

⁹⁷ Interview: Head of Advocacy and Community, Health for All Coalition Sierra Leone, Freetown 2012

⁹⁸ Interview: Revolutionary United Front Party (RUF), Kakua 2012

One of the challenges that further exacerbate these issues is that, oftentimes, post-conflict economies typically offer little to be economically reintegrated into. As the economy of Sierra Leone had been depressed by the conflict, it lacked the ability to absorb many of the ex-combatants, making difficult the sustainable reintegration of this group as they frequently possessed inferior knowledge and skill of their trades.⁹⁹ Furthermore, some have noted that because of the lack of diversity in the types of skills offered, it seemed “inconceivable” that the local economy would be able to absorb and ensure a high demand for their goods.¹⁰⁰ In turn, few who graduated from these vocational training programs were able to make a sustainable income.¹⁰¹ Because of the state the economy was in however, prospects of employment were, and currently are, slim for everybody, not only ex-combatants.

With a ranking of 180 out of 187 in the Human Development Index¹⁰² and a GNI/capita of \$340.00 USD,¹⁰³ Sierra Leone stands as one of the poorest countries in the world. In a country in which approximately 70% of citizens live below the poverty line, among which approximately 46 % are unemployed,¹⁰⁴ it becomes clear that unemployment is a larger national issue that moves beyond the distinction of ex-combatants. It is not so much that ex-combatants are facing the challenges of unemployment, but more so that everybody seems to be facing the challenges of unemployment.

⁹⁹ Solomon, Christiana and Gjinifer, Jeremy, “Disarmament, demobilization and reintegration”: 8

¹⁰⁰ Coulter, Chris. *Bush Wives and Girl Soldiers: Women’s Lives through War and Peace in Sierra Leone*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press: 2009): 188

¹⁰¹ Ibid: 189

¹⁰² International Human Development Indicators (2011), United Nations Development Program, available at: <http://hdrstats.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/sle.html>

¹⁰³ World Development Indicators, World Bank, available at: <http://data.worldbank.org/country/sierra-leone>

¹⁰⁴ African Economic Outlook, Sierra Leone 2012, Pg: 12,14, available at: <http://www.africaneconomicoutlook.org/fileadmin/uploads/aeo/PDF/Sierra%20Leone%20Full%20PDF%20Country%20Note.pdf>

Furthermore, it was explained that one of the primary shortcomings of the DDR's vocational training component was that it failed to provide ex-combatants with a continuous source of income.

The whole idea was to give them cash in hand, anything to actually make them ready money because they were used to a life of always having money in their pockets. If you were a fighter, you just take, so they needed something that would give them cash on a daily basis.¹⁰⁵

As the newly found training fell short of this expectation for the majority of ex-combatants, other opportunities were created to ease this transition. One such option was to join the SLA.¹⁰⁶ Offering a notoriously low pay however, this option was not always desirable or ideal. For others, the creation of certain industries has actually saved groups of ex-combatants from unemployment and has provided most of those who abandoned their skills training with a daily source of income and an opportunity to aid in those communities where the infrastructure has been destroyed: this industry is the bike riding industry.

Bike Riders Associations (BRA) can be found in all major cities across Sierra Leone. As one representative from Bo explained, "bike riding came as a result of the need for the youth to work and live a [...] comfortable life after the war." Furthering this statement, the representative recounted that:

After the DDR program, we decided we should come together to engage in this kind of trade because by then some wanted to go back into the bush to fight. So we wanted to engage ourselves in this new kind of jobs, finding quick money, living a very comfortable life. That was the main reason we decided to come together as youths, to get ourselves employed, self-employed.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ Interview: National Coordinator, Sierra Leone Association for Non-Governmental Organizations (SLANGO), Freetown 2012

¹⁰⁶ Coulter, Chris, *Bush Wives and Girl Soldiers*: 161

¹⁰⁷ Interview: Bike Rider's Association, Kakua 2012

With the realization that they could not survive on a daily basis, bike riding provided ex-combatants with an opportunity to make fast money and would allow them to be paid every day.¹⁰⁸

As the original group of bike-riders was composed primarily of ex-combatants, Sierra Leoneans did not initially regard it as a serious trade. As time went by, however, the organization attracted more interest, and membership started to grow. Overtime, the composition of those undertaking bike riding has slowly expanded from a group of ex-combatants, to incorporate students seeking part time employment to pay for college and university, drop outs, and those seeking fast money.¹⁰⁹

Alongside the ability to provide a daily source of income, the bike riding in Sierra Leone has been an indispensable part of post-war recovery. As much of the infrastructure and road systems were devastated by the war, bike riders offer transportation across versatile terrain, to remote areas that are inaccessible by car, and they are affordable for the majority of Sierra Leoneans.¹¹⁰ Additionally, bike riding is a relatively accessible trade to engage in as bikes can be acquired by individual riders by credit that they will work to eventually pay off.¹¹¹

Overall, the emergence of the BRA has been beneficial to Sierra Leone's post-conflict recovery as it offers a way of attaining a daily source of income; it creates jobs for those suffering from unemployment, - particularly the youth; and most importantly, it provided ex-combatants with an alternative form of income to supplement their inadequate training, removing

¹⁰⁸ Interview: Regional Project Officer, Bike Rider's Association, Nongowa 2012

¹⁰⁹ Interview: Bike Rider's Association, Kakua 2012

¹¹⁰ Solomon, Christiana and Giniifer, Jeremy, "Disarmament, demobilization and reintegration": 37

¹¹¹ Interview: Bike Rider's Association, Kakua 2012

them from an idle and disenfranchised state.¹¹² One of the most remarkable successes of the bike-riding industry that should not be overlooked is its ability to have its members engage with the community on a daily basis. It is important to emphasize that the people of Sierra Leone, both former perpetrators and victims are widely using the services provided by those who work in this industry. This point should be taken as a precursor to what will be revealed by the social stigma indicator as it demonstrates that people are willingly utilizing these services despite knowing that it is a primarily ex-combatant-dominated industry. By sitting at the backs of these riders on a motorized vehicle, this shows that people have trust that these riders will deliver their services even if it means going to remote areas with few people around. Bike riders are offering a service that fills the gap and the short-comings of the public transportation services, and that can connect those in the remote areas to the urban centers.

For many who were hired for contract jobs with international organizations working in the initial post-conflict years, unemployment became an issue as these organizations slowly completed their tasks and began to pull out.¹¹³ Bike-riding, on the other hand, was able to continue and thrive once these international organizations began to leave, arguably leaving some ex-combatants in a more favorable position than their counterparts. Bike-riding however is not without its limits. It is typically reserved for the young and strong as it places a significant amount of strain on the physical health of its members. Common issues to emerge are illnesses such as pneumonia and tuberculosis, as well as frequent crashes and hospitalization for those

¹¹² Interview: Regional Project Officer, Bike Rider's Association, Nongowa 2012

¹¹³ Interview: Former United Nations contract employee, now unemployed and looking for odd-jobs to support his son's primary school education. Freetown, 2012

with serious wounds.¹¹⁴ Once the rider retires, they must find another source of income. For most without skills or education, unemployment is often the only alternative.

In conclusion, the employment measure indicates that the majority of ex-combatants who chose to partake in vocational training have largely abandoned their trades due to the inadequate training offered by the DDR program. Because the duration of the training was not long enough, many have stigmatized the services provided by the DDR trainees as it is deemed to be inferior to the work of other tradesmen. Because of the widespread abandonment of their trades, many have resorted to bike-riding as a way to earn a day to day living. This industry flourished after the war and is a result of the need to employ and occupy idle and jobless ex-combatants. It should be emphasized that because unemployment rates are very high in Sierra Leone, ex-combatants do not suffer any more than any other group. Unemployment is largely affecting the youth of Sierra Leone, transcending the distinct categorization of ‘ex-combatant’.

Indicator 3: Inter-Marriage

Drawing from the literature of ethnic and migration studies, the choice of ‘inter-marriage’ is used in this study as an indicator for the social reintegration of ex-combatants. Amongst those who study cross-cultural migration, ‘inter-marriage’ is often used as an indicator of the social integration of minority groups said to signal the “lessening of ‘social distance’ between a minority group and the [...] majority, enabling unions between groups which would previously have been taboo.”¹¹⁵ Theoretically, inter-marriage occurs when the social, cultural, and ethnic differences between the individuals is no longer perceived to create a barrier to long-term union.

¹¹⁴ Interview: Regional Project Officer, Bike Rider’s Association, Nongowa 2012

¹¹⁵ Song, Miri, “Is intermarriage a good indicator of integration?” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 35(2), (2009): 331

As a result, the inter-marriage between different groups is generally regarded as a positive indicator of a minority group's social acceptance into the mainstream.¹¹⁶

In Sierra Leone, as is the case across much of Africa, marriage is highly regarded as it provides opportunities of economic advancement and inter-family relations. Within this culture, the resistance to marriage or the failure to marry “can be construed as a radical act [...] where marriage is perceived as mandatory to avoid being viewed as a social outcast.”¹¹⁷ Though much has been written about war-time marriages, where female captives are often forced into marriage, sexual slavery, and drug abuse, the inter-marriage indicator used in this study refers strictly to those marriages between single ex-combatants or those involved indirectly in the war and other groups in the post-conflict phases.

Inquiries into the issue of inter-marriage between groups of ex-combatants and other groups produced results that remained consistent with little variation across all four chiefdoms. Interviews revealed that in general, groups of ex-combatants face no additional stigma when it comes to inter-marriage. As one Paramount Chief put it, “I mean, they have children, they have homes, they are working. You go into some of these communities, you never know they even took up arms against each other.”¹¹⁸ It was further explained that in a war such as the one experienced in Sierra Leone, where the division between perpetrator and victim is blurry at best, and where such a large part of the population was affected by the war, inter-marriage is hardly an issue as many have forgiven and put the past behind them.¹¹⁹ These findings were reiterated across chiefdoms with other officials such as city Mayors, religious authorities, and the Ex-

¹¹⁶ Ibid: 333

¹¹⁷ Mackay, Susan, “Girls as “Weapons of terror” in Northern Uganda and Sierra Leonean rebel fighting forces”, *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, 28(5), (2005): 393

¹¹⁸ Interview: Paramount Chief, Small Bo 2012

¹¹⁹ Interview: Local Chief (Moyamba), Freetown 2012

Fighter's Organizations. This finding however, does not mean that there is no stigma for marriages across all groups.

Upon questioning about any stigma against any groups other than ex-combatants it was often suggested that if there is still any lasting stigma, it would most likely be directed towards victims of rape. In one study conducted in the initial post-conflict years it was noticed that generally, certain communities did not directly shame or stigmatize the victim. There was however, a general recognition that she was "damaged goods", especially if she was a virgin before the incident, rendering her no longer marketable.¹²⁰ As explained by another interviewee,

Nobody would deliberately spoil their chances of marriage in a society where marriage is esteemed as one of the biggest things a woman has to look forward to. Especially if they did not have physical wounds needing direct attention.¹²¹

Further explaining the situation in which this stigma would take place, the interviewee explained that many social issues could arise as a result of a family finding out the mother was raped. Questions surrounding the legitimacy of the children, health concerns over sexually transmitted diseases, and family lineages would all come into question thus potentially resulting in hostility and stigma towards the rape victim and her children. Another interviewee voiced similar concerns over allegations of external rape within a marriage yet offered an easier solution where the family might simply take the women to the hospital for various physical tests.¹²² As women and girls are primarily valued for their roles as wives and mothers, marriage becomes very important as it may be many's "best option to obtain economic security and protection."¹²³ This

¹²⁰ Coulter, Chris. *Bush Wives and Girl Soldiers*: 224, 227

¹²¹ Interview: National Coordinator, Sierra Leone Association for Non-Governmental Organizations (SLANGO), Freetown 2012

¹²² Interview: Deputy Mayor, Nongowa 2012

¹²³ Denov, Myriam, "Coping with the trauma of war: Former child soldiers in post-conflict Sierra Leone", *International Social Work*, 53(6), (2010): 799

finding, however, is not to say that all those who were raped could not be in lasting relationships. Testimonies in the TRC Final Report reveal that amongst the participants, some were able to engage in full relationships despite the fact that they were raped. This finding demonstrates that while the stigma associated with rape may be common, it is not unlikely that a victim of rape would be able to engage in a serious and lasting relationship.¹²⁴

In conclusion, the inter-marriage indicator reveals that inter-marriages between ex-combatants and other groups is widespread and rarely an issue. One of the only times that stigma arises within a marriage is when one of the parties could potentially be a victim of rape, putting into question the legitimacy of children, potential health risks, shame, and family ties.

Indicator 4: Social Stigma

Closely related to the measure of inter-marriage is the measure of social stigma. As stigma can manifest itself beyond the confines of marriages and family relations, this measure allows for the identification of any additional forms of lingering social stigma associated with ex-combatants.

In the initial years following the war, it is widely reported that ex-combatants did face varying degrees of social stigma at the community level and between individuals. A common sentiment to arise within the communities themselves was “those who have ruined us are being given the chance to become better persons financially, academically, and skill-wise.”¹²⁵ As a result of this initial resentment mixed with feelings of anger, hostility, and perhaps vengeance, ex-combatants frequently expressed fear over returning to their communities, and if they did return, felt as if they were not truly accepted back.¹²⁶ This finding was echoed in interviews

¹²⁴ *Witness to Truth*, Appendix 3: 252, 109(110), 98 (242), 245 (389)

¹²⁵ Solomon, Christiana and Giniifer, Jeremy, “Disarmament, demobilization and reintegration”: 19

¹²⁶ Stovel, Laura “There’s no bad bush”: 317

where interviewees recalled the initial post-conflict years describing how some ex-combatants were afraid to return, but over time, with the forgiveness and acceptance by the community, have mostly returned to their places of origin.¹²⁷ Other accounts of initial stigma were exposed by the Bike Riders Association when they explained that in the initial years of their operation, “We started going around to big men, wealthy people so that they can help us but many of them shy away from us with the perception that we are ex-combatants who have blood on our hands, so they [did] not treat us well.”¹²⁸

When inquiring into the state of on-going stigma, interviews across all four chiefdoms revealed that the stigma has been reduced drastically to the point where many have argued that it is non-existent. As the SCSL has removed and tried ‘those who bear the greatest responsibility’, interactions remain primarily between lower-level perpetrators and other groups. Amongst those who held more prominent positions within the file and ranks, it is emphasized that “those were the leaders [...] they are living with [us].”¹²⁹ Similarly, expressed in the Small Bo chiefdom, one religious leader noted that within this chiefdom, as a result of the community embracing notions of peace and coexistence, factions as notorious as the RUF are living amongst them stressing that they “live together and do things in common.” As a religious leader who is in touch with the community members on a day to day basis, he maintains that there is no longer much stigma, even in regards to the RUF. This was reiterated by the Paramount Chief of the Small Bo chiefdom who emphasized that:

After ten years or so [...] you basically can't tell the difference if you go into some of those communities. I mean, they have other common issues now- nobody is talking

¹²⁷ Interviews: Deputy Mayor Nongowa; Paramount Chiefs Nongowa/Kakua; Head of Advocacy and Community, Health for All Coalition Sierra Leone, Freetown, 2012

¹²⁸ Interview: Bike Rider's Association, Kakua 2012

¹²⁹ Interview: Deputy Mayor, Nongowa 2012

about ‘well you were an RUF, you were a Komajor, this...’, you know, they are basically doing one thing now.¹³⁰

Similarly, Paramount Chiefs from the Kakua and Tikonko chiefdoms maintained that stigma towards ex-combatants “is not a great issue. It is not an issue. Just like people say, people have forgiven, they just don’t forget the issue easily because sometimes you must recall it, but it is actually on the minimal scale.”¹³¹

The widespread social acceptance of this population can be best exemplified through a social and religious event that happened in Freetown. This acceptance was observed at a baby-naming ceremony in which a whole variety of people attended: babies, adolescents, the elderly, priests and Imams. Sitting all together, once the baby had received its name, everybody started to eat, dance, and celebrate. It was not until the later hours however, when people started to become slightly intoxicated, did some of the guys start reminiscing about their DDR experiences and which factions they fought for. Their enthusiastic memories centered on their experiences in the DDR process, and seemed to act as a unifying force. The atmosphere was light-hearted and victorious, in a slightly drunken and inebriated way. At that point, it became obvious that about a quarter of the population present were ex-combatants. Nobody treated them differently, nobody marginalized them. Not only were they included in the festivities, they engaged and celebrated alongside their families and friends. Before they announced their factions, it was virtually impossible to distinguish this group of ex-combatants from the other groups present.¹³² Stories such as this were echoed amongst ordinary citizens in informal interviews were they spoke of notorious ex-combatants living within their communities. One Sierra Leonean spoke of a

¹³⁰ Interview: Paramount Chief, Small Bo 2012

¹³¹ Interviews: Paramount Chiefs Kakua; Tikonko; Small Bo, 2012

¹³² Field Observations: Freetown 2012

notorious ex-combatant from the West Side Boys faction who initially was treated with suspicion but over time has found ways to help his community, lives in a nice house with his wife and children, and is now widely respected.¹³³ Another interview spoke of a personal friend who fought with the Komajors who now lives a normal life similar to the interviewee's own. It was stressed during this discussion that this former fighter has many friends, and enjoys the same type of lifestyle as his peers.¹³⁴

Interestingly, some of the testimonies offered in the TRC Final Report revealed that for some, the stigma they felt in their communities was more the result of events that happened before the war. In one testimony, a man describes how he perceived the stigma he felt in 2004 by his community to be more the result of on-going political tensions between ruling families for traditional leadership posts. Although the Commissioner questioned whether this stigma was a result of his participation in the war, the participant insisted that it was a long-standing stigma related to political allegiances and that it had nothing to do with the war.¹³⁵ Another study revealed that for many women returning from the bush, it was perceived that the type of social treatment they would receive would depend primarily on their ability to contribute financially or materially to the family or community. In this view, offering money or goods would appease those around them and fundamentally reduce the social stigma and shame associated with the war.¹³⁶

Amongst other traditionally marginalized groups such as women combatants and the disabled, interviews stressed that for different reasons, they were not facing much social stigma

¹³³ Informal Interview: Seasonal Tour Guide, Freetown, 2012

¹³⁴ Informal Interview: Former YMCA employee, Freetown 2012

¹³⁵ *Witness to Truth*, Appendix 3: 272

¹³⁶ Coulter, Chris. *Bush Wives and Girl Soldiers*: 188

as women were usually branded as victims rather than perpetrators, which removed the stigma and provided female fighters with an easier route to social acceptance¹³⁷. Likewise, the same situation occurred with groups of disabled fighters who also were often branded as victims, thus considerably removing any stigma as a perpetrator.¹³⁸

Despite the widespread long-term social acceptance experienced by ex-combatants as demonstrated by these examples, two instances exist where people still classify ex-combatants as a group. The first instance of stigma faced by ex-combatants is that of the RUF and the Ex-Fighter's Organization- both of which are self-created groups distinguishing themselves from the rest of society. As per Article III of the Lomé Peace Accord of 1999, the RUF has transformed itself into the RUF political party. As a national political party, the RUF holds regional offices across the country, two of which are found in Bo and Kenema. The party boasts a fair level of support as demonstrated by the results of the 2012 Presidential elections where the party received a total of 12,993 votes nationally, making up approximately 0.6% of all votes cast.¹³⁹ Running with a candidate who was the former spokesperson for the armed RUF group during the war, Eldred Collins, the RUF remains a controversial yet widely accepted party within the country. Interviews and data collected from newspaper articles have revealed the general sentiments attached to the RUF. Noted by one interviewee, "if you associate yourself with the RUF, then people take you differently. Most people don't want to associate themselves with the RUF

¹³⁷ Though they faced less stigma as victims, the interviewer noted that for this reason, they often fell through the cracks in the DDR process and as a result oftentimes did not undergo the same reintegration process as their male counterparts.

¹³⁸ Interview: National Coordinator, Sierra Leone Association for Non-Governmental Organizations (SLANGO), Freetown 2012

¹³⁹ National Electoral Commission, 2012. Available at: <http://www.nec-sierraleone.org/>

party.”¹⁴⁰ Though the constitution states that a party cannot be representative of one particular group, interviews exposed that many members of this group primarily identify themselves as ex-fighters. Statements such as “we moved from ex-combatants in the armed struggle to the political party struggle”, and “you know, this is an ex-combatant-formed party, so there are people who need help”, lead one to realize that membership to the RUF is primarily made up of “people who no longer holding guns [wanting] to form a political party.”¹⁴¹

The stigma attached to the RUF does not go far however, as interviews and newspaper articles reveal the will of the communities to accept and encourage their political participation. Emphasizing the national cohesion and cooperation that characterized Sierra Leone’s post-conflict recovery, one religious leader stated that “if there had been any stigma or any other thing like that, the government would not allow even the RUF to have a party. That means that they are still creating something within the lives of the people.”¹⁴² Furthering this comment, it was emphasized that “everybody is embracing the RUF party which means that forgetting about what has happened, we have forgotten about the past and are looking to the future.”¹⁴³ Reinforcing this notion is an article released by Al Jazeera leading into the 2012 elections claiming that “despite the RUF’s atrocities committed during the war, most Sierra Leoneans are content to see them take part in elections.”¹⁴⁴ Within the article, interviews with amputee victims of the RUF defended the RUF’s right to take part in the elections despite their dislike for the party. Arguing that the RUF’s inclusion in the political process is crucial to the maintenance of peace in Sierra

¹⁴⁰ Interview: Paramount Chief Compound, Small Bo 2012

¹⁴¹ Interview: RUF, Kakua 2012

¹⁴² Interview: Reverend, Small Bo 2012

¹⁴³ Interview: Reverend, Small Bo 2012

¹⁴⁴ Lupick, Travis, “Ghosts of Civil War Haunt Sierra Leone Polls”, Al Jazeera Features, November 16, 2012. Available at: <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2012/11/20121116104035514355.html>

Leone, these interviewees fully endorsed their right to campaign and organize themselves along political lines. Though many find it difficult to associate themselves with this party, most are supportive and accepting of their political endeavors.¹⁴⁵ One of the complaints to emerge from the RUF itself is in regards to employment stigma based on their political membership.

According to these claims, members of the RUF are being denied jobs because of their political affiliations. These claims however, are echoed across all political parties as members are almost constantly dismissing the legitimacy of the ruling party by claiming that the party of the day favors its own and disregards the rest.¹⁴⁶

What could justify the RUF's organization along political lines despite certain social stigmas attached to the group's identity? Humphrey and Weinstein's (2009) quantitative study suggested that if certain individuals joined the group, in this case the RUF, because they supported the cause, they would "face more difficulty gaining acceptance in the post-war period and are more likely to remain attached to their factions."¹⁴⁷ Moreover, the study found evidence that amongst strong believers, as ex-combatants they may face more difficulty in readjusting to the post-conflict life. Furthering these findings, the study also suggested that ex-combatants that originated from comparatively abusive units such as the RUF, also faced more challenges to social acceptance and reintegration.¹⁴⁸

Recorded into the TRC Final Report (2004), the RUF is statistically demonstrated to be the most violent of all factions. Within the database, the RUF is reported to have the highest number of documented violations totalling 24266 with a sex ratio of 1.96 male:female.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid, November 16, 2012

¹⁴⁶ Field Observations: Kenema; Bo; Freetown, 2012

¹⁴⁷ Humphreys and Weinstein, "Demobilization and Reintegration": 59

¹⁴⁸ Ibid: 59

Moreover, the database also indicates that the RUF committed 59.2% of all violations in the war and targeted 61.5% of victims. The RUF also has the highest number of documented violations at a rate of 2.58 violations per each victim.¹⁴⁹ These statistics demonstrate that the RUF engaged in more violence against civilians than the other factions, making their path to reconciliation potentially more difficult. Based on the findings of the Humphreys and Weinstein study, one could possibly theorize that ex-combatants have clung to the RUF identity potentially because their path to reintegration was slightly more difficult. Although this thesis is limited in its ability to distinguish whether the makeup of the RUF is composed of those who were the original strong believers or not, based on these findings, it could be one explanation for the self-identification of this particular group.

The second organisation to arise in which ex-combatants voluntarily identify themselves as ex-combatants is the Ex-Fighter's Organization. Having been created in 2011 with its primary mandate to advocate against violence, the Ex-Fighter's Organization is comprised of members between the ages of 19 and 40 years of age, with the majority falling in the 20s and 30s categories. Representing all ex-combatants, the group is made up of RUF, CDF, SLA, AFRC, Komajors, Donso, and Tamaboro factions. Working in a way similar to a lobby group, the organization advocates for itself in the hopes of allocating some government and international resources to those who fought in the war and their dependents.¹⁵⁰ Across both districts, individual members spoke of increasing their chances of receiving financial aid if they are united under one name.¹⁵¹ The organization also seeks to provide support and provide guidance to ex-

¹⁴⁹ *Witness to Truth: Report of the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission* (2004): Appendix 1: 15, 23

¹⁵⁰ Email correspondence with the Ex-Fighter's Organization, Freetown 2013.

¹⁵¹ Interview: Ex-Fighter's Organization, Nongowa; Kakua 2012

combatants by urging them to resist political approaches for mobilization. This was evident during the 2012 elections when the organization worked to spread messages of peaceful and fair elections. With self-identifying t-shirts embellished with the motto “Say No to Violence”, the organization seeks to change the face of ex-combatants in Sierra Leone as perpetrators of violence.¹⁵² In Sierra Leone however, the Ex-Fighter’s Organization, is not the first of its kind. Previous groups such as the CDF Wives, Widows, and Orphans NGO were created in an effort to attract foreign funding and to tap into the proliferation of development assistance that characterized the initial post-war years. While this particular organization procured some foreign assistance, others were not as successful.¹⁵³ Furthermore, this type of organization is not unique to Sierra Leone. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, South Sudan, and the Central African Republic, ex-combatants have grouped together as a way of combating the shortfalls of the DDR skills-training programs. Pooling their funds together and sharing information on employment opportunities, organizations such as these have provided ex-combatants with a group that promotes feelings of inclusion and resilience.¹⁵⁴

Although not reiterated in any other interviews, members of the Ex-Fighter’s Organization expressed concerns and frustrations over the general population blaming ex-combatants for petty crime and violence within communities across the country. “People are used to violence in this country. Most times when they are caught, they say it’s done by ex-fighter’s which is a lie.”¹⁵⁵ Furthermore, frustrations arose with some members as they described

¹⁵² Interview: Ex-Fighter’s Organization, Nongowa; Kakua; Freetown, 2012

¹⁵³ Hoffman, Danny, *The War Machines*: 116

¹⁵⁴ Zena, Prosper Nzekani, “The lessons and limits of DDR in Africa”, *Africa Security Brief: A Publication of the Africa Center for Strategic Studies*, no. 24, (2013): 7

¹⁵⁵ Interview: Ex-Fighter’s Organization, Kakua 2012

situations in which other groups steered away from engaging in political debate with these members, prompting the interviewee to say:

We try to discuss about issues, because we want to tell people what is right. You know here, when you say the truth, people get annoyed, so they say “you know these are the people, they have been used to force, to say things that are not right...’ and so on and so forth.¹⁵⁶

Emphasizing that these allegations are false, the Ex-Fighter’s Organization now wishes to use their new-found collective identity in a positive way by creating sensitization programs for vulnerable youth, thus changing the associations that people make with ex-combatants.¹⁵⁷ Although the organization has noble aims, interviews with individual members exposed some personal motivations for affiliating themselves with this group.

One of the individual motivations that arose in the interviews is that of recognition. Across both districts, individual members occasionally pointed to the need for recognition for their roles in bringing peace and democracy to the country. As spoken by one member:

We who fought in the war were not really having that kind of... people did not recognize us in the society. So we decided to form ourselves together so that we could have people from the diasporas, or anywhere in the country assist us because we know that if we just scatter like that, people will not help us.¹⁵⁸

Feeling uncompensated for their efforts, some members unwittingly demonstrated that their membership in this organization was guided primarily by the prospects of being admired for their efforts in bringing peace and democracy to the country.¹⁵⁹ As this finding was recorded in a 2008 study by Laura Stovel, where she noted that some ex-combatants felt like heroes who got no

¹⁵⁶ Interview: Ex-Fighter’s Organization, Nongowa 2012

¹⁵⁷ Interview: Ex-Fighter’s Organization, Kakua 2012

¹⁵⁸ Interview: Ex-Fighter’s Organization, Nongowa 2012

¹⁵⁹ Interview: Ex-Fighter’s Organization, Nongowa 2012

recognition,¹⁶⁰ these interviews reveal that in 2012 similar sentiments still persist and have partially added to the formation of a self-identifying group.

The second instance of stigma attached to groups of ex-combatants is a particular brand of stigma that interacts with the vocational training they received, where a craftsman will usually be called out as a “DDR-Trainee”. As addressed in the Employment section, ex-combatants in the Ex-Fighter’s Organizations in both the Bo and Kenema Districts voiced frustrations over the general population deeming their craftsmanship inferior in quality. Comments like “oh these were the six-month trainees”, and “they did not do their job” has resulted in a series of challenges for ex-combatants seeking employment in already established trades. Even amongst other authorities interviewed, stigma resided when talking about the type of tailor you should see, the type of carpenter you should hire. In all cases, it was deemed an unacceptable compromise to use the services of the ex-combatants. In this type of situation, ex-combatants are still identified as a group and stigmatized unless they undertook further training on their own.

To conclude, the measure of social stigma revealed that there is little remaining stigma attached to ex-combatants at the individual or group levels. The data reveals that they have been accepted into the communities by all relevant authorities as well as by the population as a whole. It is virtually impossible to tell who fought in a given community and who did not. Though acceptance is widespread, instances still exist where ex-combatants are distinguished in regards to their poorly perceived craftsmanship and through their voluntary membership with the RUF or the Ex-Fighter’s Organization.

¹⁶⁰ Stovel, Laura, “There’s no bad bush”: 317

Indicator 5: Crime

The final indicator of crime is used to assess whether ex-combatants are engaging in criminal activities in the post-conflict society. It is generally assumed that due to their poor skills and education levels, ex-combatants who are unable to compete in the job market and who are left idle become prime candidates for armed criminality and petty crimes.¹⁶¹

The measure of crime taken after ten years of peace however, indicates that though there was a spike in small arms robbery between the years of 2002-2005, the crime rate has been reduced in both urban and rural areas.¹⁶² This finding was confirmed through numerous interviews across all four chieftaincies stressing that though the crime spiked after the war and the rate of crime has been steadily declining, Sierra Leone is still dealing with issues of pick pocketing, petty theft, and many cases of gender-based violence.¹⁶³

As some have noted, these types of petty crimes have the tendency to be associated with populations of ex-combatants. In one instance, the Paramount Chief of the Kakua chiefdom emphasized that the crime rate in his chiefdom was due primarily to idle ex-combatants. Stressing that DDR was not sustainable, he went on to explain how some ex-combatants went to find an alternative, “and that alternative is just bike riding. Another alternative is just robbery.

¹⁶¹ Solomon, Christiana and Giniifer, Jeremy, “Disarmament, demobilization and reintegration”: 17. See also Zena, “The lessons and limits of DDR in Africa”: 3

¹⁶² Interview: Head of Advocacy and Community, Health for All Coalition Sierra Leone, Freetown 2012; Interview: Deputy Mayor Kenema, Nongowa 2012; Interview: Criminal Investigation Department, Family Support Unit, Freetown 2012. Statistical data for this time period is unavailable as the National Police Headquarters only started to rigorously record statistics on crimes within each region and across the country some years after the war and the restructuring of these institutions. The earliest statistical data recovered by the National Police Headquarters dates 2007, and give indicators from as early as 2006.

¹⁶³ Interview: Speaker for the Paramount Chief Nongowa 2012; Interview: Criminal Investigation Department, Family Support Unit, Freetown 2012; Interview: Police Headquarter, Freetown 2012

And you have a lot of thieves around here now because they cannot sustain themselves.”¹⁶⁴

Although this is the common association, interviews conducted with the Sierra Leone Police (SLP) and the Family Support Unit (FSU) at the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) revealed that ex-combatants are rarely the perpetrators of these crimes.

One officer at the FSU emphasized that it would be a mistake to assume that these crimes were perpetrated by ex-combatants as most crimes of this nature tend to be more the product of poverty than they are a legacy of the war.¹⁶⁵ Expanding on this observation, another representative from the FSU explained that most of the ex-combatants are too afraid to commit such crimes for fear of further tarnishing their reputations, and have consequently preferred to keep a low profile.¹⁶⁶ Furthermore, with the implementation of the community policing program, members of the Bike Riders Associations have been cooperating alongside police to ensure that crimes do get reported and addressed in a timely matter.¹⁶⁷ As the bike riders, many of which are ex-combatants, pass by remote areas on a regular basis, they are now upholding the responsibility of reporting crimes that they see as they are riding around their regions.¹⁶⁸ This cooperation between the BRA and the police is reported across all chiefdoms, and across both the Kenema and Bo Districts. In this way, ex-combatants can be seen to be cooperating with the police forces as a way of clamping down on crime.

The largest national issues of crime are theft and gender-based violence, neither of which is deemed to be as a result of the war. In terms of theft, between 2007 and 2011, the most

¹⁶⁴ Interview: Paramount Chief, Kakua 2012

¹⁶⁵ Interview: Criminal Investigation Department, Family Support Unit, 2012

¹⁶⁶ Interview: Criminal Investigation Department, Family Support Unit, 2012

¹⁶⁷ Interview: Bike Rider's Association, Nongowa 2012

¹⁶⁸ Interview: Bike Rider's Association, Nongowa 2012

frequent crimes recorded across both the Eastern and Southern regions are burglary, larceny, and assault. These findings match the overall national trends.¹⁶⁹

In terms of gender-based violence, it is recorded that in the Eastern region which houses the Nongowa and Small Bo chiefdoms, the two most prevalent crimes reported to the FSU from January 2012 to September 2012 were domestic violence and unlawful carnal knowledge with 486 accounts and 111 accounts respectively. Similarly, within the Southern region which houses the Kakua and Tikonko chiefdoms, domestic violence followed by unlawful carnal knowledge were the two most prevalent crimes with accounts recorded at 453 and 119 respectively.¹⁷⁰ Despite the progressive bills recently passed by the national government in Freetown promoting gender equality, gender-based violence remains a dominant theme across crimes in the post-conflict period. Because of new investigative institutions such as the FSU, there are beginning to be a wide number of crimes reported regarding sexual violence. The problem however, lies in the fact that after the investigation is over and it is time to prosecute, the victims will usually back out and opt to take no action as a result of cultural pressure.¹⁷¹ Within the Eastern region, a total of 697 crimes were reported, while only 164 were charged. Within the Southern region, a total of 829 crimes were reported, while only 288 were charged.¹⁷² Pressure in the form of family interference, traditions, and cultural norms often encourage ways of settling disputes outside of court, using alternative avenues in which all sides can come to compromise.¹⁷³

¹⁶⁹ National Police Headquarters Statistics, 2007-2011. Statistical data is given however it is recorded inconsistently over the years. Aggregation of the data into a comprehensible and simple analysis proved to be too difficult as it risked skewing some of the recordings. Amongst the statistics given, these crimes are consistently in the top three most frequent criminal acts across both districts of interest and the country as a whole.

¹⁷⁰ Statistical Report from the Family Support Unit, 2012

¹⁷¹ Interview: Criminal Investigation Department, Family Support Unit, Freetown 2012

¹⁷² Statistical Report from the Family Support Unit, 2012

¹⁷³ Interview: Criminal Investigation Department, Family Support Unit, Freetown 2012

Conclusion

In closing, the findings of these five indicators reveal that after ten years of peace, ex-combatants seem to be enjoying an equal level of acceptance back into society. Direct testimony from both the TRC Final Report and the interviews offer some insight into the perceptions of both ex-combatants and their communities of social, political, and economic reintegration. The combination of these accounts reinforced by academic sources and statistical data, when available, provide a rich picture of the overall levels of acceptance of the ex-combatants back into their communities. Reinforcing previous studies, it was found that while some faced initial stigma due to their ties with certain factions and their inability to contribute to their family's wellbeing, others were welcomed back with open arms, received care and support, faced little to no social stigma, and were able to engage in a happy and healthy marriage.¹⁷⁴ Aside from the particular brand of stigma attached to the inadequate vocational training delivered by the DDR programs, and the self-separation of the RUF and the Ex-Fighter's Organization, the chosen socioeconomic measures indicate that the long-term reintegration of Sierra Leone's ex-combatants has been widely successful.

In response to these results, it is now necessary to identify what causal mechanisms have led to this successful reintegration. Working from the premise that long-term reintegration is dependent on meaningful and sustainable reconciliation, the following chapter will assess some of the classic IGO and NGO initiatives for national, communal, and individual reconciliation.

¹⁷⁴ Coulter, Chris. *Bush Wives and Girl Soldiers*: 213

CHAPTER 3: THE USUAL SUSPECTS: IGO AND NGO INITIATIVES FOR RECONCILIATION

Having demonstrated that the social, political, and economic reintegration of Sierra Leone's ex-combatants has been widely successful, one must determine what accounts for this outcome. As reintegration programs tend to rely heavily on IGO and NGO subcontracting for programs designed around trauma-healing, psycho-social counselling, sensitization programs, vocational training, and civic education,¹⁷⁵ the general assumption is that when reintegration has been successful, it is largely the product of IGO and NGO intervention. Working from the premise that long-term reintegration is largely dependent on meaningful and sustainable reconciliation, this section assesses some of the major IGO and NGO initiatives used to foster a sense of national, communal, and individual reconciliation. Rather than assessing a wide range of programs in which reconciliation could have been a residual consequence, such as family-tracing programs, this chapter purposely limits itself to those programs whose principal goal was to foster reconciliation at all three levels: national, communal, and individual. While the TRC largely targeted national reconciliation, sensitization programs, group and individual counselling, and tradition-inspired NGOs and CSOs guided by international standards targeted reconciliation at the communal and individual levels. Although long-term reintegration has been largely successful, this chapter argues that these programs have had a minimal impact for producing a sense of lasting national, communal, and individual reconciliation.

¹⁷⁵ Specker, Leotine, "The R-Phase of the DDR process": 29-30; Ginifer, Jeremy, "Reintegration of ex-combatants": 40

National Reconciliation and the TRCs

The past twenty years has seen the proliferation of TRCs across Africa to address the large-scale crimes against humanity and mass atrocities committed during times of war. Originating in Latin America, truth commissions allowed victims to challenge an oppressive state's official version of past events through the creation of an impartial historical record guided by personal testimonies. These personal testimonies of torture, killings, and disappearances provided citizens with a forum in which they could vocally address and document their histories of human right's abuses.¹⁷⁶ In the 1990s, TRCs were implemented in South Africa to address issues of apartheid, marking the first time they were used on African soil. With the endorsement of Archbishop Desmond Tutu¹⁷⁷, TRCs became the prevailing institutional structures for reconciling entire nations in the aftermath of conflict.

In Sierra Leone, TRCs were implemented alongside the Special Court of Sierra Leone (SCSL) as part of a two-pronged strategy of transitional justice. Together, these institutions cooperated to process and reconcile the perpetrators and victims through the institution of justice.¹⁷⁸ The SCSL was created jointly by the United Nations and the government of Sierra Leone, and worked with a mandate to "prosecute persons who bear the greatest responsibility for serious violations of international humanitarian law and Sierra Leonean law committed in the territory of Sierra Leone since 30 November 1996."¹⁷⁹ While the SCSL has been instrumental in

¹⁷⁶ Shaw, Rosalind, "Memory Fictions: Localizing the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Sierra Leone": 189-190

¹⁷⁷ In his memoir *No Future without Forgiveness*, Tutu reflects on the importance of the TRCs in reconciling South Africa and stresses the importance of honesty, compassion, and of addressing issues of the past in order to move forward.

¹⁷⁸ Miraldi, Marissa, "Overcoming obstacles of justice: the Special Court of Sierra Leone", *New York Law School of Human Rights*, 894, (2003): 856

¹⁷⁹ Statue of the Special Court for Sierra Leone, Article 1, (2002), accessed at on March 8, 2013:

bringing to justice “those that bear the greatest responsibility”, the TRCs have been the main way that reconciliation has been pursued for the majority of the population.

Contrary to the SCSL, the TRCs operated over a much larger jurisdiction, seeking to reach both victims and lower-level perpetrators who were involved in the atrocities directly or indirectly, but were not eligible for trial in the SCSL.¹⁸⁰ Created out of the Lomé Accords in 1999 through the cooperation of the United Nations and the government of Sierra Leone, the TRCs acted as truth-telling forums in which victims and lower-level perpetrators would come together and share their stories in the hopes of fostering healing and lasting reconciliation.¹⁸¹ Recognizing the importance of traditional cultural beliefs and traditional methods of conflict resolution to the people of Sierra Leone, the TRCs subcontracted the local NGO Manifesto 99 to provide guidelines to the commission on how to integrate these traditional mechanisms. It was hoped that the integration of cleansing rituals and ceremonies performed by relevant traditional authorities would add more cultural legitimacy to the process of reconciliation.¹⁸² Commissions were set up in all twelve districts’ headquarter towns, where hearings would usually last about one week. Towards the end of the week, Paramount Chiefs and village elders were encouraged to participate and perform healing rituals and ceremonies.¹⁸³

Criticisms

Despite the TRC’s noble aims of fostering a sense of national reconciliation, many criticisms of the TRCs and the ways in which they were implemented exist. Criticisms such as the failure to communicate the purpose, the inability to instill a sense of trust amongst the participants, the

<http://www.sc-sl.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=uClnD1MJeEw%3d&tabid=176>

¹⁸⁰ Miraldi, Marissa, “Overcoming obstacles of justice”: 855

¹⁸¹ Shaw, Rosalind, “Memory Fictions”: 185

¹⁸² *Witness to Truth*: Vol. 1: 52-53

¹⁸³ Kelsall, Tim, “Truth, lies, ritual”: 363, 378-380

inability to reach the remote areas, and the lack of cultural awareness are among the main points to arise when analyzing the legacy of these programs.

The first criticism of the TRCs addresses the inability of the program to effectively communicate its purpose resulting in confusion for participants, particularly for populations of ex-combatants. Amongst groups of victims, it is reported that because the purpose of the commission was unclear, many participated in the hopes of receiving some sort of compensation. Without a clear understanding of the TRC mandate, participation, for many, was seen as a way to receive economic assistance.¹⁸⁴ Amongst ex-combatants, a survey released by PRIDE- an indigenous Sierra Leone NGO and the International Center for Transitional Justice- revealed that although “most ex-combatants have heard of the TRC and the Special Court, [they] do not feel that they understand the two institutions.”¹⁸⁵ Legally, the SCSL had the right to order the disclosure of information from any persons or the TRC, however, the TRC then announced that it would not share information with the SCSL.¹⁸⁶ As a result of this lack of understanding, it is reported across numerous studies that ex-combatants held suspicions over the potential of information-sharing between the SCSL and the TRC. Amongst their primary suspicions was the worry that if they participated in the TRC and revealed the full extent of their crimes, the details would be shared between the institutions and could possibly result in their being indicted.¹⁸⁷ More specifically, as a result of the perceived information sharing, ex-combatants were fearful that they would be charged with a violation of international humanitarian law and would be tried

¹⁸⁴ Ibid: 369-370

¹⁸⁵ The Post-Conflict Reintegration Initiative for Development and Empowerment (PRIDE) in partnership with International Center for Transitional Justice, “Ex-combatants views of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the Special Court in Sierra Leone”, Freetown, (2002): 4

¹⁸⁶ Ibid: 18-19

¹⁸⁷ Ibid: 6; Miraldi, Marissa, “Overcoming obstacles of justice”: 857

at the SCSL. Without a thorough understanding of the TRCs functions and the relationship between the two institutions, many ex-combatants lost varying degrees of trust in the TRC.

Further compounding this lack of trust, ex-combatants harboured doubt over what participation would mean for their personal relations. For some, worries arose that their participation in the TRC would disrupt their integration into civilian life. Within this view, participation in the commissions meant to risk potential vengeance from the victims of the crimes, while many also worried that their participation would potentially result in retaliation from other ex-combatants should they be implicated in some of the testimonies. For others, participation entailing a forced recollection their stories might bring about the return of unwanted memories. Consequently, participation for groups of ex-combatants in the TRCs was less than anticipated.¹⁸⁸

Another criticism deals with issues of exclusion. TRCs have been criticised for their inability to spread their message beyond the district headquarter towns in which they were stationed. As a result of financial constraints and the inability to spread the messages deep into the countryside, those living in the remote areas were widely excluded from the process of reconciliation offered by the TRCs.¹⁸⁹ Because Sierra Leone lacks an extensive road network, many of the rural areas are virtually inaccessible. As a result, mobility for those living in these areas is fairly constrained. Many of the people in these rural areas were not able to go to those centres where the TRCs were held, meaning that “the actual people who were affected were not able to tell their stories.”¹⁹⁰ Looking in hindsight, it has been stated that because the TRC

¹⁸⁸ Shaw, Rosalind, “Memory fictions”: 194

¹⁸⁹ Alie, Joe A.D. “Reconciliation and traditional justice”: 131; Interview: Direct Supervisor/ Documentation Manager, Fambul Tok International, Freetown 2012; Interview: Professor Fourah Bay College, Freetown 2012

¹⁹⁰ Interview: Direct Supervisor/ Documentation Manager, Fambul Tok International, Freetown 2012

operated at the national level, “nobody was talking about outlying counties.”¹⁹¹ With a failure to reach those in the remote areas, the TRCs lost their ability to provide an opportunity for reconciliation to many of those communities who were highly devastated during the war.¹⁹²

The issue of exclusion also can be extended beyond the spatial limits of the commissions. Exclusions in the case of individuals are evident when looking at the difference between those who have chosen to participate in relation to those who chose not to participate. TRCs have furthermore been criticised for assuming that all participants are ready to reveal their past and forgive those who harmed them. As described by Sipiwe Dube:

Much talking and thinking about post-conflict justice and reconciliation has focused on a model of an idealized actor who demonstrates a readiness to forgive and reconcile and a capacity to let go of the past in order to move forward.¹⁹³

As demonstrated by this passage, if actors are unable to fall in line with the particular model of reconciliation used by the TRC, they risk becoming alienated from the process of national reconciliation.¹⁹⁴ This alienation, in turn, undermines the intent of the truth commissions as it excludes those who were not necessarily open to making public statements about their trauma.

The most overarching criticism of this particular process however, maintains that the TRCs promoted a sole conception of healing. Ethnographic research specific to Sierra Leone has shown that culturally, the people prefer a method of “forgive and forget” more than a method of truth-telling.¹⁹⁵ Evidence of this can be found in one of Shaw’s ethnographic studies on post-conflict Sierra Leone. Time and time again, Shaw noted how many Sierra Leoneans, children

¹⁹¹ Bombande, Emmanuel, “Regional civil society peacebuilding in West Africa: A conversation with Emmanuel Bombande” in ed. Elizabeth Drew and Alexander Ramsbotham, “Consolidating Peace: Liberia and Sierra Leone” *Accord: An International Review of Peace Initiatives*, Issue 23 (London: Conciliation Resources, 2012): 23

¹⁹² Interview: Direct Supervisor/ Documentation Manager, Fambul Tok International, Freetown 2012

¹⁹³ Dube, Sipiwe Ignatius, “Transitional Justice beyond the normative” Towards a literary theory of political transitions”, *International Journal of Transitional Justice*, 5(2), (2011): 186

¹⁹⁴ Ibid: 186

¹⁹⁵ Shaw, Rosalind, “Memory fictions”: 184

included, would shy away from discussing their wartime memories in public. Although they spoke of some events in private during interviews, Sierra Leoneans typically preferred to “forget” their memories and not to “encourage” the return of violence by giving it a public reality”.¹⁹⁶ Further evidence of this lies in the observation that despite Sierra Leone’s rich history in the slave trade, it is rarely spoken about in day to day life.¹⁹⁷ As mentioned in Coulter’s study, the “need” to publicly narrate their wartime stories and trauma, was for the most part, not obvious to many Sierra Leoneans. Through much sensitization however, many were encouraged to participate and were persuaded that their participation was a necessary pre-requisite to emotional healing.¹⁹⁸ Although the TRCs attempted to integrate traditional practices and rituals to promote a method of healing that was culturally specific, it was done on a very small scale. As one observer recalls, “it is true that they did recognize that these processes existed but the extent to which they made use of these processes is very limited.” It was further explained that that though the TRCs did go to small villages and asked the people to perform some ceremonies such as washing ceremonies, it was done on a minimal scale.¹⁹⁹ As the TRCs relied primarily on the method of truth-telling to bring about wholesale reconciliation, it can be criticised that their efforts were more in line with what people in the West would consider appropriate. Tim Kelsall (2005) explains that:

The practice of confession, [...] has been an outstanding cultural node in the historical experience of the West. Individualized confession of personal actions and inner psychic states has been central to the Catholic religion, to the secular practices of psychoanalysis and psycho-therapy, and has latterly gained mass appeal through TV talk shows, in which ordinary people confess extraordinary

¹⁹⁶ Shaw, Rosalind, “Displacing Violence: Making Pentecostal Memory in Postwar Sierra Leone” *Cultural Anthropology* 22(1), (2007): 68

¹⁹⁷ Kelsall, Tim, “Truth, lies, ritual”: 383

¹⁹⁸ Coulter, Chris. *Bush Wives and Girl Soldiers*: 167

¹⁹⁹ Interview: Professor Fourah Bay College, Freetown 2012

intimate details of their private lives to public audiences.²⁰⁰

In light of this explanation, it would appear that the method of truth-telling used by the TRC arguably forced a specific understanding of healing on a population that may have conceived of it differently. Furthermore, Coulter's study has argued that the emphasis placed on condensed wartime narratives such as those given in as testimonies in the TRCs risks overlooking some of the daily structural violence endured, that may have been more traumatic to the victims.²⁰¹

Building on this point, the TRC has increasingly become dismissed as "a bureaucratic institution of the state" in which its operations were "too structured and missed what the people really wanted from reconciliation."²⁰² This finding was echoed in interviews across in Freetown where it was made clear that although these efforts did some good, they would have been improved if Sierra Leoneans were given more time to grieve, "to come to terms with what your loss actually meant to you so that you know what you really wanted out of the whole reconciliation process."²⁰³

As the list of criticisms for the TRCs is plentiful, it becomes crucial to assess their long-term legacy. Not surprisingly, as revealed by interviews and by recent articles, the legacy is limited. As remarked by the head of one reconciliation NGO, "ordinary Sierra Leoneans are now either cynical of the TRC or have forgotten about it."²⁰⁴ This statement is significant as it is given by one of the original advocates for the use of TRCs in Sierra Leone.

²⁰⁰ Kelsall, Tim, "Truth, lies, ritual": 383

²⁰¹ Coulter, Chris. *Bush Wives and Girl Soldiers*: 169

²⁰² Bombande, Emmanuel, "Regional civil society peacebuilding": 23

²⁰³ Interview: National Coordinator, Sierra Leone Association for Non-Governmental Organizations (SLANGO), Freetown 2012

²⁰⁴ Caulker, John, "Fambul Tok: Reconciling communities in Sierra Leone", in ed. Elizabeth Drew and Alexander Ramsbotham, "Consolidating Peace: Liberia and Sierra Leone" *Accord: An International Review of Peace Initiatives*, Issue 23 (London: Conciliation Resources, 2012): 52

Although the truth-telling legacy of the TRCs seems insignificant to many Sierra Leoneans, the same cannot be said for the list of recommendations given towards the end of the TRC's Final Report. Within the TRC's Final Report, Volume Two, Chapter Three lists numerous recommendations for political, legal, and administrative reforms to ensure that stakeholders in Sierra Leone take special care to not recreate the conditions that lead to the war. Chapter Four meanwhile lists a series of reparations and measures to be taken for all those who suffered during the war, with special consideration going to marginalized groups such as women and children. Reparations were suggested in the form of service packages and symbolic measures. Revealed in one interview with a local development NGO working with issues of gender equality was how some of the reparation packages that were meant for rape victims were never realized. After a bit of lobbying on their behalf, this interviewee described how the government eventually gave some money to a handful of the more vocal victims, but largely ignored the rest.²⁰⁵

As it appears, the primary value of the TRC resides in the list of recommendations from the commission to the national government²⁰⁶. Statements such as "The TRC made a recommendation on youth unemployment" have frequently been used by interviewees and ordinary citizens as ways of holding the government accountable to the needs of the people. Throughout the course of the fieldwork, it was obvious that the most commonly cited recommendations are youth unemployment and gender equality.²⁰⁷ Contrary to what most would expect, the most prominent feature to emerge from the TRCs is the list of recommendations

²⁰⁵ Interview: Founder/ Chief Executive Director, Thorough Empowerment and Development for Women and Girls in Sierra Leone (TEDEWOSIL), Freetown 2012

²⁰⁶ For a full list of recommendations please refer to the TRC Final Report (2004) Volume Two, Chapter Three.

²⁰⁷ Field Observations, Freetown, Kenema, Bo, 2012. Whenever the TRC was brought up in conversation it was almost always in relation to the recommendations made by the Commission. It is one of the primary tools for ordinary people to verbally hold their government accountable for issues of unemployment, gender-based violence, and other national issues.

which is now being used as a tool for the general population to hold their government accountable to their needs, not the legacy of the truth-telling method.

Working alongside the TRCs were numerous complementary initiatives targeting reconciliation at both communal and individual levels. As Sierra Leone struggles with keeping records of all NGOs and IGOs that operated and are currently operating in the country, brief descriptions of the main avenues for reconciliation will be discussed by assessing one example of each.

Sensitization

One of the most commonly implemented strategies for both IGOs and NGOs is the use of sensitization programs or workshops. The goal of these programs is to educate different groups about issues surrounding peacebuilding efforts, reintegration, and reconciliation. Sensitization workshops implemented by the National Commission for DDR and directed to populations of civilians frequently addressed issues such as the negative perceptions of ex-combatants as well as offering explanations as to why ex-combatants were receiving benefits, and how these benefits should not be mistaken as forms of compensation.²⁰⁸ Sensitization programs were directed to all groups in Sierra Leone including traditional authorities and sought primarily to educate Sierra Leoneans of various peacebuilding efforts.

Another way in which sensitization was carried out across Sierra Leone is through the use of public media outlets, the most far-reaching being radio stations. One such example is the Radio UNAMSIL, which started in May 2000, and spoke of “issues such as crime, guilt, justice,

²⁰⁸ Ginifer, Jeremy, “Reintegration of ex-combatants”: 45-46

tolerance, forgiveness, and peace.”²⁰⁹ Another way in which radio was used was to spread the message of the TRCs and the SCSL. Revealed in the PRIDE survey, “radio is the most effective medium for raising awareness, but it must be complemented by more extensive and interactive contact.”²¹⁰ This finding is reflective of the previously discussed issue of ex-combatants knowing about the SCSL and the TRC yet lacking a complete understanding of the two institutions.

Criticisms

Programs such as these are rarely criticised as their primary contribution lays in educating the people about new developments in their ever-changing post-conflict context. In Sierra Leone, radio is effective in sparking initial discussion, however lacks the capacity to engage in long and detailed awareness campaigns. The legacy of stations such as Radio UNAMSIL persist to this day as radio stations such as Culture Radio and others continue to use the bulk of their programming to encourage mindful discussion over societal and cultural issues such as the proliferation of street kids, gender equality, hygiene, street cleaning, and female genital circumcision, amongst others.²¹¹ The primary value of sensitization programs therefore lies in their ability to spread information about different initiatives and explain the purposes of each program. Although many have effectively educated the general populations of new opportunities and initiatives, they were limited in their capacity to engage in detailed and intimate discussions of reconciliation.

²⁰⁹ Ibid: 49

²¹⁰ The Post-Conflict Reintegration Initiative for Development and Empowerment (PRIDE) in partnership with International Center for Transitional Justice, “Ex-combatants views of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the Special Court in Sierra Leone”, Freetown, (2002): 5

²¹¹ Interview: Culture Radio, Freetown 2012

Counselling

Alongside these efforts to encourage reconciliation at the community levels, numerous NGOs implemented initiatives to encourage reconciliation at the individual level. Among the most widely used initiatives for post-conflict peacebuilding and reconciliation is that of counselling and psychotherapy programs. Stemming from suggestions that the best way to resolve conflict between parties is to facilitate mutual apologies and forgiveness,²¹² these programs targeted individual psychological recovery for both victims and ex-combatants.

An example of a program of this type is the Center for Victims of Torture (CVT), based out of Minneapolis, who began to work in 1999 with Sierra Leonean refugees in Guinea and Sierra Leone at the request of the U.S. State Department Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration.²¹³ Through the use of social activities such as sport, art, music, story-telling, and community-wide sensitization programs, this program sought to develop resilience amongst individuals and to promote social interaction. During these activities, staff of the programs targeted individuals who may be withdrawn and provided follow-up services to them and their families. Additionally, the program allowed staff to identify those individuals who chose not to participate but who would benefit from such programs, and if appropriate, could offer appointments for psychosocial counselling.²¹⁴ Throughout the course of the stages, the CVT program attempted to integrate traditional norms and practices into their initiatives. Examples such as hosting the counselling sessions in their hybridized, locally-built ‘counselling huts’,

²¹² Fisher, Ronald J. “Social-psychological processes”: 28, 39

²¹³ Stepakoff, S. et al., “Trauma healing in refugee camps in Guinea: A psychosocial program for Liberian and Sierra Leonean survivors of torture and war”, *American Psychologist*, 6(8), (2006): 923

²¹⁴ Ibid: 925

performing traditional cleansing rituals, and giving of kola nuts²¹⁵ to those who chose to partake, were included as a way of increasing the legitimacy of their efforts. Although this program, like many others, sought to make their initiatives more indigenous by integrating traditional cultural elements into their efforts, long-term assessments reveal that these efforts fell short of fostering meaningful and sustainable reconciliation. The CVT program exemplifies one of the common ways in which communities and individuals were encouraged to put the war behind them and to reconcile with one another.

Criticisms

Somewhat similar to the criticisms directed towards the TRCs, criticisms for programs such as this one center on their tendency to overlook cultural preferences for reconciliation. Specific criticisms include the time-frame in which they were to operate, the methods of reconciliation that they promote as well as the societal divisions they could potentially create. Furthermore, the methods employed by these programs to reach their desired goals can be seen as adhering more to the agendas of the external donors than to the needs of the individuals.

Many have acknowledged that for reconciliation to be meaningful, it must be paced at its own timing.²¹⁶ Voicing a similar frustration in regards to the reconciliation efforts of the IGOs and NGOs, the issue of time constraints emerged once again. As it was explained by one interviewee, because of the foreign nature of the programs that seemed to operate on a tight deadline,

²¹⁵ Ibid: 926. Traditionally, kola nuts would be brought to a person of esteem such as a Paramount Chief or any of the elders as a symbol of respect. Upon receiving the kola nuts, the recipient usually says a variation of “he who brings kola brings life” and has an increased responsibility to aid and cater to the requests of the giver to a certain degree.

²¹⁶ Lederach, John Paul, *The Moral Imagination: The Art and Soul of Building Peace*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005): 160

For me one problem I always said with that process was nobody actually gave us time to come to terms with our grief or come to terms with what happened to us. The experts had money to spend. [...] it would have been better if we got a year or six months to grieve.²¹⁷

Following this statement, this interviewee elaborated that “nobody knew what they wanted. Nobody knew what the experts wanted because everybody came with their own theories.”²¹⁸ Not only was reconciliation seemingly time-bound, it also had to adhere to international theories of what fosters reconciliation and how best to implement it.

Across the interviews in all four chiefdoms, it was emphasized that these models did not necessarily reflect the cultural methods of reconciliation. In a context such as Sierra Leone, the notion of community is central to the health, wellbeing, and relations of the people. In turn, western-style individualistic and psychotherapeutic approaches, as demonstrated by the CVT program, are usually seen as culturally inappropriate.²¹⁹ As described by one Paramount Chief, “we don’t sit down with psychologists or counsellors where we vent. We sit in a large group like this, in little courts like this, and you have the opportunity to say your mind.” Adding to this explanation, he elaborated and said that “in our little communities, anything we say out, that means we’re ready to forgive. If I sit around and spill out what happened to me, what happened to my family, what I’m basically saying is that I am ready to forgive.”²²⁰ Evidently, the process of openly declaring ones grievances must be an organic process that one does on their own time when they deem themselves to be ready.

²¹⁷ Interview: National Coordinator, Sierra Leone Association for Non-Governmental Organizations (SLANGO), Freetown 2012

²¹⁸ Interview: National Coordinator, Sierra Leone Association for Non-Governmental Organizations (SLANGO), Freetown 2012

²¹⁹ Mackay, Susan, “Girls as “Weapons of terror””: 395

²²⁰ Paramount Chief, Small Bo 2012

Voicing further frustrations, it was stressed that when it comes to consoling those who are suffering from various grievances, the “counselling should be done according to their traditional beliefs, not according to the European standards of what you think you should tell a rape victim.”²²¹ As the counselling was not sufficient, it was stated that many of those who had used the services provided by NGOs and IGOs had to eventually find their own version of relief to aid in their personal reconciliation process. This help was usually selected according to their faith of socialization.²²²

Further criticisms of NGO and IGO intervention state that these programs have often led to further divisions in the society by creating categories of ‘victims’ and hierarchies of the war-wounded for skills training or housing projects.²²³ Although the TRCs tried to be mindful of this, many others were not. The creation of divisions and groups within societies risks having adverse effects as they ultimately result in the separation of people rather than reinforcing a sense of unity and cohesion.

Grassroots Traditional Reconciliation NGOs

Building from the increasing momentum to include traditional conflict resolution mechanisms, rituals, and ceremonies into reconciliation, many NGOs began to implement ‘grassroots’ traditional initiatives across the country. Within Sierra Leone, the most prominent NGO of this type is Fambul Tok International, implemented by the Sierra Leonean human rights organization Forum of Conscience, both of which are largely supported by American foundation Catalyst for Peace.

²²¹ Interview: National Coordinator, Sierra Leone Association for Non-Governmental Organizations (SLANGO), Freetown 2012

²²² Interview: National Coordinator, Sierra Leone Association for Non-Governmental Organizations (SLANGO), Freetown 2012

²²³ Berghs, Maria, “Embodiment and Emotion”: 1407

Fambul Tok International exemplifies the newest and arguably most culturally sensitive efforts to utilize a type of reconciliation that resonates with the local population. By going across the country and working at the section level²²⁴, Fambul Tok seeks to bring reconciliation to individuals and communities through the use of traditional cultural practices and ceremonies. One of the key components to these programs is the traditional bon fire in which victims and perpetrators can engage in truth-telling in the hopes of reconciling. Alongside the bon fire, Fambul Tok encourages a traditional ceremony and rituals performed by members of the community.²²⁵ Additionally, this organization provides guidance and small-scale logistical support for community-based development initiatives such as communal football games, radio-listening clubs, and support for communal farms.²²⁶ As this organization allows the community members themselves to organize the committees, to decide what type of ceremonies they would like to be performed, and what type of development aid they would like after, it boasts a fair deal of grassroots legitimacy. As described by the organization:

This community-healing process of reconciliation and forgiveness is designed to address the roots of the conflict at the local level, and to restore the dignity to the lives of those who suffered most directly from violence. [...] By grounding reconciliation in traditional practices, it also helps create healthy communities capable of building new foundations of peace.²²⁷

Seemingly, this type of organization should produce a type of sustainable and meaningful reconciliation among individuals and their communities.

²²⁴ Sierra Leone is composed of 12 Districts and 149 chiefdoms. Chiefdoms are further broken down into numerous sections.

²²⁵ Interview: Direct Supervisor/ Documentation Manager, Fambul Tok International, Freetown 2012

²²⁶ Interview: Direct Supervisor/ Documentation Manager, Fambul Tok International, Freetown 2012

²²⁷ Fambul Tok International, "Fambul Tok: Community Healing in Sierra Leone, Our First Year": 5

Criticisms

Within the academic and semi-academic literature, few criticisms exist regarding the efforts of Fambul Tok. This is in part because the organization is relatively new, having done their first project only in 2008, and in part because most of what has been published on the activities are written by the Founder himself or by his American counterpart and primary sponsor, Catalyst for Peace. Initially, interviews in Sierra Leone displayed favorable opinions of the organization, but as the atmospheres relaxed many revealed some serious shortcomings to this approach.

Interviews with both the organizations and other stakeholders exposed many weakness, among which are its case selection model, the validity of the ‘grassroots’ claim, the types of cases they ‘reconcile’, as well as their potential to undermine current customary systems of redress.

One of the issues revealed in an interview with the organization itself revolves around its method of case selection. It was described in an interview with the organization that cases are selected usually at the referral of another NGO. After this referral has been given, and the chiefdom has been chosen, it is further broken down into sections. Once all sections have been identified, selection is based on a lottery for which area will host the reconciliation initiatives.²²⁸ Given the fact that the case is based on a referral from an external actor as well as a lottery puts into question the validity of the grassroots claim. As it is the organization presenting the need for reconciliation and the willingness to host a ceremony at no expense to the participants produces questionable motivations for accepting the offer of reconciliation. As one interview explained in relation to NGOs such as Fambul Tok,

These things should come from the heart, it’s not some external agency telling them, like what Fambul Tok does, to be involved. And if these people really think that this is what they need, for their community to go on, to put the

²²⁸ Interview: Direct Supervisor/ Documentation Manager, Fambul Tok International, Freetown 2012

misdeeds of the war behind them, this has to come from within.²²⁹

Fambul Tok takes great pride in the fact that its initiatives for reconciliation are driven from the ground up through consultations with the people. Though they claim that “there’s nobody coming from the outside saying “Let me show you how to do things””²³⁰, they are coming from the outside and more or less saying “we have decided that you need reconciliation”.

Another issue with the ‘grassroots’ claim is in relation to the training that the self-made village committees receive. In its release “Fambul Tok: Community Healing in Sierra Leone, Our First Year”, it is stated that once the group has been formed, they receive extensive training in Fambul Tok values, reconciliation, trauma healing, mediation, and restorative justice.” Further along in the report it is revealed that the initial training offered to the group was delivered by the Center for Justice and Peacebuilding at Eastern Mennonite University, USA.²³¹ Is it truly grassroots if the people have to be trained and educated about their own indigenous processes? Having shed light on the questionable validity of the grassroots claim, further criticisms emerged that put into question its ability to deliver genuine post-conflict reconciliation, rather than aid in the mere resolutions of petty disputes.

The second issue to arise over the proliferation of reconciliation-based NGOs is that of timing. For many who were interviewed, the efforts of organizations such as Fambul Tok are no longer required in the country and are frequently seen as a waste of resources and of having little impact on the ground.²³² Across interviews with other local and international NGOs working in the areas such as street children reintegration and health care provision, similar claims were

²²⁹ Interview: Professor Fourah Bay College, Freetown 2012

²³⁰ Interview: Direct Supervisor/ Documentation Manager, Fambul Tok International, Freetown 2012

²³¹ Fambul Tok International, “Fambul Tok: Community Healing in Sierra Leone, Our First Year”: 4, 5, 17

²³² Interview: Assistant Director, Don Bosco Fambul, Freetown 2012

made. In one interview, the participant stated that although organizations like Fambul Tok were good ideas, “Sierra Leone has moved away from the war ten years ago. [...] it’s high time that we started intervening in some other areas. To me, the people of Sierra Leone have reconciled. They are reconciled.”²³³ Echoing these claims are other interviews where participants stressed that the reconciliation issue is now a thing of the past and that the problems of today’s Sierra Leone are not legacies of the war, but have reverted back to the socioeconomic problems that pre-date the war.²³⁴ Following up with this statement, another participant elaborated “programs like Fambul Tok made lots of money, [did] lots of talk, and have had minimal impact on the ground despite big money.”²³⁵

Upon inquiring with religious authorities if there was a continued need to address reconciliation between groups of ex-combatants and others, it was repeated in a variety of ways that “No, [reconciliation] is not relevant again. We have gone over that. We did that immediately after the war, for the first two to three years just after the war.”²³⁶ Repeatedly stressed across all four chiefdoms was that as far as all authorities could see, conflict-related reconciliation was no longer an issue and had already been addressed years before. Recognizing that the majority of these comments came from authorities affiliated with other development organizations, religious institutions, and political institutions, some of these findings were cross-checked with ordinary members of the population who arguably had nothing at stake as most were unemployed and had no affiliations to any organizations. Once again, these claims were echoed as people were usually quick to dismiss the need for more post-conflict reconciliation. For the majority of them, the

²³³ Interview: Head of Advocacy and Community, Health for All Coalition Sierra Leone, Freetown, 2012

²³⁴ Interview: Head of Advocacy and Community, Health for All Coalition Sierra Leone, Freetown, 2012; Interview: Minister of Social Welfare, Women’s and Children’s Affairs, Freetown 2012

²³⁵ Interview: Assistant Director, Don Bosco Fambul, Freetown 2012

²³⁶ Interview: Reverend/Regional Coordinator of the IRC South, Kakua 2012.

notion of continuously addressing post-conflict stigma and grievances seemed superfluous and was no longer relevant to their daily lives. However, common amongst most of them was the emphasis they placed on the need to develop programs that were pertinent to the daily grievances of education and unemployment.²³⁷

Additionally, it was loosely mentioned across a handful of interviews that organizations such as this that still claim to be addressing post-conflict grievances could very well in fact be undermining the current judicial system if any grievances arise beyond the legacy of war-specific issues. Upon asking about what types of disputes this organization addressed the most, it was exposed that many of the disputes revolve around issues of land claims and petty dispute resolution.²³⁸ Inquiries into the state of the judicial system in Sierra Leone exposed many challenges for both those using the services and those employed within the institutions. In most cases, poverty led to corruption at all levels of the judicial system and sometimes resulted in people seeking other avenues of redress such as their local chiefs or village elders through what is commonly referred to as the “kangaroo courts”.²³⁹ In response to these abuses of power, many NGOs and IGOs have emerged and have developed ways to counter these abuses. Initiatives have been created in the form of sensitization programs for court staff that informs and educates them about new laws that have been passed, paralegals who work alongside court officials and educated the general public about their rights and obligations under the law, and financing strategies to provide a source of sustainable income for those working in the courts and

²³⁷ Field Observations, Freetown, Kenema, Bo 2012. Discussions of such topics was done in a casual setting where commentators usually either seemed somewhat amused that people were still studying this, or would dramatically dismiss these issues as things of the past. In all cases they attempted to re-direct this type of attention to issues that affect their daily lives and would sometimes try to elicit some form of material assistance.

²³⁸ Interview: Direct Supervisor/ Documentation Manager, Fambul Tok International, Freetown 2012

²³⁹ Interview: Kenema District Human Rights Committee Chairman, Nongowa 2012

discourage bribery and corruption at all levels.²⁴⁰ The difference between these initiatives and those of the reconciliation-based NGOs is that those of legal orientation are working *with* the system and trying to improve and reinforce the already existing mechanisms. Some reconciliation-based NGOs, on the other hand, are providing alternate forums for petty dispute resolution. This claim would not be warranted if they were dealing with strictly war-related personal grievances between people; that would constitute true post-conflict reconciliation. Interviews with these organizations however, exposed that they are solving disputes in the areas that are traditionally under the jurisdiction of the Paramount Chiefs and Local Courts. Rather than building the capacities of the already existing institutions, they are providing alternatives to the institutionalized judicial structures of the state.

Although many NGOs are doing good work to reinforce these legal mechanisms, it was estimated by one observer that the majority are creating problems. Not only do they risk undermining indigenous mechanisms by allowing the people to turn to the NGOs instead, they are generally not making efforts to capacitate and strengthen the local institutions. As the majority of these programs are time bound, in the event of their pulling out a void may be created.²⁴¹

The Overall Picture: A Failure to Produce Lasting Reconciliation

Within the wider literature on peacebuilding initiatives implemented by IGOs and NGOs, it becomes obvious that many of these programs struggle to address the needs of the people and to reflect the realities on the ground.

²⁴⁰ Interview: Human Rights Officer, Humanist Watch Salone, Nongowa 2012; Interview: representatives from the Local Court Kenema, Nongowa 2012; Interview: Paralegal, Kakua 2012

²⁴¹ Interview: Professor, Fourah Bay College, Freetown 2012

One of the issues being discussed in regards to peacebuilding initiatives implemented globally has given rise to the term the “commodification of peacebuilding.”²⁴² This term represents those initiatives that are “mass produced according to blue prints that meet the Northern specifications and interests.”²⁴³ In turn, these commodified initiatives usually end up being only “marginally relevant to or appropriate for the political, social, and economic realities of war-prone societies.”²⁴⁴ Building from this statement and looking in hindsight to the various reconciliation programs that were used in the initial post-conflict phases, one interviewee explained that although many types of programs took place drawing from traditional practices and adapted European practices, “none of them were quite thought out fully. A lot didn’t fit, and wasted a lot of money.”²⁴⁵

As a result of being seemingly mass-produced, many of these programs failed to take into account the cultural specificities of the people in Sierra Leone. Because of the continuous transplanting of programs that fell short of offering meaningful reconciliation, it was stressed “we might all be African, but we are different in the way we assimilate and the way we act tribally.”²⁴⁶ For this reason, peacebuilding initiatives, especially those focused on reconciliation, should be done according to whatever is traditionally suitable to each group and individual, not according to an external actor’s suggestions.

It was also observed that one of the side effects of the commodified programs is that not only do they risk failing to address the realities on the ground, but they also tend to adhere to the

²⁴² Bush, Kenneth, “Commodification, Compartmentalization, and Militarization for Peacebuilding”: 24

²⁴³ Ibid: 24

²⁴⁴ Ibid: 24

²⁴⁵ Interview: National Coordinator, Sierra Leone Association for Non-Governmental Organizations (SLANGO), Freetown 2012

²⁴⁶ Interview: National Coordinator, Sierra Leone Association for Non-Governmental Organizations (SLANGO), Freetown 2012

demands of their donors. Many of the NGOs that targeted reconciliation almost certainly were dependent on external funding. In turn, despite these groups operating domestically, they are responsible for upholding the standards and expectations of the donors.²⁴⁷ In the case of an NGO like Fambul Tok whose primary support is an American-based foundation, maintaining the romantic image of traditional ceremonies and cultural rituals to address long-standing, unresolved issues from the war is important to the survival of the organization. To acknowledge that these particular types of disputes are no longer significant to the current situation is to suggest that the organization is no longer needed and ultimately render those locals who work on the project unemployed. Drawing from examples such as the TRCs, the CVT program, and Fambul Tok International, allows one to see how an organization may be too dependent on its ability to appeal to an international audience. As peacebuilding initiatives are often financially reliant on external actors, they may have the tendency to tailor their programs in line with the funding interests of their donors.²⁴⁸

One could further argue that in regards to the efforts to integrate traditional mechanisms of conflict resolution, these may have very well been designed to appease the donor's romantic notions of indigenous culture. For decades, since the incorporation of the Local Courts into the constitution, particularly in the rural areas, "a lot of people have been resorting to use these courts to settle even minor offenses instead of using these traditional mechanisms."²⁴⁹ This finding was confirmed through interviews with the Local Courts in both the Kenema and Bo district who vented about their case loads being too heavy as many Sierra Leoneans come with

²⁴⁷ Edoho, Felix Moses, "Strategic repositioning of NGOs for sustainable development in Africa" in ed. Robert A. Dible, *Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and Sustainable Development in Sub-Saharan Africa*, (New York: Lexington Books, 2008): 207

²⁴⁸ Interview: Professor, Fourah Bay College, Freetown 2012

²⁴⁹ Interview: Professor, Fourah Bay College, Freetown 2012

petty disputes that can be resolved elsewhere.²⁵⁰ Additionally, traditional conflict resolution mechanisms in Sierra Leone were designed primarily to handle disputes among families or clan members, not necessarily for issues of mass atrocities and human rights violations. As a result, these traditional mechanisms lack the ability to address issues of mass atrocities on such wide scales. In essence, “these institutions were not fully equipped to deal with the kinds of challenges that came up as a result of the war, so they had a very limited influence as it were on the whole reconciliation process.”²⁵¹ Moreover, many of the authorities who normally operate these traditional mechanisms such as the elders, and certain chiefs, many of them were displaced and some were killed during the war. In various ways, “these institutions were more or less bastardized, for lack of a better word, during the war,”²⁵² meaning that for many, the meaning behind them may have somewhat abated.

It is important to emphasize that though the traditional mechanisms for dispute settlement had widely fallen out of use, those ceremonies that deal with cleansing and purification are still significant in the post-conflict setting. It is important to differentiate between these types of mechanisms as some are catered more for dispute resolution and the others for acceptance and purification.

The most significant problem however, has been demonstrated by these programs’ lack of acknowledgment of personal reconciliation preferences. As one observer stated “what seems

²⁵⁰ Interview: Representative, Local Court, Kakua 2012

²⁵¹ Interview: Professor, Fourah Bay College, Freetown 2012

²⁵² Interview: Professor, Fourah Bay College, Freetown 2012. Evidence of the bastardization of traditional practices is most easily understood from the example of the Komajor militia. Danny Hoffman explains how the movement originally set strict conditions for behavior in and out of war that would affect rituals and protective medicines. Over time however, some ritual specialists began to ‘sell’ their protections at higher prices because they came with less social restrictions and regulations. Initiations became less rigorous, esoteric prohibitions were reduced, and screening became looser. For a more detailed account see Danny Hoffman’s *The War Machines*: 55, 62, 87, 113-114, 235-239.

to have happened in the case of Sierra Leone with respect to reconciliation is that the ordinary citizens do not seem to have been brought on board in the process.”²⁵³ As demonstrated with the suspicions that surrounded the TRCs, the types counselling offered, and the seemingly forced reconciliation offered by cultural tradition-inspired reconciliation initiatives, these programs failed to acknowledge that reconciliation should be self-initiated and organic, not imposed and adhering to foreign standards. In Sierra Leone, “the formal approaches to reconciliation did not resonate with people.”²⁵⁴ Despite the attempts of all the assessed programs to integrate traditional practices, they failed to promote an organic approach to reconciliation. It is well known that for reconciliation to be sustainable it must come from within a society and the individuals, yet these programs have more often than not set the terms and the timelines for reconciliation to take place. Although many internationally-driven reconciliation initiatives have sought to include traditional rituals to various degrees, it appears as though little thought has gone into how much to rely on these mechanisms, when the best time to perform them would be, and most importantly, who best to lead them. Rituals, despite the culture or context, share a few similarities. For one, they happen in a special, unique space. Secondly, actions taken during the ritual, such as the offering of a sacrifice or the cleansing of an object holds considerable symbolic purposes.²⁵⁵ For this reason, it is vital that the relevant authorities who understand the traditions, customs, and values of the society head these initiatives at their own will and according to their own calculations of when it is needed and when it is not.

²⁵³ Interview: Professor, Fourah Bay College, Freetown 2012

²⁵⁴ Bombande, Emmanuel, “Regional civil society peacebuilding”:

²⁵⁵ Schirch, Lisa, *Ritual and Symbol in Peacebuilding* (Bloomfield: Kumarian Press, 2005): 28

While looking in hindsight, many interviewees expressed similar sentiments to the programs initiated by NGOs and IGOs. In one case the interviewee declared “even if the international agencies had not come we still would have gone through our reconciliation, we didn’t need them.”²⁵⁶ Similarly stated when asked if sustainable reconciliation would have happened without this intervention, another interviewee exclaimed “Oh yes of course! No, you don’t need them at all. These things have to come from the heart.”²⁵⁷

Having established that the above mentioned programs have had little impact in fostering a sense of meaningful and sustainable reconciliation, the following chapter will make the case that the successes of ex-combatant reintegration is largely the result of programs and messages spread by the pre-existing faith-based CSOs: mosques, churches, the IRC SL, and the traditional authorities.

²⁵⁶ Interview: National Coordinator, Sierra Leone Association for Non-Governmental Organizations (SLANGO), Freetown 2012

²⁵⁷ Interview: professor, Fourah Bay College, Freetown 2012

CHAPTER 4: UNUSUAL SUSPECTS: RELIGION AND CHIEFTAINCY IN RECONCILIATION

In the previous chapter it was argued that the contribution of specific types of IGO and NGO programs had little impact in establishing a sense of long-term reconciliation. Having demonstrated that these programs were unable to resonate with the local population and to provide meaningful reconciliation, it becomes important to identify the actual causal mechanisms that promoted the widespread acceptance and reintegration of Sierra Leone's ex-combatants. Contrary to the general assumption that this success is likely the result of IGO and NGO intervention, this chapter will argue that the successful reintegration of Sierra Leone's ex-combatants is primarily the result of the pre-existing religious CSO interventions from mosques, churches, and the Inter-Religious Council of Sierra Leone (IRCSL), as well as the result of initiatives led by local traditional authorities through their use of traditional ceremonies and rituals. Religion, in Sierra Leone, plays an important role in the daily lives of the people. Because of the widespread influence religion wields on the majority of the population, these religious CSOs were able to build from the trust they held and the common conceptions and ideas of tolerance and acceptance found within these three religions. Together, these actors have been active across the country, have effectively restored a sense of unity and reconciliation, and have contributed to lasting peace²⁵⁸. By tracing the historical development of each of these mechanisms, the social factors conducive to their success, and their long-standing legitimacy and credibility in the eyes of the people, this chapter will demonstrate both how and why these particular mechanisms were successful vis-à-vis their IGO and NGO counterparts.

²⁵⁸ Interviews: National Coordinator, Sierra Leone Association for Non-Governmental Organizations (SLANGO), Freetown 2012; Paramount Chief, Small Bo 2012

The History of Religious Tolerance in Sierra Leone

The first religion to establish itself in Sierra Leone was that of African Traditional Religion (ATR)²⁵⁹. Dating back long before the initial contact with foreigners, ATR dominated the African continent varying to different degrees across regions and tribes. Although there are many different types of ATR, common features exist such as a shared belief in evil power through sorcery or witchcraft, the use of specialized healers, belief in psychic events, and a shared belief in the importance of ancestors. While sorcery and witchcraft are generally blamed for unfortunate events, diviners, healers, and herbalists are usually consulted to determine the cause and find a remedy.²⁶⁰ Furthermore, as most are derived from oral traditions, primacy is given to the experiences within the tradition rather than to sacred texts.²⁶¹ With the onset of the early Portuguese explorers, the spread of Islam across northern Africa, and the colonial rule of the British, the religious landscape of Sierra Leone changed and was made to accommodate the new foreign arrivals.

Early Christianity

In Sierra Leone, the first foreigner to arrive was the Portuguese Pedro de Cintre in 1492. From this discovery, Portuguese and Spanish monarchs recognized the potential of Christianity to spread in these new lands, and in the early seventeenth century allowed for the early attempts of the European Christian missionaries to spread their religion.²⁶² Being plagued however, by limited funds, inexperience, and tropical diseases, the missionaries' work and scope was

²⁵⁹ ATR in this study will be used as an umbrella term for different types of traditional religions and practices that vary across ethnicities and may or may not involve the use of magic, amulets, symbols, superstitions, voodoo, traditional healers, juju-men, obeah-men, and witchcraft.

²⁶⁰ Welbourn, F. B., *Atoms and Ancestors*, (Bristol: Edward Arndt (Publishers) Ltd., 1968): 20, 30

²⁶¹ Hexham, Irving, *Understanding World Religions: An Interdisciplinary Approach*, (Michigan: Zondervan, 2011): 49, 51

²⁶² Alie, Joe A.D. *A New History of Sierra Leone*, (Oxford: Macmillan, 1990): 101

limited.²⁶³ Towards the end of the eighteenth century, Protestant missionaries began their own work across the country resulting in the gradual expansion of European religious and political influence by the early nineteenth century. Concurrently, the British claimed the territory as their own and established their power with the planting of the Union Jack²⁶⁴. By 1896, as a way of further consolidating their power, the British declared Sierra Leone a Protectorate, allowing the British colonial rulers to control the political and economic activities of the country. By the close of the nineteenth century however, despite the best efforts of the Christian missionaries and their successes in converting many ATR practitioners to Christianity, their reach was limited and was unable to counter the spread of Islam.

The Spread of Islam

Arriving slightly later than the Christian missionaries, Islam entered Sierra Leone in the early eighteenth century and was spread largely in the north of the country by the Susu, Fulah, and Madinka tribes from Guinea.²⁶⁵ Although some of the advocates of Islam sought to spread their influence through the Futa Jallon jihad, which resulted in the spread of Islam in the north of Sierra Leone, the majority were able to successfully spread their influence in peaceful ways. With the use of long-distance traders, missionaries, and teachers of Islam and Arabic, the practice of Islam spread its influence beyond the northern regions and across the entire country.²⁶⁶ As many of these traders, missionaries, and teachers possessed highly sought-after resources by the local people, they were able to bring wealth and provide employment for many native Sierra Leoneans. Throughout the course of increased trade, inter-marriage, increased

²⁶³ Ibid: 101

²⁶⁴ Sillah, Mohammed Bassiru, "Islam in Sierra Leone: The Colonial Reaction and The Emergence of National Identity" *Journal Institute of Muslim Minority Affairs*, 15(1&2), (1994): 122

²⁶⁵ Sillah, "Islam in Sierra Leone": 132

²⁶⁶ Alie, *A new History*: 43

access to land, and the building of Islamic schools, those who advocated Islam were able to consolidate their influence over the majority of the population.²⁶⁷

The following reasons offer further insight into why the attempts of Christian missionaries failed to counter and dominate the simultaneous spread of Islam. First, Islam appealed to the locals and became linked with practical advantage as it occasionally made use of rituals and religious charms written in Arabic. Being linked to spiritual powers therefore complemented the pre-existing practices of ATR rather than undermining and vilifying it. Secondly, whereas those practitioners of Islam tolerated and encouraged practices such as sacrifice, polygamy, and slavery, followers of Christianity forbade their followers to indulge in such false beliefs.²⁶⁸ Moreover, Islam's recognition of both good angels who act as messengers and of jinn- psychic forces of good or evil, in many ways reflected the beliefs about spirits held by the ATR practitioners.²⁶⁹ Finally, because Islam was propagated by other Africans and shared some of the traditional practices, it was "perceived as a viable part of African culture vis-à-vis Western culture."²⁷⁰ In turn, Christianity was typically perceived amongst many locals as a disruptive foreign force. Whereas Islam succeeded in identifying itself as an African religion, Christianity was seen as 'a white man's religion'.²⁷¹

Islam in Colonial Sierra Leone: the Beginning of Religious Tolerance

As an official Protectorate of the British Empire and a region where the spread of Christianity was slower than anticipated, the rapid and sustained domination of Islam across Sierra Leone began to be regarded as a threat to the colonial interests. Accordingly, the British colonial rulers

²⁶⁷ Ibid: 45

²⁶⁸ Ibid: 110

²⁶⁹ Welbourn, F. B., *Atoms and Ancestors*: 49

²⁷⁰ Sillah, "Islam in Sierra Leone": 138.

²⁷¹ Alie, *A New History*: 110

perceived Islam and its Muslim followers as their “potential rivals for the hearts and minds of Africans”.²⁷²

As part of their cultural development, Muslim leaders in Freetown began to encourage Muslim children to learn Islamic studies alongside the lessons of English, science, and mathematics that were typically taught in schools. The push for more educational opportunities in the area of Islamic studies, in turn, caught the interest of a Presbyterian Christian named Edward W. Blyden. Recognizing the significance of the Islamic movement and its Muslim clerics, Blyden advocated for educational opportunities to be given to Muslim students in schools that were outside of the Christian influence.²⁷³

In light of its growth, their inability to counter it, and the access it gained in remote areas of the hinterland, the British authorities began to recognize Islam and made attempts to tolerate and accommodate it. One of the ways in which they utilized this new capacity was through translation services for important documents between Arabic and English. Additionally, the colonial authorities used the literate members of the Muslim community to communicate with those newly colonized in the hinterland as well as with traditional authorities. Realizing this new found potential, the colonial authorities began to support the establishment of Islamic elementary schools across the country. In some cases, Christians even held Islam in high esteem as they “admired the role of the faith in community values”.²⁷⁴ By the early twentieth century some Christians openly encouraged their congregations to look to the Muslims to learn about piety, religious devotion, and simplicity. Furthermore, some prominent local Christians became

²⁷² Sillah, “Islam in Sierra Leone” : 133

²⁷³ Ibid: 133

²⁷⁴ Ibid: 134

outspoken about the Christian congregations' ignorance of the Islamic faith, Arabic, and the African identity.²⁷⁵ Through the establishment and support of Islamic schools under the watchful eye of Blyden, who strongly discouraged schools to form under exclusive ethnic identities, religious and ethnic tolerance began to grow across the country.

Outside of Sierra Leone, similar initiatives were taken to promote more tolerance between the two dominating religions across the continent. By the mid twentieth century, programs aimed at fostering more religious tolerance began to emerge in Africa such as the 1959 Project of Christian-Muslim Relations in Africa (PROCMURA) that established itself in an attempt to bring a better understanding of Islam to the Christian populations. By encouraging a spirit of mutual love and respect, rather than confrontation and hostility, the project encouraged Christians to reach out to their Muslim neighbors in the hopes of developing a deeper understanding.²⁷⁶ The PROCMURA project started operating in Sierra Leone in the 1970s. Although the project was met with initial success as both Muslims and Christians embraced the initiative, it failed to create a national forum for dialogue between the two religions as Christians feared it defeated their missionary stance and Muslims grew suspicious over the potential of Christians to use the forum as a conversion tool for Muslims.²⁷⁷ Despite its dwindling influence across the country, PROCMURA was able to lay the foundation for an institutionalized effort to bring cooperation between the two religions.

²⁷⁵ Ibid: 135

²⁷⁶ Conteh, *Inter-Religious Encounters and Dialogue in Sierra Leone: Historical & Contemporary Endeavors*, (United States of America: Xlibris Corporation, 2011): 21

²⁷⁷ Ibid 22

With a population of slightly over six million, Sierra Leone's current religious composition is roughly as follows: 60% Muslim; 20-30% Christian; and 5-10% ATR²⁷⁸. Within the Bo district, for example, Muslims make up 72.2%, the majority being Sunny Muslim; Christians make up approximately 26.4% of the population, the majority being Catholic; and other groups, including African Traditional Religion (ATR) make up the remaining 1.4% of the population.²⁷⁹ This is an illustrious case as it reflects the religious composition across both sample districts as well as across the country.²⁸⁰ Although Muslim and Christians populations dominate most areas, "flexible religious identities and practices make it impossible to divide Sierra Leone into discrete percentages."²⁸¹ In Sierra Leone, certain elements of ATR have been incorporated into Islam, giving rise to a distinct West African form of Islam, while Christianity typically offers less flexibility. The blending of these faiths, though to varying degrees across individuals and groups, created the foundation upon which religious tolerance could be established across the country.

Religious Influence and the Civil War

Throughout the civil war, many authorities, government institutions, and civilians networks were either destroyed or compromised. Religious institutions representing all three faiths, however, withstood the brutality and sustained their influential roles without rebel or elite capture. How might this be?

²⁷⁸ Jessop, Maria., Aljets, Diana., and Chacko, Betsie., "The ripe moment for civil society" *International Negotiation*, 13 (2008): 99

²⁷⁹ Thomas, Armand C., "Population Profile of Bo District and Bo Town" *2004 Population and Housing Census of Sierra Leone*. (2010): 78

²⁸⁰ Because of statistical inconsistencies across the country, this figure is taken from the Bo District specifically as they had the most updated census report. The Kenema District as well as the National Statistics Office were considerably further behind in their data collection.

²⁸¹ Shaw, Rosalind, "Displacing Violence: Making Pentecostal Memory in Postwar Sierra Leone" *Cultural Anthropology* 22(1), (2007): 69

During the war, religious and traditional faith was used as a legitimating force by all sides. While it is commonly known that the CDF largely drew from traditional hunting groups such as the Komajors who relied significantly on traditional rituals and beliefs to initiate and encourage their troops, usage of religious practices is reported on all sides. Similarly, the Tamaboros, a prominent civil defense militia of the north, also collaborated with occult specialists and relied significantly on rituals and washing ceremonies to prepare them for face off with the RUF.²⁸² Within the RUF, it is reported that the faction actively maintained religious life, rituals, and worship by enforcing a strict observance of both Muslim and Christian religious practices. In one report, it is described how at 6:00 every morning, those fighting in the RUF were made to attend a set of compulsory prayers. Because it was expected that every member was likely to be either Christian or Muslim, “different members were appointed each day to lead prayers, which were concluded with a general recitation of the Lord’s Prayer, followed by *Al-Fatihah*.” The report further explains that “it was this long history and tradition of religious cooperation and harmony between Islam and Christianity that provided functional values to the [RUF] in the deep reserves of the fortified jungles.”²⁸³ Drawing from these religious practices to reinforce their power, the RUF kept respect for these practices, without pulling them down and changing their functions. While Sierra Leoneans were divided along factional lines throughout the course of the war, religion, or ethnicity, were not any of them.

Apart from the warring parties, civilians also maintained their reliance on the religious practices and institutions. As the conflict intensified, civilians began to rely more on their

²⁸² Hoffman, Danny, *The War Machines*: 37

²⁸³ Conteh, *Inter-Religious Encounters*: 20

religious leaders and urged them to put pressure on the RUF to lay down their arms.²⁸⁴ As these leaders began to be more outspoken against the violations of human rights, they began to be increasingly targeted by the RUF. Despite the numerous attacks on their churches and mosques, religious leaders continued to speak out against the atrocious nature of the crimes and encouraged their followers to fast and pray.²⁸⁵ As explained in one interview,

What happened is all Christians came together, we fasted and prayed. Sometimes a week, sometimes three days, so that our brothers that are in the bush, we touch their hearts so that they can change and transform themselves into a better life. So we continued doing that with the Muslims.²⁸⁶

This quotation is significant not only because it demonstrates the coordinated fasting and praying, but also because it demonstrates the ideational underpinning after the war. While an ex-combatant may have committed horrible atrocities, through prayer and other religious practices, they could also, it was hoped, shed their temporary identity and resume their lives as regular members of the community.

Throughout the course of the war, as religious leaders and institutions faced increased targeting from the RUF, it was decided that more cooperation was needed amongst these particular authorities and institutions to counter the attacks of the rebels.²⁸⁷ With the call for greater cooperation came the creation of the Inter-Religious Council.

²⁸⁴ Turay, Thomas Mark, “Civil society and peacebuilding: The role of the Inter-Religious Council of Sierra Leone” in ed. David Lord “Paying the price: The Sierra Leone Peace Process” *Accord: An International Review of Peace Initiatives*, Issue 9 (London: Conciliation Resources, 2000): 50

²⁸⁵ Conteh, *Inter-Religious Encounters*: 21

²⁸⁶ Interview, Reverend, Small Bo Chiefdom, 2012

²⁸⁷ Turay, “Civil society and peacebuilding”: 50

The Inter-Religious Council of Sierra Leone

The Inter-Religious Council of Sierra Leone (IRCSL) was created in 1997 as a coalition of both Muslim and Christian religious leaders²⁸⁸, to encourage peaceful negotiations between the warring parties, and to promote national, communal, and individual reconciliation across the country for all sets of religions.²⁸⁹ With the support of the World Conference on Religion and Peace, the IRCSL became the primary representative body for religious leaders across the country. As the IRCSL sought to blend both Christian and Muslim authorities, it was originally comprised of five prominent Muslim organizations, and three Christian organizations, one of which is an umbrella organization for eighteen Protestant denominations.²⁹⁰ Drawing support from both dominant religions, the IRCSL, like many other inter-religious councils, based its cooperation on a set of ‘deeply held and widely shared concerns.’²⁹¹ The cooperation and successful intervention of this organization has led the IRCSL to be described as “the most highly visible and effective non-governmental bridge builder between the warring factions and a population devastated and divided by more than [ten] years of war.”²⁹² Through its allegiance to neutrality in the negotiation period, its sensitization programs, its humanitarian aid, and its messages of national unity, cohesion, and forgiveness, the IRCSL was able to instill a sense of

²⁸⁸ Jessop et. al “The ripe moment”: 99

²⁸⁹ Interview: Sheik/ Chairman of the United Council of Imams, East/ District Chief Imam, Nongowa, 2012

²⁹⁰ Penfold, Peter, “Faith in resolving Sierra Leone’s bloody conflict” *The Round Table: The Commonwealth Journal of International Affairs*, 94(382), (2006): 551. Member Organizations include: the Supreme Islamic Council, the Sierra Leone Muslim Congress, the Federation of Muslim Women Associations of Sierra Leone, the Council of Imams, the Sierra Leone Islamic Missionary Union, the Christian Council of Churches, the Roman Catholic Church, and the Pentecostal Churches Council.

²⁹¹ Vendley, William F., “The Power of Inter-Religious Cooperation to Transform Conflict” *Crosscurrents* 90, (2005): 97

²⁹² Turay, “Civil society and peacebuilding”: 50

lasting and meaningful reconciliation and effectively encourage the acceptance of ex-combatants back into society.

IRCSL and the Negotiations

After the brutal invasion of Freetown in 1999, the IRCSL took an increasingly active role in denouncing the violence and atrocities committed by the RUF. Issuing a statement that condemned all the violations of human rights, the council appealed to Sankoh's RUF to "demonstrate their sincerity of purpose and love for their country and its people by accepting the invitation [of Kabbah's national government] to engage in purposeful dialogue leading to the final and lasting resolution of the crisis in Sierra Leone."²⁹³ Although the IRCSL often condemned the violent tendencies of the RUF and its allies, it mindfully maintained its neutrality as it also encouraged the national government to engage more with the rebels. In one instance, the IRCSL urged the government to "talk less and listen more" as well as encouraged the people of Sierra Leone to listen to what the RUF and its allies sought.²⁹⁴

During the final years of the conflict, the IRCSL successfully pursued dialogue with the rebel groups, provided space for them to voice their complaints, while simultaneously reminding the insurgents of the unnecessary atrocious nature of their campaign.²⁹⁵ In one instance, they successfully negotiated the release of fifty-four children from the RUF. By recognizing Sankoh as one of the key players to the peace negotiations, the IRCSL was able to successfully appeal to Sankoh and his rebel movement to consider the peace settlements.²⁹⁶ Alongside these appeals, the IRCSL urged Sankoh to release some of the abducted children as a symbolic commitment to

²⁹³ Penfold, "Faith in resolving": 553-4

²⁹⁴ Ibid, 554

²⁹⁵ Turay, "Civil society and peacebuilding": 51

²⁹⁶ Penfold, "Faith in resolving": 554

peace. In response, Sankoh requested that the council provide food and medicine to some of his combatants in the bush, prompting the IRC SL to go above and beyond these requests by providing Sankoh's forces with food, medicine, blankets, clothing, and sanitary kits. Additionally, the Council allowed Sankoh to communicate with his field commanders by radio as well as to the international media. Appreciating this gesture, Sankoh and his RUF field commanders released the fifty-four children.²⁹⁷

Leading into the Lomé Accords, the IRC SL, who was now perceived as neutral in the eyes of the RUF, attended the RUF's preliminary meetings prior to the commencement of formal negotiations. Alongside its privileged seat with the RUF, the IRC SL conducted many presidential meetings to dampen any suspicions that it had moved closer to Sankoh. Throughout the course of the negotiations, the IRC SL prioritized its neutrality and sought to act as facilitators of peaceful negotiation for both sides of the conflict. It is from this role that the IRC SL became the unofficial 'go-betweens' for both parties.²⁹⁸ The council also incorporated other relevant authorities through its use of a multi-faceted approach that brought together Paramount Chiefs, tribal heads, and parliamentarians to articulate their views.²⁹⁹ Once the Lomé Accords were passed, the council worked to help sell the terms of agreement to the civilian populations as they remained skeptical of Sankoh and the RUF's commitment to peace.³⁰⁰

As made evident by the IRC SL's role in the negotiation of a peace settlement, "the IRC SL not only had a seat at the table, they helped set the table"³⁰¹ Not only did they successfully represent and make space for the views of the RUF to be heard alongside the

²⁹⁷ Ibid: 554

²⁹⁸ Penfold, "Faith in resolving": 554

²⁹⁹ Turay, "Civil society and peacebuilding": 52

³⁰⁰ Penfold, "Faith in resolving": 555

³⁰¹ Jessop et. al, "The ripe moment": 94

demands of the government, they acted on behalf of the citizens, as what some have called “the voice of the voiceless”³⁰² - those marginalized by the war. Additionally, the IRCSL actively spoke out against the atrocities and continuously, until the end of the conflict, urged the rebels to put down their arms.³⁰³ Interviews across the selected chiefdoms reinforced the claim that “the IRCSL is actually the moral guarantor for the peace of which [Sierra Leone is] enjoying now.”³⁰⁴ Scott Appleby has argued through other case studies that religious leaders are very capable of fostering genuine reconciliation should they be respected by all sides of the conflict. Furthermore because of their connection to the victims, they have the ability to become influential advocates for reconciliation by all affected parties.³⁰⁵ This finding remains consistent with the role of the IRCLS during the conflict. Not only did they effectively mediate between both warring parties, they also played an instrumental role in reconciling their communities.

IRCSL’s Post-War Activism

Among the list of the IRCSL’s post-conflict initiatives are their provisions of humanitarian assistance to those in need as well as their country-wide sensitization programs, religious counselling, and preaching of reconciliation across the country at all three levels.

One of the ways in which the IRCSL and its member churches and mosques aided in the immediate post-conflict peacebuilding phase was to provide humanitarian assistance to those in need. Alongside providing the RUF/AFRC rebels and civilians with food, clothing, and medicines, the council helped to shelter many refugees during and in the initial aftermath of the

³⁰² Isozoh, Monsignor Denis, “Managing conflicts in the African context: The role of religious leaders.” In ed. Oke, *Proceedings of the International Congress of Dialogue on Civilizations, Religions and Cultures.*, (Paris: UNESCO, 2005): 33

³⁰³ Jessops et. al., “The ripe moment”: 101

³⁰⁴ Interview: Reverend/Regional Coordinator of the IRCSL South, Kakua 2012.

³⁰⁵ Appleby, Scott R., *The Ambivalence of the Sacred*, (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2000): 202

war.³⁰⁶ Simultaneously, the IRCSL also coordinated its efforts with the United Nations and other international actors to conduct an assessment of emergency relief needs in RUF-held territories.³⁰⁷ Humanitarian aid was not limited to the functioning of the IRCSL however, as many member organizations also embarked on their own initiatives and post-conflict relief programs.

Amongst many contributions from various churches and mosques across the country, interviewees brought attention to the contributions of the Catholic Church who provided material support in the form of food, child tracing, and aid with rebuilding homes, which was open to all displaced Catholics.³⁰⁸ Others, such as the Pentecostal Church refashioned their deliverance of messages to more meaningfully address their members' experiences and understandings of the conflict.³⁰⁹ Re-framing can be seen as an attempt to understand the actions and motivations of the wrongdoer in a wider context or in a 'different frame of reference'.³¹⁰ Through their use of prayers, sermons, dramas, and movies, the Pentecostal Church aided in the reframing their experiences and 'demonic memories' with imagery of the underworld and the concept of spiritual warfare.³¹¹ By reframing these experiences, the Pentecostal Church aided in what Arne Grøn emphasizes as religion's best asset in post-conflict reconciliation: the ability to offer an alternate perspective in which "humans can articulate experiences of evil that are beyond

³⁰⁶ Philpott, Daniel, "When faith meets history: the influence of religion on transitional justice" in ed. Brudhom, Thomas and Cushman, Thomas, *The religious in response to mass atrocity: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009). 196

³⁰⁷ Turay, "Civil society and peacebuilding": 53

³⁰⁸ Interview: National Coordinator, Sierra Leone Association for Non-Governmental Organizations (SLANGO), Freetown 2012

³⁰⁹ Shaw "Displacing Violence": 85

³¹⁰ Bash, Anthony, *Forgiveness and Christian Ethics*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007): 42

³¹¹ Shaw "Displacing Violence": 88

understanding.”³¹² For those religious institutions with less financial backing, efforts were frequently made to provide people with rice, used clothing, and assorted cooking items. Others with less material wealth still, actively sought to help people resettle themselves in their communities and homes and to forget about what has happened.³¹³

Another way in which the IRC SL and its member organizations were active in the post-conflict phase is through their numerous country-wide sensitization campaigns and sermons. Drawing on the shared beliefs in forgiveness and reconciliation found across all three major religions,³¹⁴ the IRC SL embarked on a series of talks and sensitization initiatives for their religious leaders as well as those who make up the broader population. One representative of the IRC SL stated that “we brought Christian and Muslim leaders together so when we talk, they will take the messages back.”³¹⁵ By encouraging these leaders to spread the message of the Council, the IRC SL allowed both Christians and Muslims to “tell the people about the importance of unity and peace in their own ways.”³¹⁶ As all three religions emphasize the “pre-eminence of God, love, charity, good neighborliness, respect for the law, and particularly justice and tolerance of group differences”³¹⁷, the Council delivered messages that spoke to all Sierra Leoneans despite

³¹² Grøn, Arne. “The limit of ethics- The ethics of the limit” in ed. Brudhom, Thomas and Cushman, Thomas, *The religious in response to mass atrocity: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009): 39; 41

³¹³ Interview: Reverend, Small Bo Chiefdom 2012.

³¹⁴ Phipott, “When faith meets history”: 189 and Conteh, “Inter-Religious Encounters”: 58. Though Phipott argues that the concept of reconciliation is very entrenched in the Abrahamic religions, Conteh makes a valid argument that ATR also shares similar values.

³¹⁵ Interview: Reverend/ Regional Coordinator of IRC SL South, Kakua 2012.

³¹⁶ Interview: Sheik/ Chairman of the United Council of Imams, East/ District Chief Imam, Nongowa, 2012.

³¹⁷ Adegbite, Dr. Lateef, “The role of religious leaders in conflict resolution” in ed. Oke, *Proceedings of the International Congress on Dialogue on Civilizations, Religion and Cultures in West Africa*, (Paris: UNESCO, 2005): 35- Though Adegbite speaks primarily of Christianity and Islam, Conteh (2011) makes the case that ATR is very similar to these religions as it shares many of the same values.

their religious inclinations. As a result, Sierra Leoneans were provided with a discourse that encouraged unity, harmony, social cohesion, and reconciliation.

Seeking to spread their message across the entire country, the IRCSL preached to those who took up arms as well as those who did not in the hopes of bringing a common understanding and triggering forgiveness and reconciliation amongst the people.³¹⁸ In preaching to those that took up arms, one representative of the IRCSL gave a brief example of the types of messages that religious leaders should use. When addressing populations of ex-combatants who may or may not have had yet to disarm, religious leaders were encouraged to:

Tell them they are important, how they are needed in the community, their environment, and how they should make good use of the opportunities that lie ahead of them. We told them of the opportunities that they would have when they would lay down their arms.³¹⁹

When targeting the larger population, these sensitization efforts sought to bring awareness to the consequences of the war and to foster a sense of sustainable reconciliation. As explained by a representative of the IRCSL, “After the rebel war we held a series of reconciliation workshops, we brought people together, we told them the effects of war, how it had damaged the country, and how the footings that it would bring.”³²⁰ Through these efforts, the council “realized that peace depended on the people of Sierra Leone being prepared for and wanting peace.”³²¹ Should the locals be set on revenge and hostility, the population would be less likely to support the negotiations that gave the RUF a prominent voice in the peace settlements.³²² Not only did the council initiate these activities during the war leading into the peace settlement, they continued

³¹⁸ Interview: Paramount Chief Small Bo, 2012.

³¹⁹ Interview: Reverend/Regional Coordinator of IRCSL South, Kakua 2012

³²⁰ Interview: Reverend/Regional Coordinator of IRCSL South, Kakua 2012

³²¹ Jessops et. al., “The ripe moment”: 101

³²² Ibid: 101

to spread similar messages once peace was established. In addition to the workshops, the IRCSL was also involved in the traditional communal bonfires used in the villages to provide forums in which all the community members can come together and tell their stories of the war. These bonfires, in tandem with the workshops and sensitization campaigns encouraged the people to come together and to consider forgiveness and reconciliation.³²³ And these efforts were not in vain. In one study drawing parallels between religion and forgiveness, and the effect it had on street children in Sierra Leone who had previously been physically abused, it was demonstrated the children in Bo and Freetown were very likely to forgive those who abused them.

Interestingly, while most respondents from Bo and Freetown were wary of personally forgiving those who committed physical and sexual violence against them during the war, 94% in Bo and 93% in Freetown asked that the people of Sierra Leone forgive those who abused them during the war.³²⁴ These results reflect what the author of the study refers to as the wholesale acceptance of a form of “blanket forgiveness”, which was likely advocated for by the religious institutions and influential traditional authorities.³²⁵

The difference between these sensitization campaigns and those of the international community is that while the international initiatives sought to deliver relevant information and jumpstart the reconciliation process, these religiously-driven campaigns were able to utilize their pre-existing credibility and influence to spread messages that they knew would resonate with the

³²³ Interview: Reverend/ Regional Coordinator of IRCSL South, Kakua 2012.

³²⁴ Hinton, Samuel, *Street Children in Sierra Leone who Forgive those who Physically and Sexually Abuse them: A Quantitative and Qualitative Analysis*, Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2009: 73, 79. Hinton’s study accounts for populations in Freetown and Bo but not for Kenema. Hinton argues that one of the reasons for encouraging such widespread forgiveness is because much of the violence was done by the victims themselves, many of whom were children and youth. In response, many Sierra Leoneans have overwhelmingly supported the concept of reconciliation through a form of ‘blanket forgiveness’ which would allow the country to put the war behind them and move on.

³²⁵ Ibid: 79

local population. Based on their unique position as community leaders, religious leaders “have the privilege of having committed large audiences in many African countries”, Sierra Leone included.³²⁶ When discussing inter-religious councils in general, William Vendley argues that through these unique positions, religious leaders and their communities possess important social, moral, and spiritual assets for aiding in the post-conflict peacebuilding phase. As these religious social institutions can be found in all communities and almost all villages, they “represent significant channels for communication and action.”³²⁷ Vendley continues to explain that as far as their moral assets go, religious leaders “are uniquely positioned to sell their moral stature and influence to encourage mutual understanding within their communities.”³²⁸ By using a familiar intimate vocabulary drawing from shared conceptions of suffering and failure and of success and happiness, these institutions can draw on a shared communal identity that existed prior to the conflict. In terms of their spiritual assets, these institutions can provide their followers with great amounts of courage and strength in times of suffering and human wickedness as “they can make available the strength to bear the unbearable”, provide hope to those that have lost it, and can encourage those to forgive when forgiveness hardly seems like an option.³²⁹

Why this Worked in Sierra Leone

More often than not, conflicting views between religions is a source of disagreement and conflict. As foreign religious institutions took root in Africa, many “began to experience

³²⁶ Isizoh, “Managing conflicts”: 32

³²⁷ Vendley, “The power of Inter-Religious cooperation”: 94

³²⁸ Ibid: 94

³²⁹ Ibid: 94

conflicts between themselves in the course of their establishment on the continent.”³³⁰ Conflicts of doctrines, tenets, and interests began to manifest as each tried to build their strength and influence through the recruit of the newly converted. In many cases, these new recruits would reinforce the divisions between the two dominant religions.³³¹ In the case of Sierra Leone however, the two religions that are often a source of conflict are able to successfully cooperate together and enjoy a mutual respect and tolerance for one another. Assessing the societal preconditions for such tolerance reveals that this cooperation is primarily the product of some significant social factors. Social factors such as a long history of religiously-mixed families, the shared celebrations between both religions, and the education of tolerance and understanding have created an environment that is conducive to religious cooperation and the fostering of reconciliation. Sierra Leone is a society of acceptance which enjoys a large degree of religious and ethnic tolerance and cooperation, neither of which was compromised during the war. Drawing from the social tolerance of the people of Sierra Leone and building off of their pre-existing credibility, these religious institutions were able to provide meaningful and sustainable reconciliation which ultimately lead to the successful reintegration of Sierra Leone’s ex-combatants. To fully understand this process, a brief description of the necessary background conditions for this effect to be successful is required.

Social Factors Conducive to Success

Many social factors contribute to the distinct religious tolerance characterizing Sierra Leone. One such factor is that of family heritage. Across Sierra Leone, it is not uncommon to find both

³³⁰ Oke, Finagnon Mathias, “How religious leaders can contribute to solving problems in times of conflict?” in Oke, *Proceedings of the International Congress on Dialogue on Civilizations, Religion and Cultures in West Africa*, (Paris: UNESCO, 2005): 50

³³¹ *Ibid*, 50

Muslims and Christians in one family, coexisting peacefully and all equally contributing to the wellbeing of the family. Extending beyond the family unit, this mosaic can be found at the clan, village, and community level.³³² One of the contributing factors to this type of multi-religious family composition is inter-marriage. “Within the Sierra Leone social milieu, there is a cross-cultural ethnic interaction manifested in the form of inter-marriages, friendships, and other social areas of human relationship.”³³³ Inter-marriage between Christians and Muslims is very common as it is seen to fall in line with the religious doctrines. For Muslims, “Islamic law makes provision for the marriage of a Muslim man to a Christian woman because Christians fall under the analytical category of ‘People of the Scriptures’”³³⁴ Field observations confirm this point as it was not uncommon to find couples in which one partner of one religion or ethnicity, male or female, was married or in a serious relationship with a person from a different religion or ethnicity. In most cases, the couples will have their marriages solemnized in both religious institutions: a church and a mosque, usually on the same day.³³⁵

Additionally, it is not uncommon to see both Muslims and Christians attending each other’s institutions and celebrating one another’s religious holidays and ceremonies. In many cases, and reported in other studies, the friendly relations between the two institutions allowed for many Muslims to attend church if they so desired, and many Christians to attend mosque. This phenomenon is generally more pronounced in urban areas where the populations tend to be more heterogeneous than in the smaller villages.³³⁶ Similarly, Muslims will join their Christian friends and family in the celebration of Christmas, Easter, and many other religious or church

³³² Conteh, *Inter-Religious Encounters*: 19

³³³ Sillah, “Islam in Sierra Leone”: 122

³³⁴ Conteh, *Inter-Religious Encounters*: 19

³³⁵ *Ibid*, 19

³³⁶ Coulter, Chris. *Bush Wives and Girl Soldiers*: 62

festivals. Alternatively, many Christians across the country will join their Muslim friends and family in the celebrations of “Ramadan, *Idul-Fitri*, *Idul-Adha*, and *Maulidu’l-Nabi*- the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad.”³³⁷ In one interview, it was explained how every year Sierra Leone sends 149 people to Mecca for the Islamic pilgrimage- one representative of each of the 149 chiefdoms in the country. As the costs of such an operation add up, it was explained that the majority of the donors who provide scholarships for these individuals to partake are Christians.³³⁸ Furthermore, the interviewee explained how in most large organizations across the country, if the number one person is a Christian, the number two will usually be a Muslim, and vice versa. The sharing of celebrations, support for one another, and power within large organizations ensures that one religion will not be perceived as showing disrespect for or overpowering the other.

The last social factor enabling the peaceful coexistence of the two dominant religions is that of education. Under the subject of “Religious and Moral Education”, students across the country are educated in the basic principles of all three religions: Islam, Christianity, and ATR.³³⁹ Reinforcing the need for programs such as this for instilling religious tolerance across West Africa, Dr. Lateef Adegbite explains that in order to ensure a proper understanding of each other’s religion, “citizens must be taught the elements of their own religion as well as those of other dominant faiths in their community.” Such an education would bolster respect for one another and would reduce the fear of each other as “people tend to be afraid of what they do not understand.”³⁴⁰ By understanding the distinctions, and without drawing a separation, students

³³⁷ Conteh, *Inter-Religious Encounters*: 19

³³⁸ Interview: Sheik/ Chairman of the United Council of Imams, East/ District Chief Imam, Nongowa, 2012.

³³⁹ Conteh, *Inter-Religious Encounters*: 20

³⁴⁰ Adegbite, “The role of religious leaders”: 36

gain the ability to appreciate and understand each other's views and can build off the similarities and shared, common values supported by all three religions.

Interestingly, evidence of such cooperation and tolerance can be found at the beginning of all state functions as both Muslim and Christian prayers will typically be offered.³⁴¹ Similarly, when attending concerts, performances, speaking events, and other formal events, prayers are offered for both Muslims and Christians. This practice is supported by the international community as they also tend to adhere to these social norms. In one instance, a Christian-sponsored international NGO held a series of concerts and competitions to spread the message of a peaceful and fair 2012 Presidential elections. At the beginning of every concert, both Christian and Muslim prayers were conducted out of respect for both faiths. Having the international community reinforce this practice further solidifies and encourages Sierra Leone's high degree of religious tolerance.³⁴²

Upon assessing the social tendencies of the people of Sierra Leone, one can conclude that the presence of these specific social factors has provided a nurturing environment for the historical and on-going religious and ethnic tolerance. It is this very environment that provided the opportunities for religious CSOs to establish meaningful long-term reconciliation.

Explaining Success

Alongside flourishing in an environment conducive for sentiments of acceptance and tolerance, one of the primary explanations to account for the successes of these programs vis-à-vis their IGO and NGO counterparts is their status as pre-existing. Because of their historical roots and their presence before the conflict, these institutions were able to provide both perpetrators and

³⁴¹ Conteh, *Inter-Religious Encounters*: 20

³⁴² Field Observations in Kenema and Freetown 2012.

civilians with an already familiar avenue for reconciliation. Prior to the war, religious leaders enjoyed high degrees of respect from their communities where their decisions were rarely challenged by their followers.³⁴³ In Sierra Leone's post-conflict society, religious leaders still enjoy large degrees of respect. The respect for these religions extends beyond the leaders however, as one can frequently see "poda podas"-commercial, privately owned mini buses- and taxis with religious scriptures painted onto them, often blending both Islamic and Christian expressions, values, and symbols on one vehicle.³⁴⁴

Within the IRC SL specifically, many of the members had already established long-standing relationships with their communities before the war in which they were able to build off of throughout the course of the peace process.³⁴⁵ This time-tested relationship benefited from the pre-established trust of the citizens which enabled this organization to act as an effective mediator during the negotiations and to provide an effective delivery of post-conflict messages of reconciliation. Furthermore, because of their pre-existing legitimacy and their proximity to the conflict throughout the entire war, this organization was given more credibility in the eyes of the warring parties.³⁴⁶ This perceived credibility, it could be argued, likely extended beyond the key players of the peace process to those in the communities who would eventually be the recipients of many sensitization campaigns, sermons, and messages of reconciliation initiated by this organization and its mosques and churches. Furthermore, it should be emphasized that their status of pre-existing would suggest that within the interviews used, the reputations of these

³⁴³ Isizoh, "Managing conflicts": 29

³⁴⁴ Ibid: 31. This is confirmed by field observations where it was noted that an overwhelming majority of poda podas in Sierra Leone were decorated with both Islamic and Christian religious symbols and expressions.

³⁴⁵ Jessop et. al., "The ripe moment": 107

³⁴⁶ Ibid, 107

institutions or leaders had little at stake and are not reflecting the need to defend their creation as a product of post-conflict peacebuilding initiatives.

While looking in hindsight, many interviews conducted across all four chiefdoms and Freetown expressed similar sentiments. As one interviewee who oversees all IGO and NGO programs noted:

A lot of our reconciliation was religiously-based because we are a very religious country, are very tolerant. Nobody really cares if you are Christian or Muslim, it is still reconciliation. And everything we did was in both faiths anyways. Here people have a high regard for religion.³⁴⁷

Over the course of the interview, the same interviewee explained how in many cases because of the confusion surrounding what was to be expected from the reconciliation programs offered by many of the IGOs and NGOs, “that’s why everyone went back to their own religion of socialization.” According to this interviewee, and stressed in numerous other interviews, the initiatives undertaken by these religious institutions were successful because they were already adapted to the ways of the people.

They knew our customs and how to work with them and how to work around them. So when this happened, they were already with the people, they already knew the way the people thought.³⁴⁸

Support for the activities of the IRCSL, churches and mosques across the country were reiterated by the Paramount Chiefs of Small Bo, Kakua, and Tikonko, as well as international and national development and human rights NGOs.³⁴⁹ This finding is significant because many

³⁴⁷ Interview: National Coordinator, Sierra Leone Association for Non-Governmental Organizations (SLANGO), Freetown 2012

³⁴⁸ Interview: National Coordinator, Sierra Leone Association for Non-Governmental Organizations (SLANGO), Freetown 2012

³⁴⁹ Unfortunately the question of religious institutions was not asked to the Speaker of the Chief for Nongowa because at that point the research had not yet taken this religious direction.

of those who endorsed the efforts made by the religious institutions were often working in other areas. Interviews used to support this argument have been drawn from those with no affiliations to these institutions. In most cases, religious authorities commented on the initiatives that they did, while evidence of support for these initiatives is taken from academic sources, traditional authorities, and other development NGOs that work in different fields.

Moving beyond the contributions of the religious institutions primarily representative of the Muslim and Christian faiths, it is crucial to assess the role of traditional practices and their relevant authorities in the reconciliation process. While most Sierra Leoneans are followers of either Islam or Christianity, the overlap of these two faiths with ATR and other traditional practices makes exploring the role of traditional religions and practices in the reconciliation process a worthwhile endeavor. Rooted in the pre-colonial era, traditional authorities, ceremonies, and rituals historically held considerable power and influence over the people of Sierra Leone. These traditional institutional structures continue to remain a credible and legitimate source of guidance encompassing the political, economic, and social organization of the people as well as their personal lives.

Pre-Colonial Traditional Authorities and Practices

In pre-colonial Sierra Leone, ethnic groups were organized as large states with sophisticated social, economic, and political systems. Ruling over these states were the traditional Kings, Queens, and other 'big men'. Despite being the primary ruler for these states, these authorities were subject to the same laws as their dependents and were subject to appeals should their dependents disagree with their rulings. Surrounding themselves with a group of close advisors

such as sub-chiefs and elders, these authorities were rarely in a position to make large decisions that would affect the communities without the counsel of their advisors.³⁵⁰

Within the Mende-dominated areas, the main ethnicity addressed by this thesis, the region was broken down into two different types of states: “personal amorphous states” and territorial states³⁵¹. In the personal amorphous state, territorial boundaries depended on the preferences of the ruling king. Dependents primarily identified themselves with their ruling king rather than with their state. Alternatively, territorial states had fixed boundaries where dependents identified themselves with the state rather than with the ruling king. In this situation, identification with the state would remain constant regardless of who the ruling authority was. Within these states, settlements typically consisted of chiefdoms which could further be broken down into ‘open’ villages and stockade towns, and ‘war towns’. Within the chiefdoms’ open villages, the primary residences of the dependents, economic activities flourished, while in the war towns, matters of defense were of utmost priority.³⁵² Like most modern states, authority was delegated to various sub-chiefs in different towns and villages.

As for societal life, secret societies such as the Poro or Wonde for boys, and the Bondo or Sande for girls served as institutions for education in societal skills, expectations, and norms. Relying heavily on the use of traditional ceremonies and rituals, these societies set the conditions of what it meant and what it didn’t mean to be a Mende man or woman. In Poro, a society that is

³⁵⁰ Alie, *A New History of Sierra Leone*: 14

³⁵¹ Ibid: 14. Alie borrows Arthur Abraham’s term “personal amorphous states” in his description of the political organization of the Mende peoples. For more information on Abraham’s classifications, please see: Abraham, Arthur, *Mende Government and Politics Under Colonial Rule*, (Sierra Leone and Oxford University Press, 1978)

³⁵² Alie, *A New History of Sierra Leone*: 16-17

controlled by “spirits who are representative of masked figures”,³⁵³ boys acquired knowledge in the areas of medicine, politics, and government. In certain societies, education also extended to military training.³⁵⁴ On occasion, members of Poro would perform political and economic roles regarding the status of the king or would act as arbitrator for chieftom disputes. In Bondo, girls were educated in family matters, homecraft, childcare, and sex matters.³⁵⁵ In both organizations, initiates are thought of as being swallowed by the spirits of Poro and Sande and are sworn to secrecy about the details of their initiation.³⁵⁶ Participation in these secret societies was highly regarded as initiates would come out as societal members of high esteem and suitable for marriage.³⁵⁷

Alongside these secret societies, many other cultural associations existed such as the Humoi and the Njaye. The Humoi, a women’s medicine society, is composed of powerful healers of infertility, venereal diseases, and regulators of sexual conduct amongst the Mende. The Njaye, on the other hand, is a cultural association in which leaders could bring about good or bad luck depending on which actions they decided to take.³⁵⁸ In the pre-colonial period, the activities of traditional rulers, their states, and the secret societies were highly interwoven. Dependent on one another, traditional beliefs, ceremonies, and rituals stemming from these

³⁵³ Awolalu, Omosade J. and Dopamu, Adelumo, P., *West African Traditional Religion*, (Ibadan, Onibonoje Press & Book Industries (Nig.) Limited, 1979): 233

³⁵⁴ Alie, *A New History of Sierra Leone*: 24-25

³⁵⁵ Alie, *A New History of Sierra Leone*: 24-25

³⁵⁶ Awolalu, Omosade J. and Dopamu, Adelumo, P., *West African Traditional Religion*: 234-235

³⁵⁷ Day, Linda, *Gender and Power in Sierra Leone: Women Chiefs of the Last Two Centuries*, (New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2012): 91 Day explains how one woman chief’s secret society was highly sought after by girls as it was a source of prestige and implied the girls would be married to high-ranking men. The prestige associated with membership in these societies was echoed in interviews with political figures and ordinary citizens who boasted their membership as it gave them the ability to become citizens of high esteem and could lead to prominent political careers.

³⁵⁸ Day, *Gender and Power in Sierra Leone*: 20-21

societies and others like them, were woven into the political, economic, and social fabric of everyday life.

With the arrival of the British in the early nineteenth century, trade began to increase and gradually make its way into the hinterlands.³⁵⁹ As a result of increased trade, competition between traditional rulers and other prominent natives began to intensify and in some cases, resulted in war. As prices for these new exotic commodities fell in Europe on account of the World Trade Depression of the 1870s and 1880s, the British mistakenly associated the wars of the hinterlands as the sole reason for their declining profits and gradually began to advocate for more regulation in the area. In an attempt to regulate these trade-wars and to stop the encroachment of French colonial rule in the North, the area now known as Guinea, pressure mounted for the British to consolidate their power.³⁶⁰

Colonial Rule and the Creation of Chieftaincy

As a result of mounting pressure to consolidate its power, British colonizers declared Sierra Leone a Protectorate in 1896. Within this new system of indirect rule, Kings, Queens, and other big-men were made to relinquish some of their political and economic powers and become subordinate authorities to the District Commissioners who claimed jurisdictional power over their chiefdoms. Along with the change in their political and economic powers came the change in names as their titles of Kings and Queens were replaced with “Paramount Chiefs”.³⁶¹

Assigned tasks such as tax collection, the maintenance of peace and order, and the recruitment of chiefdom residents for manual labour, Paramount Chiefs “became intermediaries between their

³⁵⁹ The term ‘hinterlands’ will be interchangeable with the term ‘provinces’. Both designate the areas outside of Freetown and the highly populated Western Area.

³⁶⁰ Alie, *A New History of Sierra Leone*: 118-126

³⁶¹ Sillah, “Islam in Sierra Leone”: 123

people in the chiefdoms and the British colonial administration in Freetown, the central seat of government.”³⁶² Should a traditional ruler object to these duties, they were deposed and replaced by a ruler who would act in favour of the colonial administration. Alternatively, those Paramount Chiefs who supported the new regime ruled for life. Within this new system of governance, British administrators could directly control the selection of Paramount Chiefs. Potential candidates for this post “could be confirmed in office if they had descended from a Chief recognized by the British, if they were believed to be able to collect tax, and if they were willing to cooperate with British policies.”³⁶³ As a result of the taxes now being collected and the recruitment of free labour, Chiefs gained increasing opportunities to exploit the inhabitants of their chiefdoms.³⁶⁴

After a few years, the British decided to levy a tax on all the residents of the Protectorate. In response to the unpopular decision, one Paramount Chief named Bai Bureh decided to defy this decision and mobilize his warriors. The confrontation between the colonial administrators and the warriors in 1898 became known as the Hut Tax war. Although Bai Bureh and his chieftaincy allies were ultimately defeated, this war helped to instill sentiments of African nationalism. In the following years, grievances would grow and attacks would be directed towards those chiefs who actively collaborated with the colonial government.³⁶⁵

Chieftaincy in the Post-Colonial Period

In 1961, Sierra Leone became an independent state. The initial years after independence were marked as a time when political parties and structures shifted and splintered in an attempt to

³⁶² Ibid: 123

³⁶³ Day, *Gender and Power in Sierra Leone*: 112

³⁶⁴ Ibid: 115

³⁶⁵ Sillah “Islam in Sierra Leone”: 123-124

establish their national identities. In 1973, however, the APC party under the leadership of Siaka Stevens won a majority which would go on to declare a one-party state in 1978.³⁶⁶ Despite being able to further unite the country under one political group, Stevens' rule was characterized by increasing corruption and authoritarian practices.³⁶⁷ As political and economic power became increasingly centralized in Freetown, institutions such as the local governments were abolished.³⁶⁸ In addition to abolishing these structures, the ruling government began to use local Chiefs as a way of rallying support for candidates during elections, therefore reducing many of the traditional authorities to mere tools of the state. Consequently, the institution of chieftaincy during this time became increasingly associated with the kleptocratic tendencies of those ruling in Freetown.³⁶⁹

Chieftaincy and the Civil War

The issue of chieftaincy in the war was at one point a contentious issue, but has now settled as many have voiced similar views reinforcing one another. Initially, one argument put forth by Paul Richards suggested that local grievances against the traditional authorities in the chiefdoms largely contributed to the swell in the RUF's rank and file.³⁷⁰ From this perspective, the civil war was representative of a sort of slave revolt in which the oppressed youth of the hinterland revolted against the oppressive and decadent tendencies of the traditional authorities.

Alternatively, arguments presented by Richard Fanthorpe demonstrate that during the war, as well as in the post-war period, Sierra Leoneans expressed grievances towards the abuses

³⁶⁶ Alie, *A New History of Sierra Leone*: 240-244

³⁶⁷ Ibid: 248-249

³⁶⁸ Jackson, Paul, "Reshuffling an old deck of cards? The politics of Local Government reform in Sierra Leone" *African Affairs*, 106(422), (2006): 102

³⁶⁹ Jackson, "Reshuffling an old deck of cards?": 95

³⁷⁰ Richards, Paul, "To fight or to farm? Agrarian Dimensions of the Mano River conflicts (Liberia and Sierra Leone)" *African Affairs* 104(417), (2005): 571-590

of other political bodies such as the national government and its bureaucracy. Past criticisms of political authority have not, and are not, exclusive to traditional authorities³⁷¹. Recalling Abdullah's account of the rise of the RUF, it should not be forgotten that the underclass of the larger cities in Sierra Leone also contributed the rebel groups in terms of numbers and force. The lack of the APC's accountability and the declining socioeconomic conditions indicates that the resentment of the RUF fighters extended far beyond the scope of the rural chieftaincies. Although many traditional authorities and cultural traditions were targeted by the RUF, as they were generally "perceived as part of the corrupt and decadent system that the insurgents wanted to get rid of"³⁷², so too were all other authority figures, leaving no direct evidence that the RUF reserved a special targeting for the institution of chieftaincy.³⁷³ Numerous other scholars have reinforced this claim, some by further explaining that as the rebels were:

resentful of the cozy relationship shared by traditional rural elite, local politicians and national party officials, elements of the rural poor and urban underclass blindly struck out against any and all operatives of the state.³⁷⁴

In some cases, traditional authorities attempted to help the rebels with foodstuffs and medicine in exchange for their word that they would leave their chiefdoms undisturbed. Unfortunately, in many cases however, this relationship collapsed and traditional authorities were forced to flee, leaving behind their chiefdoms and their dependents.³⁷⁵ In other instances, the armed insurgents would either fill the vacant post or replace the local traditional authority

³⁷¹ Fanthorpe, Richard, "On the limits of liberal peace: Chiefs and democratic decentralization in post-war Sierra Leone", *African Affairs*, 105(418), (2005): 27-49

³⁷² Alie, Joe A.D., "Reconciliation and traditional justice: tradition-based practices of the Kpaa Mende in Sierra Leone", in *Traditional Justice and Reconciliation after Violent Conflict: Learning from the African Experiences*, (International Institution for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, 2008): 140

³⁷³ Fanthorpe, Richard, "On the limits of liberal peace": 31

³⁷⁴ Day, *Gender and Power in Sierra Leone*: 150

³⁷⁵ *Ibid*: 158

with inappropriate authorities such as “Town Commanders”³⁷⁶. Town commanders were usually selected locals who could organize the town residents for labour, cooking, and fighting. In the TRC transcripts, testimonies spoke of the new authority figures maintaining favourable relations with the rebel groups. Those who attempted to defy this new responsibility or to flee would be punished and killed.³⁷⁷ In other instances still, when traditional authorities did successfully cooperate with the insurgent groups, they became useful tools for civil-military liaison.³⁷⁸

Furthermore, in some instances the institution of chieftaincy even played an active role in the conflict. In response to the indiscriminate violence used by the rebels and the military, check points began to be erected across the south to secure the villages from attacks. Concurrently, chiefs and local elites within the internally displaced persons (IDP) camps began to mobilize and organize the civil defense militias.³⁷⁹ One Paramount Chief from the Gbongor chiefdom by the name of Samuel Hinga Norman took a lead role in commanding the Komajor militia. As the Komajors were primarily based on traditional identities stemming from the Mende ethnicity, the most suitable leadership was that of a Paramount Chief who was familiar with the traditional hunting society and the rituals and ceremonies associated with this group.³⁸⁰ Within the movement, some of the occult practices used “drew heavily from Islam (or purportedly Islamic) symbolism, narratives, and myth.”³⁸¹ For some, small pieces of paper written in Arabic allegedly from the Koran, could be attached to clothing, strategically placed in places of battle. Another

³⁷⁶ *Witness to Truth: Report of the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission*: For examples in which testimonies speak of town commanders see Volume 3B: 239, 269, 295, 351. For evidence that both the Komajors and the RUF used town commanders see the testimonies on pages 146 and 248.

³⁷⁷ *Witness to Truth*: Appendix 3: 248

³⁷⁸ Fanthorpe, “On the limits of liberal peace”: 31

³⁷⁹ Hoffman, Danny, *The War Machines*: 39

³⁸⁰ Englebert, Pierre, “Patterns and Theories of Traditional Resurgence in Tropical Africa” *Mondes en Développement*, 2(118), (2002):55

³⁸¹ Hoffman, Danny, *The War Machines*: 229

example of the type of rituals and ceremonies used involves the initiation. Initiation into the militia entailed a traditional ceremony that turned new initiates invisible before they would be given weapons.³⁸² Additionally, it is reported in the TRC Final Report that the Komajor faction often underwent rituals involving cannibalism and magic to initiate their new recruits.³⁸³ As community leaders began to take leadership roles in the organization of these forces, so too did some of the ritual specialists for their knowledge of the preparation of occult protections such as rituals and washing with special medicines used by those in the defense militias.³⁸⁴

Chieftaincy in the Post-Conflict Period

Since the advent of colonial rule, the institution of chieftaincy has seen a lot of turbulence in which these authorities have sometimes defended their chiefdoms admirably, and sometimes exploited them for personal advancement. Coming out of the war, as Sierra Leone restructured many of its core state institutions, doubt resided over the issue of reinstating the institution of chieftaincy. With their ongoing influence in the provinces and their potential to be the primary representatives of their chiefdoms however, the institution was reinstated, though somewhat reformed.³⁸⁵

In an attempt to deconstruct the causes of the war, political power was decentralized from Freetown and shifted outward to the provinces. One of the key documents to this reform, the Local Government Act of 2004, reconfirmed the status of chieftaincy, which would be delegated

³⁸² Miller, Derek, Ladouceur, Daniel, and Dugal, Zoe, *From Research to Road Map: Learning from the Arms for Development Initiative in Sierra Leone*, (UNIDIR, United Nations Publications, 2006): 27

³⁸³ *Witness to Truth: Appendix 3A: 496-497*

³⁸⁴ Hoffman, Danny, *The War Machines: 40*

³⁸⁵ Jackson, "Reshuffling an old deck of cards?": 95-96 Jackson states that popular perceptions of Chieftaincy remained in the post-war period, though with a bit a reservation, and ultimately the people of Sierra Leone supported the reform of chieftaincy rather than the abolishment of the institution. With the Local Government Act of 2004, the institution was reformed from its previous pre-war state.

functions from the Local Councils for each District.³⁸⁶ Having historically played important roles in the organization of their chiefdoms for things such as military mobilization and development, these authorities continue to be perceived as key players to the reconstruction and as the primary agents of development in their respective chiefdoms.³⁸⁷ Overseeing the collection of taxes, the creation and enforcement of by-laws, and issues of land tenure, the traditional authorities “are the highest decision-making bodies in the chiefdoms.”³⁸⁸ It should be emphasized that because of their status as “Custodians of the land”, having the Paramount Chief and the traditional land-owning families endorse the wholesale acceptance of ex-combatants back into the community is vital for resettlement in these areas. Other areas that they oversee became apparent during the 2012 Presidential election campaigning as Paramount Chiefs were responsible for: civic education and sensitization; role models in the behaviour for elections; voter mobilization; ensure credible polls; and to maintain their fatherly/motherly roles to both winners and losers of the election.³⁸⁹

In addition to their political functions, traditional authorities have also taken responsibilities in the judicial sector. As a remnant of colonial rule, Sierra Leone currently uses a bifurcated legal system that incorporates both customary law and English common law. For most Sierra Leoneans, traditional methods of justice remain the primary avenue for the redress of violations and rights of law. Working at the chiefdom levels, the Local Courts are the primary

³⁸⁶ Fanthorpe, “On the limits of liberal peace”: 34-35

³⁸⁷ Regional Conference of Paramount Chiefs, Southern Region, *Conference held in Bo for the Southern Province in Promoting Non-Violent, Free and Credible Elections. Communiqué* (2012); Interview: Minister of Social Welfare, Women’s, and Children’s Issues, Freetown 2012.

³⁸⁸ Koroma, Paul, “Decentralisation and peacebuilding in Sierra Leone” in ed. Elizabeth Drew and Alexander Ramsbotham *Accord: An International Review of Peace Initiatives*, (London: Conciliation Resources, 2012): 31

³⁸⁹ Regional Conference of Paramount Chiefs, Southern Region, *Conference held in Bo for the Southern Province in Promoting Non-Violent, Free and Credible Elections. Communiqué* (2012)

authorities for adjudicating cases within customary law including land claims, customary law marriages, small disputes, property rights, and inheritance.³⁹⁰ For those in remote villages however, reliance on the Paramount Chiefs, Section Chiefs, and village headmen for the mediation of cases remains the primary avenue of redress due to their proximity and understanding of traditional values.³⁹¹ As corruption and politics are still capable of influencing the Local Courts, many in these chiefdoms have preferred to go to their local chiefs for the mediation of smaller disputes. In addition, because of the heavy load of court cases brought to the Local Courts, the Local Courts are sometimes forced to hand cases down to the Paramount Chief as a way of managing their time and availability.³⁹² Explaining in more detail, one interviewee noted that:

Even where the court system exists, it is not in every community or village that you have these operating. They operate mostly at the chiefdom headquarter towns. And because of distances, and again because of lack of faith of the people in these courts, they still go to their local chiefs.³⁹³

Although they are useful in terms of their proximity and knowledge of local customs, these “kangaroo courts” have recently been heavily criticized by those working for both national and international human rights organizations. Accusing the traditional authorities of more often than not collecting money, which would change their status as mediators to illegal adjudicators; these organizations claim that traditional authorities typically do not dispense proper justice.³⁹⁴ Despite

³⁹⁰ Interview: Local Court, Kakua 2012

³⁹¹ Sawyer, Edward, “Remove or reform? A case for (restructuring) chiefdom governance in post-conflict Sierra Leone”, *African Affairs*, 107(428), (2008): 393

³⁹² Interview: Local Court Representative, Kakua 2012

³⁹³ Interview: Professor, Fourah Bay College, Freetown 2012

³⁹⁴ Interview: Kenema District Human Rights Committee Chairman, Nongowa, 2012. This statement was reiterated by a Paralegal working for an international human rights organization in Kakua, 2012.

the legitimacy of these operations remaining unclear, one cannot deny that they are playing a large role in the mediation of low-level disputes.

Beyond their political and judicial roles, the primary responsibility of these traditional authorities is to represent, protect, and promote the interests of their chiefdoms. Based on their historical record however, one would be justified in questioning their ability to do so. Evidence collected in the form of surveys and questionnaires reveal that despite the past abuses of some traditional authorities, Sierra Leoneans are, for the most part, supportive of this institution. In terms of popular support, amongst the rural poor, many prefer traditional authorities to their elected politicians and governmental bureaucrats because “according to their calculation, chiefs are predisposed to defend the customary property and citizenship regimes that establish their own authority.”³⁹⁵ Because of their knowledge of traditional customs, many of the rural poor continue to support the institution of chieftaincy. Reinforcing this claim, research conducted by Edward Sawyer in three districts in Sierra Leone reveals that local support for traditional authorities remains strong in the post-conflict period.³⁹⁶ When asked if certain institutions in the area could resolve a conflict and maintain peace and security, 81% of Sierra Leoneans said “Yes” for village headmen and 78% for traditional authorities giving them a strong ranking next to their security sector counterparts. In regards to rural approval ratings, Sawyer’s research reveals that traditional authorities remain influential with village Headmen raking 2nd, followed by the Section Chiefs in 3rd, both following the churches and mosques.³⁹⁷ For many in the smaller chiefdoms, these authorities are the only visible and accessible elements of

³⁹⁵ Fanthorpe, “On the limits of liberal peace”: 45

³⁹⁶ Research conducted by Edward Sawyer surveyed locals from the Western Area (Freetown), the North (predominantly Temne peoples), and the East (predominantly Mende peoples)

³⁹⁷ Sawyer, “Remove or reform?": 396-399

government.³⁹⁸ Because of their proximity to the majority of Sierra Leoneans, the fact that most of those who fought came from chiefdoms in the provinces, and the traditional influence they wield, traditional authorities can be seen as instrumental players in the reintegration and reconciliation processes.³⁹⁹

Traditional Authorities and Reconciliation

After the war, traditional authorities promoted reconciliation in a variety of ways. As leaders of their chiefdoms, they took part in sensitization and advocated for reconciliation using a vocabulary that reconfirmed that the ex-combatants were ultimately brothers and sisters. As well as heading traditional rituals and ceremonies in the TRCs, traditional authorities led their own community level reconciliation initiatives in the form of traditional cleansing, purification, and acceptance ceremonies.

In the initial post-war period, traditional authorities embarked on similar projects of community sensitization and reconstruction as the NGOs and IGOs did. As described in one interview, all the traditional leaders in the Nongowa chiefdom met and discussed “that in order to have lasting peace in this country it was necessary to forgive the rebels who actually made mayhem on this country.”⁴⁰⁰ Traditional authorities themselves personally consoled individual families and communities by reminding them that these perpetrators were their family, their sons, their daughters, their brothers, and their sisters, and that it was important to accept them back despite the atrocities committed, as these were now things of the past.⁴⁰¹ Spreading

³⁹⁸ Jackson, “Reshuffling an old deck of cards?”: 95

³⁹⁹ Interview: Paramount Chiefs for the Tikonko and Kakua chiefdoms, Kakua 2012

⁴⁰⁰ Interview: Chiefdom Speaker for the Nongowa chiefdom, Nongowa 2012

⁴⁰¹ Interview: Deputy Chief Administrator, Bo City District Council, Kakua 2012. This statement was significant in that it came from a representative of the District Council, an institution that is typically disputing and in disagreement with the Chiefdom Councils. Over the course of many interviews, officials from the district councils

messages of forgiveness and reconciliation, and using vocabulary such as ‘our brothers and sisters in the bush’, traditional authorities used their social and cultural influence to encourage those within their chiefdoms to reconcile and accept back into society those ex-combatants that at one time may have harmed them directly or indirectly. Because of their traditional influence, “as traditional leaders [they] had their own part to play by advocating to the people, talking to the people, convincing the people, to buy the idea of embracing the ex-combatants.”⁴⁰² In addition to spreading these messages, chiefdom authorities aided and facilitated those who had their houses burned during the conflict. Similar findings were reported across the other three chiefdoms where in addition to encouraging the acceptance of their brothers and sisters, and in supporting the rebuilding of the community, traditional authorities also endorsed and helped create monuments in areas that had particular wartime significance, such as the Peace Junction in Bo, Kakua chiefdom.⁴⁰³

Evident in their participation in the TRCs, traditional authorities were also included in international efforts to produce lasting country-wide reconciliation. Research has demonstrated that in the initial phases of the TRCs in Sierra Leone, participation by ex-combatants was lower than anticipated. Recalling the challenges explained in the last chapter, ex-combatants worried that their participation in the truth commissions would disrupt their integration into civilian life, bring about unwanted memories, risk potential vengeance from the victims of the crimes, as well

would usually subtly insinuate that the chiefs were fussy and unreasonable in regards to issues of development and tax collection, issues which make up the bulk of their communication.

⁴⁰² Interview: Chiefdom Speaker for the Nongowa chiefdom, Nongowa 2012

⁴⁰³ The current Paramount Chief of the Small Bo chiefdom was unable to comment on specific reconstruction initiatives as he has only held this position for a few years and was not around in the initial post-conflict period. He did however, constantly use the vocabulary of brothers and sisters, demonstrating his willingness to continue to accept this group in his chiefdom.

as retaliation from other ex-combatants if they were to be implicated in some of the stories.⁴⁰⁴

When they did participate, research describes a situation in which many claimed to have never been directly involved in the conflict, by passing blame to the collective rather than admitting to their own personal culpability. With the implementation of traditional ceremonies and the participation of local Chiefs however, ex-combatant participation became more meaningful as many then offered pleas for forgiveness to their local Chiefs.⁴⁰⁵ Stated in the same study, even the most infamous ex-combatants present became more receptive and willing to cooperate in the act of truth-telling and forgiveness. Although the TRC made use of some traditional ceremonies and rituals headed by traditional authorities, one observer recalling the hearings said:

It is true they did recognize that these processes existed but the extent to which they made use of these processes is very limited [...] The hope was that after the TRC these indigenous structures would be strengthened and empowered to be able to do reconciliation at the community or village level. Unfortunately that did not happen.⁴⁰⁶

Although mentioned in the previous chapter that these traditional mechanisms had largely fallen to disuse as a result of their not being equipped to deal with mass atrocities, their partial bastardization during the war, and the advent of the Local Court system, value still remains however, in the communal cleansing, purification, and acceptance ceremonies headed by these traditional authorities at the community level. While religious institutions were able to successfully target the majority of Sierra Leoneans, traditional rituals and ceremonies conducted by Paramount Chiefs, Section Chiefs, village headmen, elders, and other relevant traditional

⁴⁰⁴ Shaw, “Memory Fictions: Localizing the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Sierra Leone” *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 1(2), (2007): 194

⁴⁰⁵ Kelsall, “Truth, lies, Ritual: Preliminary Reflections on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Sierra Leone”, *Human Rights Quarterly* 27(2), (2005):363,372, 379

⁴⁰⁶ Interview: Professor Fourah Bay College, Freetown 2012

authorities played a complementary role they engaged those who retained connections to their ATR beliefs.

Traditional Ceremonies and Rituals

Amongst the most influential traditional ceremonies and rituals listed in the interviews were the offering of sacrifices to the ancestors, cleansing ceremonies, and purification ceremonies. As the Paramount Chief is seen as both a spiritual and political authority in the chiefdom across numerous tribes in Sierra Leone, they are legitimate authorities to be heading such ceremonies and rituals.⁴⁰⁷ Acting on behalf of the community, traditional authorities have the ability to bring their people together and to enact these mechanisms that aid in the re-establishment of order to both the surroundings and the spiritual realm. These ceremonies promoted the acceptance of ex-combatants back into their communities as it allowed the communities to symbolically gesture their willingness to accept, as well as allowed ex-combatants to mentally shed their contamination and the negative community and self-perceptions lurking from their wartime experiences.⁴⁰⁸

One of the traditional practices that was useful, particularly at the village level, was that of making sacrifices to the ancestors. During the war, much of the lands that surrounded these villages, as well as the land these villages were built on were desecrated because of the mass violations and other abominations that took place. As part of the reconciliation for the inhabitants to go back and carry on with their lives, sacrifices were offered to their ancestors. It was believed that by offering these sacrifices, the angry gods would be appeased. In some larger villages,

⁴⁰⁷ Jackson, “Reshuffling and old deck of cards?”: 105

⁴⁰⁸ Stark, Lindsay, “Cleansing the wounds of war: an examination of traditional healing, psychosocial health and reintegration in Sierra Leone”, *Intervention*, 4(3), (2006): 206

along with the sacrifices offered, big ceremonies were held in which inhabitants would pray in various ways for peace to rein again. For those ex-combatants who had returned, “those who felt brave enough or were encouraged by their colleagues to come were all part of those ceremonies.”⁴⁰⁹

In addition to the sacrifices offered and the large ceremonies, cleansing ceremonies for the land took place across the country. Because the land had become so polluted throughout the course of the war with killings, rape, looting, thievery, and corruption, locals and their traditional rulers found it essential to cleanse the land and to rid it of the war-time impurities. One interview with a professor who possesses significant insight into these types of traditional ceremonies explained that:

Their belief was that if you did not cleanse [the bushes], appease to the ancestors and spirits, you will for some reason not have a good harvest, and the spirits should be roaming all over the place and they will torment the lives of people.⁴¹⁰

Accordingly, the cleansing of the land and the bushes may have been a prerequisite for some members of the community to resettle on these lands and to pick up and restore their lives.

In some cases, purification ceremonies took place where those who had committed the crimes were literally washed as a way of purifying their bodies and souls. This type of ceremony however, was based “on the understanding that those who have committed these crimes felt sorry, asked for forgiveness, and also to promise that they would not go back to their bad ways.”⁴¹¹ As there was somebody to be blamed, somebody to be forgiven, and the opportunity to talk things out, the traditional authorities could utilize ceremonies such as these as a way of

⁴⁰⁹ Interview: Professor Fourah Bay College, Freetown 2012

⁴¹⁰ Interview: Professor Fourah Bay College, Freetown 2012

⁴¹¹ Interview: Professor Fourah Bay College, Freetown 2012

fostering reconciliation. By washing those who committed the crimes, those who welcomed them back could be more certain, perhaps more trustful, and more willing to accept them back as they had rid themselves of their impurities.

Through the use of traditional sacrifices, community ceremonies, and their use of cleansing and purification ceremonies, those in the most remote parts of Sierra Leone could partake in reconciliation at the community level, done according to their traditional beliefs, and led by the legitimate authorities. These ceremonies and rituals are currently thought to be very useful and relevant, especially in the initial stages when resettlement of both populations of ex-combatants and regular citizens was underway.⁴¹² Initial post-war academic reports confirmed this finding as one states that “traditional reconciliation techniques such as cleansing rituals have made a considerable impact in terms of community relations.”⁴¹³ Moving beyond the role of local chiefs, and other community elders, it is important to explore how traditional reconciliation was carried out at the individual level.

Other Traditional Mechanisms of Reconciliation

Working alongside the traditional authorities are other institutions and practitioners whose establishment dates back long before the colonial period. In what Edward Sawyer has referred to as the ‘auxiliary mechanisms’ of justice, secret societies, traditional healers, juju men⁴¹⁴, and

⁴¹² Interview: Professor Fourah Bay College, Freetown 2012

⁴¹³ Giniifer, “Reintegration of ex-combatants”: 49

⁴¹⁴ The term “juju” is derived from the French word for small doll or toy. These dolls have little to do with the traditional beliefs prevalent in West Africa, however, because of the widespread use amongst foreigners and now locals, the term juju basically signifies “magic” or “medicine”. For more detail please see: Awolalu, Omosade J. and Dopamu, Adelumo, P. *West African Traditional Religion*, (Ibadan: Onibonoje Press & Book Industries (Nig.) Limited, 1979): 23-24

other traditional elements of the society have the ability to wield significant influence over the behaviour and beliefs of those Sierra Leoneans who kept their ATR ties.⁴¹⁵

As mentioned earlier, secret societies pre-date the colonial period and hold significant social, cultural, and political influence in most parts of Sierra Leone. Within the Mende-dominated lands, which are part of the core area where secret society takes place in West Africa, “the presumptions, philosophies, and practices of these societies affect almost every aspect of social and political life at the chiefdom level.”⁴¹⁶ Although most elements of these secret societies are kept secret to non-initiates, it is well known that much of their functioning is rooted in traditional beliefs, where few public and many arcane rituals and ceremonies make up a core part of their activities. Along with training boys to become men and girls to become women, these societies wield significant influence over Paramount Chiefs and other community elders. In one study, it is reported that chiefs will often consult with the soweï- the highest ranking Sande official- “before taking on projects that would affect the whole community. In a culture where the soweï is seen as a midwife for all, can communicate with ancestral spirits, can caste spells for good or evil, and where high ranking soweisia (plural of soweï) were granted the greatest honours, it is not too difficult to see how the leader of this society would wield significant influence over social and political matters.”⁴¹⁷ Likewise, the Poro secret society, while basing the bulk of its power on ritual and traditional beliefs, also heavily influences society on a day to day basis. During the colonial expansion, the Poro society could “issue its own pronouncements and laws, essentially oaths sworn by its members”⁴¹⁸. Furthermore, “the Poro Society was known to

⁴¹⁵ Sawyer, “Remove or reform?": 393

⁴¹⁶ Day, *Gender and Power in Sierra Leone*: 30-31

⁴¹⁷ Ibid: 30-31

⁴¹⁸ Ibid: 32

affect not only intra-chapter matters such as the support of a specific political leader, but also through its pronouncements, cross-ethnic and cross-chiefdom political action as well.”⁴¹⁹ In addition, it could control the price of commodities such as palm oil, agricultural practices, education, and punishment for crimes.⁴²⁰ Amongst other indicators, Poro was the key institution linked and influencing the institution of chieftaincy, and still remains a vital part of the culture to this day. As made evident by the Paramount Chief of the Small Bo chiefdom who admitted to being one of the head figures in these societies, many of those who hold traditional and politically prominent posts originate as prominent members of these societies.⁴²¹

Evidently, within the Mende culture, secret societies are present in all parts of life. Although this was very difficult to collect data on, even in interviews, field observations reinforce this relationship as it was noted that traditional Mende devils linked to the secret societies would come out on days of importance, such as political rallies and holidays. The way that spectators would behave in their presence reflects the deep-rooted traditional beliefs instilled by these societies. In some cases the spectators would run and try to hide or take alternate routes. In other cases, people would turn their heads or bend down. For many ordinary citizens consulted, membership in the secret societies was a thing of pride as it meant that they were proper citizens and could rise politically should they so desire.⁴²²

Moving beyond the role of traditional rituals and ceremonies influencing economic, social, and political activities at the communal level, many other traditional practices exist which can be used by individuals to bring different forms of reconciliation or personal advancement.

⁴¹⁹ Ibid: 32

⁴²⁰ Ibid: 32

⁴²¹ Interviews: Paramount Chief, Small Bo 2012; Deputy Mayor, Nongowa 2012; regular citizens, Sierra Leone 2012.

⁴²² Field Observations, Freetown; Kenema; Bo 2012

Coined by Conteh, the term ‘dual religiosity’ refers to both Muslims and Christians utilising and resorting to their traditional ATR beliefs in critical times of their life.⁴²³ The use of charms, for instance, to ward off evil spirits, or of sacrifice done at the individual level to appease the ancestors can be used by individuals who find that they need to take action against things that may be affecting their lives.⁴²⁴

Another way in which an individual can right a wrong in their personal lives is to visit a Juju-man or Obeah-man. In one interview, a story was told in which the interviewee’s close friends were badly gang-raped during the civil war. Though they went through the internationally-sponsored counselling programs aimed at psychological healing, and even followed up for many years, they found it difficult to reconcile and carry on. Acting upon this psychological discomfort, they decided to utilise the services of an Obeah-man. The interviewee explained how they had paid, in the form of a sacrifice, the obeah man to put a curse on the perpetrators ensuring that the perpetrators would never give birth to any sons that would live past the age of eight years old. When she consulted with her friends after the visit, they both said that they felt better, justice would be served, and they felt more able to carry on with their lives.⁴²⁵ For most who believe in these types of curses, there is an acknowledgement that they are limited in their use. For most curses, they can only be used when somebody has wronged another, therefore rendering the curse to be just.⁴²⁶ Although acts like these not necessarily constitute true ‘reconciliation’, for some, it proved to be a necessary pre-requisite for coming to terms with their past.

⁴²³ Conteh, *Inter-Religious Encounters*: 79

⁴²⁴ Ibid: 79

⁴²⁵ Interview: National Coordinator, Sierra Leone Association for Non-Governmental Organizations (SLANGO), Freetown 2012

⁴²⁶ Hexham, Irving, *Understanding World Religions*: 65

To fully grasp these practices, it must be understood that within these types of ceremonies there is a give and take. Upon questioning whether these services were offered and affordable to everyone, the interviewee elaborated that for those suffering from post-conflict trauma or stigma, “with or without the stigma, if anybody goes to a traditional doctor for anything or any kind of healing, when they talk about sacrifice, you have to take something to be sacrificed. [...] Depending on your social class will determine the kind of doctor you go to.”⁴²⁷ The difference, it was explained, would be similar to somebody who could afford private health care versus somebody who was made to depend on a lower level institution. For those who were desperate enough, something would be found to sacrifice. In rural and village settings, as these beliefs often went beyond the individual, it is not uncommon for entire families to help with the costs of an appropriate sacrifice. Occasionally the healers could also be paid in instalments.⁴²⁸ Extending beyond individual reconciliation and healing, these types of healers are known to offer their services for other reasons such as political advancement, the procurement of employment, judicial outcomes, romance, and health. Working off of the dual religiosity of many Sierra Leoneans, these sacred specialists play vital roles in the everyday functioning of society.

Infiltrating the political realm of society, these practices are believed to bring about opportunities for advancement or for the maintenance of a particular post. For those who seek to advance or maintain their political power, resorting to a traditional specialist for personal reasons is not uncommon.⁴²⁹ Upon questioning many ordinary citizens, most will strongly acknowledge that many of the political leaders frequently resort to these types of practices to gain or retain

⁴²⁷ Interview: National Coordinator, Sierra Leone Association for Non-Governmental Organizations (SLANGO), Freetown 2012

⁴²⁸ Interview: National Coordinator, Sierra Leone Association for Non-Governmental Organizations (SLANGO), Freetown 2012

⁴²⁹ Conteh, *Inter-Religious Encounters*: 79-83

power. Despite other religious officials from the churches stating that these practices are no longer being used, the perception amongst many Sierra Leoneans is that most people still use them.

In addition to political advancement, these healers are widely used for their ability to help those users procure sustainable employment. Suspecting that their ability to gain employment is being hampered by internal corruption, politics, and bureaucracy, these users typically keep faith that the supernatural powers invoked by the traditional healer will be enough to overcome the obstacles that stand in their way. Likewise, these services are also used by those who are seeking to influence the outcome of a court case.⁴³⁰

The last two common uses for these traditional healers is related to romance and health. Should a man or women desperately seek the hand of another, they may be prompted to utilise the services of these traditional healers.⁴³¹ As for health concerns, for many in the remote villages, reliance on traditional practitioners is widespread as they can often provide potions, mystical explanations, and seemingly solutions for health-related issues. In one case, it was reported that a woman had consulted a traditional healer to determine why her children kept dying at young ages. The healer in turn, explained to her that this was likely because a devil was visiting her at night, having intercourse with her, and stealing her children's blood when she would breastfeed them. Although this explanation is not in line with what western health practitioners may have suggested (malaria, diarrhea, cholera, and the like) and have sometimes

⁴³⁰ Ibid: 79-83

⁴³¹ Ibid: 83

stunted the efforts of health-related aid work, these healers are still credible and legitimate to many, especially in the provinces.⁴³²

Despite the challenges of collecting primary data involving these practices and enticing interviewees to openly talk of such activities, many still hold these institutions and beliefs in esteem and partial fear. Accordingly, these practices still have the ability to influence behaviours and actions in many domains. In one report issued by the United Nations, one Sierra Leonean employee working with the Arms for Development Initiative requested a week's leave from the project because he had been hit by a witch bullet. Though the witch bullet, shot from a witch gun and used by somebody seeking vengeance against another, left no visible wounds, the employee insisted on being given time off to remedy the situation and to get healed.⁴³³ For many Sierra Leoneans being shot by a witch gun can cost one's life if it is not attended to in a timely fashion. It was frequently explained by Sierra Leoneans that without treatment, the recipient of the bullet would die within three days.⁴³⁴

Sierra Leone is a society rich in traditional beliefs that encompass every aspect of their social, political, and economic lives. As most of these traditional practices are made to be kept secret, there are few detailed academic accounts of what these rituals are actually comprised of, what their meanings really signify, and how widespread their usage is. Regardless, it is still a set

⁴³² Obermueller, Nele Mailin. "Medicine versus Myth in Sierra Leone" The Guardian, November 26, 2012, available at: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/journalismcompetition/medicine-versus-myth-sierra-leone>

⁴³³ Miller, Derek et al., *From Research to Road Map*: 27.

⁴³⁴ Upon questioning numerous citizens outside of the formal interviews, many spoke about the witch gun discreetly and held the belief that if left untreated, a witch bullet would cause a mysterious death within three days of being shot.

of beliefs and mechanisms for justice, personal advancement, and reconciliation that is deeply rooted in the culture and has special meaning to the participants.⁴³⁵

Conclusion

In the initial post-conflict period, Sierra Leoneans were able to reconcile more sustainably and meaningfully by utilizing the pre-existing institutional structures in the form of religious CSOs and traditional authorities, practices, and rituals. These institutions both pre-date the colonial period and have rich histories in the social, political, and economic lives of Sierra Leoneans. Pre-existing CSOs such as mosques, churches, and the institution of chieftaincy and traditional beliefs provided the most meaningful reconciliation and facilitated the acceptance of ex-combatants back into their communities. The creation of the IRC SL during the war also had its roots in a long-time established tolerance between all three dominant religions- Islam, Christianity, and African Traditional Religion- that facilitated its inception and made it a credible and legitimate institution in the eyes of both main parties in the conflict as well as with the general population.

As the IRC SL worked to bring an end to the war and establish lasting peace and reconciliation in the entire country, regardless of religion or ethnicity, individual churches, mosques, and traditional authorities preached messages of acceptance, tolerance, and forgiveness, all while creating social space for these brothers and sisters of the bush to come back into society. By utilizing terms such as ‘brothers, sisters, sons, and daughters’, these institutions used the closest way of conceptualizing ex-combatants: the familial level. Simultaneously, the institution of

⁴³⁵ For more information on these types of rituals and beliefs, please refer to Wade Davis’ *Passage to Darkness: the Ethnobiology of the Haitian Zombie*. His study refers to Haiti, but can be loosely applied to Sierra Leone as they share some similar beliefs spread by the slave trade.

chieftaincy worked primarily at the level of communal healing by utilizing ceremonies and rituals of sacrifice, cleansing, and purification. These ceremonies promoted the acceptance of ex-combatants back into their communities as it allowed the communities to symbolically gesture their willingness to accept, as well as allowed ex-combatants to mentally shed their contamination and the negative community and self-perceptions lurking from their wartime experiences. In addition, these ceremonies and rituals also helped restore the spiritual order, as well as the order of the environmental surroundings to their pre-war state.

It was reiterated time after time across all four chiefdoms that for reconciliation to be meaningful and sustainable it had to be community-driven. Not only was it crucial that these initiatives came from the people themselves, at their own timings, and in accordance to their preferences, it had to resonate with the local populations. For this reason, the status of pre-existing is significant as it demonstrates legitimacy, credibility, and familiarity to the local customs, practices, and beliefs. The initiatives of IRC SL, the churches, the mosques, the traditional authorities, and the ATR practitioners were able to provide familiar avenues of redress and reconciliation. The practices pre-date both the war and the colonial period and are still playing influential roles in post-conflict Sierra Leone. Certainly, the practices of these institutions during and after the conflict are illuminating for what they tell us about the versatility of these religiously-based CSOs and the work of traditional authorities as both traditional institutions of faith and as peacebuilding agents. It has been argued that those religious actors to emerge in the peacemaking phases are among the least likely to treat reconciliation “as an

“efficient”, “managed”, and expeditious means to a predetermined end” or to trivialize a community’s history, memories, or complex grievances.”⁴³⁶

Sierra Leone is a society of tolerance and acceptance. Within this society, citizens enjoy large degrees of religious and ethnic tolerance, neither of which was threatened by the war. Because of the distinct historical development and the continuation of practices aimed at fostering tolerance and national unity, these particular CSOs were able to withstand the atrocious nature of the civil war, maintain their legitimacy, and provide a familiar and comforting accompaniment down the path of national unity, forgiveness, acceptance, and reconciliation. Because of their status as pre-existing, they held the trust of the both victims and perpetrators. Moreover, one could argue that because of their status of pre-existing, the reputations of these institutions rest less on their post-conflict contributions than many other organizations that arose in the aftermath of war to combat these problems. This is significant for the interviews used in this chapter as it suggests that because of their pre-existing status they did not need to ‘sell’ their contributions or their image. While many other organizations were created specifically to address these post-conflict issues, these religious organizations and traditional authorities have stood the test of time and are less likely to need to prove that their creation is worthwhile.

⁴³⁶ Appleby, Scott, *The Ambivalence of the Sacred*: 203

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUDING REMARKS AND DISCUSSION

This thesis has presented post-conflict Sierra Leone as a success story where the social, economic, and political reintegration of its ex-combatants has been widely successful. Reconciliation, as a facilitator for long-term reintegration, has also been largely successful, but not because of the interventions of the predicted actors. While Chapter One presented the context in which the research question was developed, Chapter Two demonstrated that the social, economic, and political reintegration of the majority of Sierra Leone's ex-combatants has been widely successful. Chapter Three then sought to explore the impacts and limitations of a handful of representative IGO and NGO initiatives, all the while demonstrating that these mechanisms lacked the capacity to produce long-term reconciliation or to facilitate long-term reintegration. Finally, Chapter Four assessed the contribution and historical development of the religious and traditional institutional structures that led to the successful reintegration of Sierra Leone's ex-combatants. As demonstrated by Chapter Four, religious institutions and traditional authorities provided the most instrumental reconciliation by reinforcing ideas of forgiveness, acceptance, and national cohesion. By tracing the historical development, the events, and the decisions that contributed to Sierra Leone's religious and ethnic tolerance, the primary argument put forth demonstrated that successful reintegration is primarily the product of pre-existing CSO intervention from mosques, churches, the IRC SL, and traditional authorities.

Post-conflict Sierra Leone is a success story because the keys to success that were already there before, during, and after the conflict took increasingly active roles in restoring the society to what it previously was: a society that valorizes tolerance. These pre-existing faith-based CSOs were successful because they were the legitimate authorities to be heading such initiatives and programs. Not only were they seen as credible and trustworthy to all warring sides as well as the

general population, they knew how to work with the people and their cultural practices, as well and how to work around them. Most importantly, they utilized the culturally appropriate mechanisms for fostering and sustaining a meaningful sense of reconciliation. The mechanisms employed by these authorities in the form of sermons, guidance, counselling, ceremonies, rituals, and messages of acceptance and tolerance, were organic and done at their own time, when authorities deemed their usage the most appropriate. Unlike their international counterparts, these processes were not working on external deadlines, were not dependent on external funding, nor were they being managed for efficiency. They simply sought to restore the peace and tolerance that existed before the war. Through the work of the IRC SL and the various initiatives of other religious institutions in the post-conflict phase, these pre-existing CSOs demonstrated considerable efficacy in bringing the warring parties to the negotiating table, in consoling the citizens, and in fostering reconciliation within their communities and amongst their individual followers. Similarly, traditional authorities were able to successfully encourage their respective chiefdoms to consider forgiveness and to accept those brother and sisters of the bush back into their families.

The case study of post-conflict Sierra Leone is unique in the sense that it dispels a series of commonly held assumptions about conflict of this nature. First and foremost, this case demonstrates that long-term reintegration of ex-combatants can be widely successful despite the many shortcomings of classical reintegration programs identified in other studies. Secondly, this case study demonstrates that in not all cases are local CSOs damaged or compromised during a war of this kind. In the case of religious institutions, their legitimacy remained intact and did not suffer from elite capture or a loss of respect. This finding is then extended to local beliefs in

ATR practices that also remained undamaged and could later be utilized by those traditional authorities who were designated to oversee such practices.

Finally, this case study also sheds light of the potential for religious authorities from different faiths to cooperate and coordinate their efforts in the name of common good. Because of their privileged position as ‘custodians and critics of culture’, these religious authorities have the ability to wield significant influence in a variety of post-conflict settings.⁴³⁷ As identified by Appleby in his study of religious peacebuilding around the world, religious leaders can be useful in post-conflict settings in a variety of roles. They can be instrumental in preventative diplomacy, conflict mediation, nonviolent protest, advocacy for structural reform, as well as provide moral legitimacy to a certain path, and the capacity to articulate and reinforce human rights.⁴³⁸

Arguably, and made evident by the case of Sierra Leone, the potential for these roles can be extended to traditional authorities as well. Should religious leaders be willing to “identify and enlarge the common ground they share”⁴³⁹, their potential for promoting tolerance and restoring peace in the post-conflict peacebuilding phases becomes increasingly important. In a society such as Sierra Leone where faith and religious beliefs pervade all areas of life, it becomes increasingly important to consider the potential benefits and challenges that could be produced as a result of their intervention. In the case of Sierra Leone, the intervention of these particular authorities was highly successful at helping society move past wartime differences. In others, however, the roles and functions of these authorities during the peacebuilding phases could possibly be detrimental to the security and post-conflict social stabilization as they could create

⁴³⁷ Appleby, Scott R. *The Ambivalence of the Sacred*: 211

⁴³⁸ Appleby, Scott R. *The Ambivalence of the Sacred*: 211

⁴³⁹ Ibid: 279

further divisions in society. For this reason, a thorough and concise assessment of the society as hand is required before fully committing oneself to one direction or another.

Discussion

This final section of the thesis seeks to identify and address some of the concerns that may arise from a study such as this. Discussions around the representativeness of the interviews, the potential for interviewees catering their responses to their perceptions of what should be said, as well as the representativeness of this single case study will be addressed.

Representativeness of the Interviews

Because this research made significant use of interviews and qualitative analysis, one of the primary concerns to potentially arise would involve the problem of local capture. Basing the bulk of the research on interviews with those who were either involved or experienced the reintegration process first hand risks subjective recollection and potentially the will to conceal the ‘truth’ about the post-conflict situation. Admittedly, this thesis relies primarily on interviews with local Sierra Leoneans in both prominent positions and not. This, however, does not necessarily have to be a weakness. By conducting the bulk of the interviews with native Sierra Leoneans, this study draws primarily from the perceptions of reconciliation and reintegration from the locals as it is they who live with the consequences of these different programs.

One of the ways to counter this bias was to complement these findings with informal interviews with regular people outside of these big institutions who arguably have nothing at stake and no ulterior agenda to push. Additionally, many of the topics discussed in the interviews were cross-listed across different interviews with different actors. It was not so much that chiefs were talking about chiefs, rather chiefs were encouraged to talk about IGOs and NGOs, as well as religious institutions. This method was used in all interviews to encourage participants to

discuss their perceptions of different initiatives outside of their own specialization. Most of the findings were then reviewed with professors from the Fourah Bay College. Findings from the interviews were then triangulated to draw the conclusions reached in this thesis.

One of the limitations of this research is most easily identified through its lack of IGO input. This research tried to incorporate the perceptions of IGOs into the study as much as possible, but oftentimes, the busier, bigger, and more well-established the organization, the greater the difficulty in obtaining interviews. One of the ways that this study could be strengthened would be to incorporate more data and interviews from these large organizations.

Subjective Bias in the Findings

Another potential concern is that the research simply set out to reinforce its own predictions and interpretations of the post-conflict setting. Although there is little way to prove this, it can be assured that what was discovered on the ground did not match the hypothesis leading into the fieldwork. Originally, it was hypothesized that whatever the outcome of reintegration after assessing the chosen indicators, that traditional authorities would play the primary role in reconciliation and that tradition-inspired NGOs would complement these efforts. This hypothesis was developed based on the academic literature and newspaper clippings analyzed before the fieldwork commenced. Seldom, within the sources specific to Sierra Leone, were religious institutions considered as viable alternatives to the international reconciliation programs. Once there however, it became obvious how pervasive religious and traditional beliefs are in the society. The first set of interviews did not inquire into the interventions of these institutions; they were brought up repeatedly through the following interviews. From that realization, interview questions were adapted and data was collected from a different set of institutions altogether. In this respect, the findings from Sierra Leone mirror one of the arguments presented by a scholar

who spoke of the field as a powerful force that “can be underestimated, but it cannot be evaded.”⁴⁴⁰ The outcome of reintegration and the roles of the religious institutions were definitely underestimated, however once there, it was much too difficult to deny their status.

Representativeness of the Case

As this research draws from a single case study, more specifically from two single regions within a country, concerns may arise over its representativeness. What can this case tell us about other cases? In response to this question, attention should be drawn to the categorization of these regions as a critical case within Sierra Leone. The combination of factors such as the length and intensity of violence endured, the demobilization of those who fought for the two major factions, and the proximity of natural resources which financially contributed to the sustained efforts of both sides would seemingly indicate a great need for post-conflict reintegration and reconciliation. As such, the choice of these particular regions proved to be the most pertinent regions for this analysis. If reintegration could be successful in these two regions, it may also indicate success in communities across the country less devastated by the war.

One of the limitations for this case selection is in regard to Freetown. Within Freetown, traditional authorities such as Paramount Chiefs are replaced with tribal headmen. As they do not exercise the same degree of political and cultural power as those in the provinces, it is unclear whether their post-conflict interventions were as influential as their counterparts in the provinces. Furthermore, it is unclear how many ex-combatants have migrated to the large urban centres such as Freetown as a result of a failure to reintegrate into their communities or simply because they perceived more economic opportunities.

⁴⁴⁰ Flyvbjerg, Bent, “Case Study Research Misunderstandings”: 235

Despite the exception of Freetown, the selection of this case is representative to countries beyond Sierra Leone when one considers the role of IGO and NGO peacebuilding interventions. Although Sierra Leone has a distinct cultural heritage and traditions, it does reinforce the claim that the “commodified” peacebuilding programs, as mentioned earlier, may not always be appropriate for all post-conflict situations. By shedding light on one case where these programs had a short-lived impact suggests that there may be other cases with similar legacies. Furthermore, this case offers a glimpse into how peacebuilding efforts can incorporate both traditional and modern institutions for the purposes of sustained reintegration. Additionally, the conclusions drawn for successful reintegration can perhaps be applied elsewhere as many of the criticisms of these programs extend beyond the case of Sierra Leone. Once again, by presenting a single case that defies the common assumptions, researchers may be enticed to study other cases that may challenge the conventional wisdom.

One of the lessons that can be taken from this research is to not assume that all CSOs have been damaged or compromised through war. In the case of Sierra Leone, research suggests that it was a handful of pre-existing CSOs that most effectively fostered reconciliation and facilitated reintegration in the post-conflict peacebuilding phases. For societies that have a high rate of religious adherence, religiously-based institutions will likely play a large role in the process of national, communal, and individual reconciliation. This finding influences peacebuilding initiatives as it suggests that where and when possible, stakeholders may benefit from trying to reinforce the capacity of existing structures rather than relying heavily on imported, temporary alternatives. In Sierra Leone, it was the religious and traditional CSOs that withstood the war and effectively cooperated in the post-conflict period, however in other cases these pre-existing CSOs may be of a different nature.

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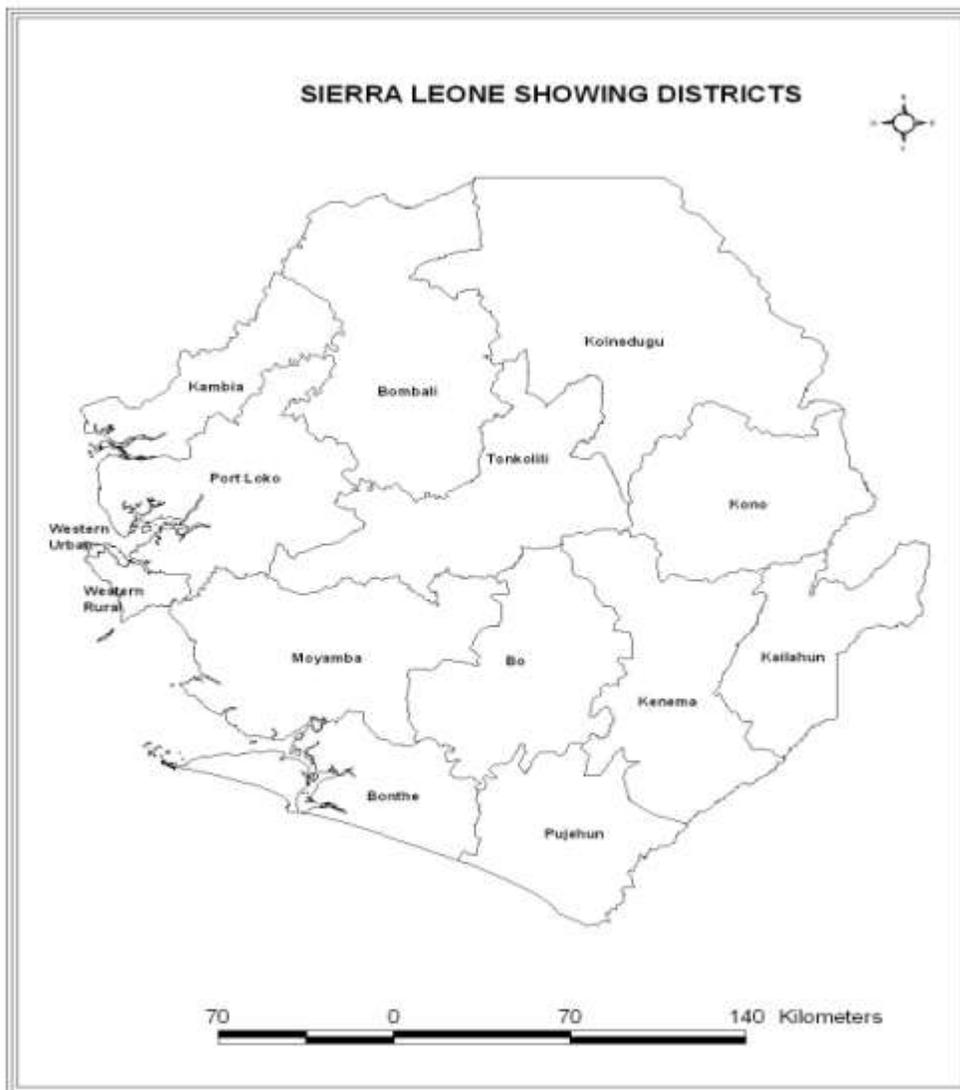
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APPENDIX A: MAP OF SIERRA LEONE, BO DISTRICT, AND KENEMA DISTRICT

Figure 1: Map of Sierra Leone.



Source: Statistics Sierra Leone, 2012

Figure 2: Kenema District



Source: Statistics Sierra Leone, 2012

Figure 3: Bo District



Source: Statistics Sierra Leone, 2012