

UNPACKING THE SHORTCOMINGS OF TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE: IN THE CASE OF POST-CONFLICT SIERRA LEONE

GEÇİŞ DÖNEMİ ADALETİNİN YETERSİZLİKLERİ ÜZERİNE BİR İNCELEME: ÇATIŞMA SONRASI SIERRA LEONE ÖRNEĞİ

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Abstract

An increasing number of African states are transitioning from conflict to peace, yet these transitions continue to be marked by ongoing violations of civilians' rights. These violations are often perpetrated by political authorities, driven by economic interests, or rooted in deep-seated historical legacies. In response to these complex post-conflict dynamics, the frameworks of transitional justice and disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) have emerged as both academic fields of inquiry and instruments of political practice. These mechanisms primarily aim to address large-scale human rights violations and facilitate the reconstruction of a lawful civil order. Contemporary scholarship and practitioners of DDR and transitional justice focus on identifying the most viable and legitimate means of confronting past injustices while fostering sustainable peace. This study critically examines the shortcomings of transitional justice mechanisms, DDR processes, and truth commissions in their efforts to achieve reconciliation and stability in post-conflict Sierra Leone. It is argued that these shortcomings, along with the persistence of structural violence in the post-conflict context, stem from a lack of coordination toward a unified objective and the failure to implement Johan Galtung's "Transcend" approach. Furthermore, the research identifies key limitations in the operationalization of truth commissions, particularly their inadequate engagement with Track II diplomacy, insufficient implementation of lustration practices, and neglect of participatory legitimacy. These deficiencies have ultimately contributed to the unfulfilled objectives of peacebuilding initiatives in post-conflict Sierra Leone.

Keywords: Transitional justice, truth commissions, disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR), post-conflict Sierra Leone, transcend approach, structural violence.

Öz

Afrika'daki birçok devlet, çatışma ortamından barış sürecine geçiş yaşamaktadır ve bu süreç, sivil hakların ihlallerinin hâlâ devam ettiğini göstermektedir. Bu ihlaller; siyasal otoriteler tarafından, ekonomik çıkarlar doğrultusunda ya da tarihsel mirasların bir sonucu olarak ortaya çıkabilmektedir. Bu karmaşık çatışma sonrası dinamiklere yanıt olarak, Geçiş Dönemi Adaleti ile Silahsızlandırma, Terhis ve Yeniden Entegrasyon (DDR) çerçeveleri hem akademik bir sorgulama alanı hem de siyasal bir uygulama aracı olarak ortaya çıkmıştır. Bu mekanizmalar, büyük ölçekli insan hakları ihlallerini ele almayı ve yasal bir sivil düzenin yeniden inşasını kolaylaştırmayı amaçlamaktadır. Güncel literatür ve uygulayıcılar, geçmişteki

adaletsizliklerle yüzleşmenin en uygulanabilir ve meşru yollarını belirlemeye ve kalıcı barışı sağlamaya odaklanmaktadır. Bu çalışma, geçiş dönemi adaleti mekanizmalarının, DDR süreçlerinin ve hakikat komisyonlarının, çatışma sonrası Sierra Leone’de uzlaşma ve istikrar sağlamaya yönelik çabalarındaki yetersizliklerini eleştirel bir biçimde incelemektedir. Çalışmada, söz konusu başarısızlıkların ve çatışma sonrası dönemde devam eden yapısal şiddetin, ortak bir hedef doğrultusunda koordinasyon sağlanamamasından ve Johan Galtung’un ortaya koyduğu “Transcend” yaklaşımının uygulanamamasından kaynaklandığı öne sürülmektedir. Ayrıca araştırma, hakikat komisyonlarının ikincil diploması (Track II diplomacy), tasfiye uygulamaları (lustration) ve katılım temelli meşruiyet süreçlerini etkin bir şekilde kullanamamalarına dikkat çekmektedir. Bu yetersizlikler, çatışma sonrası Sierra Leone’de yürütülen barış inşa süreçlerinin hedeflerine ulaşamamasına neden olmuştur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Geçiş dönemi adaleti, hakikat komisyonları, silahsızlandırma, terhis ve yeniden entegrasyon (DDR), çatışma sonrası Sierra Leone, transcend yaklaşımı, yapısal şiddet.

STRUCTURED ABSTRACT

The growing trend of African states transitioning from conflict to peace highlights the pervasive challenges in addressing human rights violations and the long-standing structural issues embedded in these societies. Sierra Leone, a country that endured a brutal civil war between 1991 and 2002, offers a critical case study in the implementation of transitional justice and Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) processes in post-conflict societies. The civil war in Sierra Leone, exacerbated by issues such as impunity, human rights abuses, corruption, and the marginalization of certain communities, resulted in widespread devastation, including thousands of deaths and the displacement of hundreds of thousands of citizens. The Revolutionary United Front (RUF), supported by neighbouring Liberia, waged war against the government, which was accused of widespread exploitation, particularly related to the illicit diamond trade.

Following the conclusion of the war, various peace agreements were brokered, such as the 2001 Abuja Protocol, and significant international intervention, including peacekeeping missions by the UN and the British military, sought to restore peace. The peace agreements marked the beginning of DDR processes, aimed at disarming, demobilizing, and reintegrating former combatants. Despite these efforts, the implementation of transitional justice mechanisms, including the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), has been widely criticized for its failure to address the root causes of the conflict or deliver sustainable peace. This study examines the gaps in the DDR and transitional justice processes in Sierra Leone and seeks to understand why these mechanisms failed to achieve their intended goals.

This research aims to critically evaluate the shortcomings of DDR and transitional justice mechanisms in post-conflict Sierra Leone, with a specific focus on their failure to foster true reconciliation and long-term peace. The study draws on a range of sources, including academic literature and governmental reports. By focusing on the operationalization of transitional justice and DDR frameworks, this study explores the reasons behind their failure, particularly in terms of their lack of integration, local involvement, and attention to social and political inequalities.

The study highlights several key factors that contributed to the shortcomings of transitional justice and DDR efforts in Sierra Leone. A major issue was the lack of coordination between the TRC, DDR processes, and other peacebuilding initiatives. Each of these mechanisms operated in isolation, often with competing agendas and priorities, which undermined their collective impact. The absence of a clear, unified vision for peace and justice led to fragmented efforts that did not adequately address the grievances of all affected groups, particularly marginalized communities.

Another critical factor was the failure to effectively engage local actors in the process of truth-telling and reconciliation. The TRC, while intended to provide a forum for victims and perpetrators to come together and discuss the atrocities committed during the war, was criticized for not being sufficiently inclusive. The TRC’s work was seen as top-down, with limited input from local communities or

marginalized groups, including women and young people who were particularly affected by the war. Furthermore, the TRC's findings were not adequately tied to reparations or institutional reforms, leaving many victims without tangible support or acknowledgment of their suffering.

The DDR process also faced significant challenges, particularly in terms of reintegration. Although thousands of former combatants were disarmed and demobilized, the reintegration efforts were largely unsuccessful. Ex-combatants, particularly young fighters, struggled to find stable livelihoods and reintegrate into their communities. The DDR process failed to provide meaningful opportunities for economic development or social inclusion, which are essential for preventing the recurrence of violence. Without a comprehensive strategy that included economic reintegration, education, and social reconciliation, former combatants remained vulnerable to re-recruitment by armed groups or involvement in criminal activities. Additionally, the failure to address structural violence, including gender-based violence and inequality, further undermined the peacebuilding process. Sierra Leone's post-conflict society was marked by deep gender disparities, with women disproportionately affected by the conflict in terms of sexual violence, displacement, and loss of livelihood. The DDR and transitional justice processes did not adequately address the specific needs of women or offer them a platform to participate fully in the reconciliation and rebuilding efforts. Gender-based violence remained a pervasive issue, and without addressing these structural inequalities, sustainable peace was not achievable.

Based on the findings, the study makes several key recommendations for improving DDR and transitional justice processes in post-conflict societies. First, there is a need for greater coordination between DDR initiatives and transitional justice mechanisms. This would involve developing a shared framework that integrates disarmament, demobilization, reintegration, truth-telling, reparations, and institutional reforms into a cohesive strategy. Secondly, there should be an increased focus on community-based approaches to peacebuilding, with a particular emphasis on engaging local actors, including women, youth, and marginalized groups. This bottom-up approach would ensure that peacebuilding efforts are grounded in the lived experiences of those most affected by the conflict. Additionally, the study advocates for a more robust approach to gender and social justice, including addressing gender-based violence and promoting women's participation in peace processes. Finally, the research calls for the implementation of lustration practices to ensure that those responsible for human rights violations are held accountable and that transitional justice processes are more transparent and effective.

The transitional justice and DDR processes in Sierra Leone offer valuable lessons for other post-conflict societies. The failure to adequately integrate these mechanisms, engage local communities and address the structural violence that underpinned the conflict resulted in a fragile peace that remains vulnerable to relapse. This study emphasizes the need for more inclusive, coordinated, and context-sensitive approaches to post-conflict peacebuilding, with a focus on addressing both the immediate needs of victims and the long-term challenges of rebuilding a just and equitable society.

Introduction

The Sierra Leone Civil War (1991–2002) stemmed from deep-seated issues, including government corruption, injustice, human rights violations, and regional marginalization. The conflict was fueled by the illicit diamond trade, which was exploited by the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), and it received support from Liberia. The RUF's brutal tactics resulted in massive civilian displacement and suffering. Although several peace treaties were attempted, stability was only achieved with the 2001 Abuja Protocol and the 2002 elections, supported by the UN and British forces. Post-war recovery prioritized Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR), disarming over 76,000 individuals, including 6,000 youth combatants. (Posner, 2004; Tapperman, 2002) Transitional justice mechanisms like the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and the Special Court for Sierra Leone were created (Sesay &

Suma, 2009, p. 25) to address war crimes. However, these efforts operated independently without coordination with DDR or broader justice initiatives, leading to ineffective outcomes. Structural issues and societal divisions remained unresolved, and justice and reconciliation were only partially achieved.

The exclusion of women from the post-conflict rebuilding process further entrenched gender inequality and weakened healing efforts. Academic scrutiny has since focused on the TRC's effectiveness. Current literature reveals mixed support for incorporating criminal justice into peacebuilding. In towns like Makeni, justice was interpreted not just as punishment but as equitable access to social and economic rights. The DDR process (Millar, 2011, p. 516) faced criticism for enabling local elites to regain control of arms, resulting in renewed violence.

The article begins by contextualizing the breakdown of peace processes, outlining the challenges encountered in Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) and transitional justice mechanisms. It critically examines the limitations of DDR programs, particularly their failure to integrate Johan Galtung's "Transcend" approach. A detailed analysis of the Transcend method is presented, including a review of relevant literature and its theoretical alignment with DDR frameworks. The article argues that the Transcend approach, especially when employed in conjunction with Track II diplomacy, is particularly effective in the context of contemporary civil conflicts, as illustrated through the case of Sierra Leone. Furthermore, it underscores the significance of peace education in post-conflict societies, particularly within emerging economies such as Sierra Leone, during their transition to sustainable peace. The study also addresses methodological and conceptual limitations, including the reliance on secondary data and challenges related to the generalizability of findings. In conclusion, the article emphasizes its contribution to the field of conflict resolution and provides policy recommendations, advocating for a more inclusive and culturally responsive model of transitional justice as a prerequisite for enduring peace.

Methodology

The research is mainly qualitative and relies on secondary data. The literature explored includes reports, books, documents, scholarly journals, articles, and notes. Further testing will consist of formal documents of Sierra Leonean DDR and the transitional justice system. A qualitative approach grants the paper an ease and effectual spotting and researching of the so clear duty of indicators that aren't tangible, such as the socio-economic status of women in seeking truth via transitional justice, factoring in economic profit reasons and historical legacies (Orentlicher, 1994; Teitel, 2003). The sphere of the paper, while accessing the shortcomings of DDR and transitional justice, is limited to Sierra Leone due to its instability of political history together with its present cracks of disparity in opportunities, coupled with efforts aiming for democratic stabilization and answerability makes the country a rich ground for this paper. Having gone through eleven years of protracted conflict, it will help draw an equilibrium to the paper in the sense of recording the injustice against victims, especially women, and women's experiences through human rights transgression. This approach (Millar, 2011, p. 525) will permit the paper to explicitly cover the context-sensitive circumstances relevant in post-conflict Sierra Leone, transitioning from justice to peace, where many of the victims pushed for the inclusion of social amenities in the transitional justice framework.

The preference for secondary data was primarily due to the inaccessibility of direct eyewitnesses to the conflict, many of whom may have either passed away or are no longer able to provide firsthand accounts. The unavailability of primary sources necessitated the reliance on secondary materials. Accordingly, sources were selected based on their credibility, relevance, and temporal proximity to the events under investigation. The dataset comprised peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, and reports from reputable international organizations such as the United Nations and Human Rights Watch. The selected materials were required to address core aspects of the conflict, including its origins, principal actors, and consequences. Emphasis was placed on publications from the past two decades to capture

contemporary perspectives, although historically significant sources were also incorporated to offer essential contextual background. To ensure a comprehensive and balanced analysis, all sources were cross-referenced to verify consistency and assess potential bias.

The Fallout of Peace in Sierra Leone: Transitional Justice and Societal Transformation

Tepperman (2002, p. 104) opined that the Sierra Leonean civil war, which lasted over a decade and ended in 2002 following British military intervention, caused immense human suffering and left deep scars on the nation. Although fighting has stopped, psychological and emotional impacts persist, particularly for victims and their families. Scholars widely attribute the conflict's roots to economic motivations, especially greed (Relations, n.d., p. 2) tied to the country's diamond wealth. Collier (2000, pp. 91-96) shed light on the material facet of the conflict intertwined with a surge in economic inequality, youth disenfranchisement, and limited educational opportunities that fueled dissatisfaction. Former President Siaka Stevens monopolized the diamond trade through state agencies, marginalizing the general populace. This exploitation eventually sparked a rebellion, as the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) entered Sierra Leone promising to reclaim the diamond wealth for the people.

“The RUF told us that their main aim of fighting was to unseat the then APC government because the APC government robbed the civilians of the betterment of themselves. The average young men were left to their fate as no one was willing to speak for them, especially the politicians showed no apathy for them. Young folks ought to be motivated by giving them employment opportunities, I think that will bring stability to the system. I would not be wandering around the city idle if I had a handy job or something to do that would put food on my table. Through my trade, I and my family can survive (Peters, 2011, p.20-21).”

Understanding the roots of discontent in Sierra Leone requires an examination of its historical context. Modern Sierra Leone began in 1787 when primarily Black former British soldiers settled on the northern peninsula. In 1808, Freetown and its surrounding areas became a British Crown Colony and a central base for anti-slavery naval operations in West Africa. The remainder of Sierra Leone was later declared a British Protectorate, developing independently under colonial rule. British investments were primarily concentrated in the Crown Colony -particularly in its scattered settlements and among the Krio population-creating stark disparities between the colony and the protectorate (Webel & Galtung, 2007). These differences were especially evident in the realm of education. Despite comprising most of the land and population, the protectorate had fewer secondary schools and limited access to higher education. The Krios, who mostly resided in the colony, were at the forefront of education, further highlighting the colonial-era divide between the two regions.

In the aftermath of such historical inequalities and the devastation of war, transitional justice mechanisms were expected to pave the way for sustainable peace. Transitional justice plays a critical role in societies shifting from conflict to peace by addressing the erosion of the rule of law, unaccountable governance, and widespread human rights abuses. These mechanisms aim to secure justice, heal victims, promote reconciliation, and ensure governmental accountability. The success of transitional justice, however, depends on how well these goals are prioritized and implemented (Nkansah, 2011, p. 158). In the case of Sierra Leone, despite efforts, transitional justice faced criticism due to political interference, limited resources, and challenges in prosecuting offenders, which hindered the achievement of its core aims and exposed weaknesses in the overall justice process.

One of the central critiques of Sierra Leone's transitional justice process is its lack of inclusive participation, particularly for women, in both Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) and transitional justice efforts. Drawing from procedural justice literature, the text underscores that participation -especially through having a "voice"- is essential for victims to assert their dignity, agency, and legitimacy. According to d'Estrée (2006) and Tyler et al. (1985, p. 72), having one's voice heard

reflects integrity and fair treatment, while being silenced equates to exclusion and dehumanization. The Sierra Leonean transitional justice process is cited as an example where women were excluded, raising concerns about who has the right to narrate victims' stories. This exclusion perpetuated structural violence and denied women legitimate participation. The text argues that true participation requires more than visibility; it demands that victims' voices influence outcomes. In many transitioning African nations, women continue to suffer from pre-existing structural violence. (Sesay & Suma, 2009, p. 24) and social stigmas, especially regarding sexual violence, further silence them in justice processes, despite their forming a significant portion of the victim population being subjected to recidivism.

Gyimah (2009) underscores the persistent neglect of human rights issues before, during, and after the conflict in Sierra Leone. Despite the intrinsic link between human rights and peace, this relationship was largely overlooked. The failure to emphasize human rights in post-conflict reconstruction limited public understanding of universal versus culturally relative rights. In many African societies, particularly Sierra Leone, cultural norms and traditions marginalize women and girls, discouraging them from pursuing education or leadership. Instead, girls are pressured into early marriage and raised with the belief that they are inferior to boys, often silencing themselves in the face of abuse. On April 12, 2013, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie noted that culture is a human construct and, therefore, can be changed. For a more just and equitable society, discriminatory cultural norms must be challenged, and gender equality must be actively promoted. Scholars such as Orentlicher (1994, p. 439) and Leebaw (2003, p. 36) advocate for democratization and peace education as essential strategies for expanding human rights and combating injustice. Institutional reform that ensures fair representation and accountability is critical. By embedding human rights education and fostering inclusive democratic systems, Sierra Leone can move toward a society where justice and equality prevail for all, regardless of gender.

The role of transitional justice mechanisms in post-conflict societies is both vital and urgent. Failure to implement these mechanisms effectively can prolong cycles of violence and obstruct lasting peace (Shifter & Jawahar, 2004; Tepperman, 2002). In Sierra Leone's case, the absence of proper avenues for truth-telling and prosecuting human rights violators, especially those in high-ranking positions, and post-conflict environments risk enabling impunity and the continued influence of former perpetrators. Transitional justice measures like delivering justice, acknowledging victims, documenting abuses, and offering reparations are essential for reconciliation, yet they are often poorly executed. The exclusion of affected populations, particularly those with low literacy, from meaningful participation in justice processes and relying solely on official documents without accessible communication strategies marginalizes these groups and undermines transparency. It's, however, a moral and practical necessity to directly engage communities; neglecting them fosters resentment and deepens societal rifts. Additionally, the disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) processes in Sierra Leone were opaque and lacked accountability, allowing ex-combatants and rebel leaders with political ties to avoid justice. This impunity not only damaged trust but also contributed to renewed tensions and existing structural issues in the country. The coexistence of victims with unpunished perpetrators, as Jang (2012) highlights, cultivates mistrust and fragmentation, ultimately jeopardizing long-term peace and reconciliation in post-conflict settings.

Critique of DDR through a Gender Lens

The Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) process in Sierra Leone, following its devastating civil war from 1991 to 2002, has been scrutinized for its lack of attention to gender issues. As explained by Mazurana et al. (2004), women and girls, who played vital roles as combatants, porters, spies, and victims of sexual violence during the conflict, were largely left out of the formal DDR initiatives. The gender biases embedded within the DDR framework focused on male combatants, perceiving them as the main actors of war and thus key to efforts in peacebuilding. Mazurana & Carlson (2004, p. 31) emphasized how this approach marginalized women, particularly those whose contributions were overlooked because

they did not carry visible weapons and were not recognized as “fighters.” The reintegration stage did not adequately consider the unique requirements of female former combatants. Many encountered stigma, sexual violence, and rejection from their communities. DDR programs often provided vocational training that perpetuated traditional gender roles, such as tailoring and hairdressing, without acknowledging women's autonomy or broader ambitions. Solomon & Ginifer (2008, p. 20) further explained that the DDR process failed to address the trauma, recidivism, and reproductive health concerns of women who had experienced rape or sexual exploitation, hindering their psychosocial recovery.

Solomon & Ginifer (2008, p. 20) pointed out that the DDR (Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration) process failed to protect and support women effectively, exposing them to significant risks. Women ex-combatants were not adequately separated from men or provided with proper sanitary facilities, making them vulnerable during transit, within camps, and upon returning to their communities, where they often faced rejection and abuse. Solomon & Ginifer concluded that a major oversight was the exclusion of “bush wives,” girls and women abducted and forced into relationships with rebels, from the DDR program. These women, often subjected to coercion and psychological manipulation, received no benefits and faced worse outcomes than female combatants. The term “wife” was strategically used by rebels to assert ownership and control, marking the women as their property and deterring others from approaching them. Most of these relationships were not consensual; only a few women had willingly joined their so-called husbands. The DDR's failure to acknowledge and support these women left them highly vulnerable.

The Abidjan Peace Accords (APA): DDR without Transitional Justice

Julius Maada Bio, the leader of Sierra Leone's National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC), initiated peace talks that led to the Abidjan Peace Accord (APA) before handing power to elected President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah (Wierda et al., 2002) in 1996. The APA, signed with the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), offered blanket amnesty to all combatants and began a Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) process. However, it lacked essential transitional justice measures such as vetting, truth-telling, reparations, and prosecutions. While the agreement included plans for a civilian consultative conference, many, especially women, were excluded, and transitional justice was only minimally applied (to police vetting). Trust deteriorated when the government supported a coup against the RUF leadership, leading to further conflict. Eventually, Kabbah's government was overthrown by junior military officers allied with the RUF, again excluding transitional justice mechanisms. Gyimah (2009, p. 8) asserts that over 70,000 combatants were disarmed and demobilized, surpassing expectations. However, reintegration efforts were weak, particularly for marginalized youth, continuing a historical pattern of neglect. The study argues that reintegration is crucial for bridging DDR with transitional justice and for sustainable peacebuilding in Sierra Leone.

Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC)

UN peacekeepers and the British Army played a key role in Sierra Leone's post-conflict recovery, facilitating disarmament, demobilization, reintegration (DDR), and transitional justice through institutions like the Special Court for Sierra Leone (SCSL) and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). The SCSL, with UN support, aimed to hold perpetrators accountable for human rights abuses (Mani, 2002, p. 11). However, the reintegration process faced criticism for failing to ensure justice. Ex-combatants returned and were reintegrated without sufficient truth-telling or reparations, creating resentment and structural violence within communities (Brahm, 2007; Abu-Nimer & Nelson, 2021). There was limited prosecution, inadequate vetting, and no provision for reparations (Sesay & Suma, 2009, pp. 8-12). Civil society groups advocated for a victim trust fund, especially for amputees, but this was not proper. As a result, victims, many physically and economically incapacitated, were left unsupported, while ex-combatants reintegrated with impunity, worsening societal divisions.

The contrasting findings are how Western approaches to transitional justice, particularly truth-telling, clashed with local customs. The TRC's method failed to resonate with victims; some literate Sierra Leoneans narrated their experiences humorously (Landsman 1997; Minow 1998; Popkin and Bhuta 1999; Opatow 2001), undermining the emotional weight of the atrocities. The TRC report, although aimed at healing, was inaccessible to most affected people due to its length and complexity. It was primarily read by literates who often did not experience the conflict firsthand. Ultimately, effective reintegration requires culturally sensitive justice mechanisms, including prosecution and genuine truth-telling. Without these, reconciliation is hindered, and structural issues persist. Thus, future transitional efforts must align with local realities to foster meaningful healing and sustainable peace.

The failure on the part of TRC to effectively utilize track II diplomacy in addressing the conflict dynamics contrasts this with early efforts in the 1940s by groups like the Connecticut Advisory Board on Inter-group Associations (Richmond, 2001, pp. 18-19). These earlier initiatives used workshops to improve race relations and communication among conflicting parties. In the case of Sierra Leone's DDR and TRC processes, the lack of engagement with non-state actors, such as community leaders and chiefs, limited the effectiveness of peacebuilding efforts. The exclusion of local voices resulted in bottlenecks in terms of information flow and a rigid, top-down approach that hindered progress toward sustainable conflict resolution outcomes.

Track II Diplomacy and the Transcend Approach

The failure by actors to effectively use track II diplomacy in conflict resolution, particularly in the Sierra Leone DDR and TRC processes. This approach, which involves informal, non-governmental efforts like workshops and community engagement, was underutilized despite historical precedence dating back to the 1940s with initiatives like the Connecticut Advisory Board on Inter-group Associations. (Richmond, 2001, pp. 18-19) These earlier efforts recognized the importance of involving various societal representatives to improve relations.

In contrast, the Sierra Leone case lacked inclusive strategies such as workshops with non-state actors like community leaders and chiefs. This exclusion hindered communication and mutual understanding, which are vital for sustainable peace. The absence of grassroots participation created a rigid, top-down structure that limited information flow and delayed conflict resolution outcomes. Ultimately, the study underscores the importance of incorporating local voices and informal diplomacy to enhance the effectiveness of peacebuilding processes.

Alongside the lack of inclusive diplomacy, another significant oversight in Sierra Leone's transitional justice efforts was the failure to apply more holistic conflict resolution frameworks such as the Transcend Approach, developed by Johan Galtung. This model, often summarized through the sequence of "diagnosis, prognosis, and therapy," provides a transformative strategy for addressing the root causes of conflict rather than merely managing its symptoms (Webel & Galtung, n.d.; Jang, 2012). As practiced in classical mediation, where parties are assembled to negotiate, and in doing so, compromises are witnessed among the parties involved, which might have parties withholding their grievances, leading to pent-up fury by some parties. The transcend strategy begins with a party at a time, and an in-depth engagement is established to probe for a new hope. Following this is the classical methodology, where the various conflicting parties are brought together on the same front for negotiation with a trusted facilitator by the parties involved. There certainly exists a host of mechanisms to this approach apart from mediation; it's more of a holistic one with a potent process (Webel & Galtung, n.d., pp. 14-18) model concerning conflict and peace. In the belly of the model exist demands like "diagnosis, prognosis, and therapy.

The transcend approach (Galtung, n.d., pp. 10-14) presents a model for conflict resolution that

focuses on transforming conflicts through peaceful and creative strategies rather than merely managing or suppressing them. Unlike DDR methods that seek to control or eliminate violence through military or legal measures, Galtung's approach aims to identify the underlying causes of conflict and develop innovative, nonviolent solutions that cater to the needs of all involved parties. When applied to the Sierra Leone conflict (1991–2002), the Transcend approach provides a comprehensive and human-focused perspective for understanding peacebuilding and reconciliation, particularly in contrast to more traditional Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) programs.

Contextualizing the Transcend Approach in the Sierra Leone Conflict Context

The Sierra Leone Civil War (1991–2002) serves as an important example for analyzing Galtung's Transcend approach. This war, which featured the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), government troops, and several militias, was marked by numerous atrocities, such as amputations, the conscription of child soldiers (Mendeloff, 2004, p. 355), and widespread sexual violence. The underlying factors stemmed from years of neglect, poverty, corruption, and the disenfranchisement of youth. Galtung's approach would recommend addressing the structural violence, social injustice, exclusion, and inequality that underpinned the conflict. For instance, instead of solely concentrating on ceasefire agreements or power-sharing arrangements (as seen in conventional conflict resolution), the transcend approach would emphasize social justice and inclusive development. That includes fostering trust through participatory governance, guaranteeing fair access to resources, and strengthening civil society.

The Lomé Peace Accord of 1999, while it brought an end to significant hostilities, incorporated only a few aspects of the Transcend approach. It established a framework for shared governance and granted comprehensive amnesty to all combatants, including leaders of the rebellion. Nevertheless, Galtung's transcend approach might contend that this did not tackle the underlying social issues, which could lead to the reemergence of violence. Achieving true transcendence in Sierra Leone would have necessitated comprehensive reforms, restorative justice initiatives, and a long-term transformation of social and economic conditions (Galtung, 1996). In Sierra Leone, a Transcend-focused strategy would have emphasized inclusive discussions and the empowerment of marginalized groups (Webel & Galtung, n.d., pp. 123–140), particularly the youth who had become involved with the Revolutionary United Front (RUF). Instead of simply labeling them as either perpetrators or victims, this approach would acknowledge their legitimate grievances, including unemployment, disenfranchisement, and educational deficiencies, as significant factors contributing to conflict. With its emphasis centered on healing through recognition, restructuring society, and collaboratively envisioning a future that benefits all parties involved.

At the heart of the Transcend method lies initiatives focused on community-driven peacebuilding and traditional reconciliation methods, like the Fambul Tok approach, which were more in line with the principles of Transcend. These programs emphasized storytelling, forgiveness, and grassroots reintegration, creating environments where ex-combatants and victims could share their experiences, be heard, and participate in restoring social bonds. As in the works of Gulati & Fazli (n.d., p. 3), the Fambul Tok model integrates several core concepts and techniques of the restorative justice framework, including its broad perspective on harm, emphasis on victims, and community-driven approach. Rather than focusing on punishment, it seeks to change individuals' behavior based on the community's conviction that every member is akin to family, as expressed in their famous saying, “The family tree bends, but it does not break.”

The Transcend Approach in Comparison with DDR Theories

The DDR (Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration) framework is frequently employed in post-conflict environments and played a crucial role in the peace process of Sierra Leone. It revolves around

three key components.

1. Disarmament: The process of collecting and disposing of arms.
2. Demobilization: The disbanding of armed factions and the decommissioning of fighters.
3. Reintegration: Supporting former combatants as they transition back into civilian life, typically through vocational training, education, or job placement.

Although DDR played a crucial role in stopping direct violence in Sierra Leone and fostering some stability, it, however, encountered considerable challenges. Reintegration initiatives frequently did not address the more profound psychological and social scars left by the war. Numerous former combatants received insufficient support, and the programs struggled to restore trust within divided communities. Knight & Özerdem (2004) pointed out that, from a transcendent viewpoint, DDR represents a type of negative peace, merely the absence of violence, as opposed to positive peace, which encompasses justice, equity, and social cohesion. DDR often adopts a top-down approach, relies on external funding, and is technocratic, frequently overlooking the cultural context or emotional aspects of reconciliation. It also risks being transactional, providing ex-combatants with material benefits without securing their genuine participation in the political or social restructuring of society.

The Transcend approach, on the other hand, with the bottom-up method, would promote grassroots, culturally relevant efforts for reintegration that consider conflict resolution as an innovative process. Rather than concentrating solely on former combatants (Knight & Özerdem, 2004, p. 59), it would include all members of the community—victims, offenders, traditional leaders, and civil society—in crafting a collective future. Key components would comprise education, restorative justice, and systemic reform, with success assessed not merely in terms of stability but also through enhancements in quality of life, dignity, and mutual acknowledgment.

As opined by Solomon & Ginifer (2008, p. 14), the main difference between DDR and the Transcend model is in their scope and depth. While DDR is operational and concentrated on immediate peacebuilding efforts, Transcend seeks long-term change. For instance, DDR initiatives typically prioritize economic reintegration, such as providing skills training and job placement, whereas Transcend would additionally emphasize cultural reintegration, narrative healing, and the transformation of relationships between former adversaries. DDR operates under the assumption that the current state framework is legitimate, working within it to achieve stability. Conversely, the Transcend model would challenge whether the state itself requires transformation to avert the recurrence of structural violence. In the context of Sierra Leone, this could have involved reevaluating the distribution of power, wealth, and resources and addressing historical grievances through community-driven development and justice initiatives.

While the DDR strategies implemented in Sierra Leone were effective in establishing immediate stability following the conflict, they fell short of addressing the deeper structural and cultural roots of the violence. Galtung's Transcend approach offers a more holistic and visionary route, emphasizing the attainment of enduring peace through justice, inclusion, and transformation. Despite being more difficult to implement, it is essential for cultivating sustainable peace. The utilization of both DDR for short-term stabilization and transcend for long-term change could help post-conflict nations like Sierra Leone achieve more sustainable and meaningful reconciliation.

The Level of Peace Education and Institutional Reforms

Peace education was expected to be a vital post-conflict mechanism in Sierra Leone, especially after the cease-fire. However, the UN failed to recognize that peace cannot be sustained without addressing the

specific context of the conflict. Unlike the Western world, where most civilians are literate, a large portion of Sierra Leone's population is uneducated and unfamiliar with peace education. Therefore, both formal and informal peace education needed to be introduced at community and household levels. The study (Cromwell, 2019; Harris & Harris, 2002) argues that the disconnect between transitional justice institutions such as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), the Special Court for Sierra Leone, and the Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) programs in releasing the desired outcomes stemmed from self-serving individuals infiltrating the process, who lacked a shared vision, leading to the marginalization of vulnerable populations.

The UN could have taken a more effective approach by integrating peace education across various societal levels. This includes teaching content related to both negative and positive peace and understanding how micro- and macro-level contexts can shape future societies (Grandin, 2005, 2005.p.48). Emphasizing communication in peace education would foster a better awareness of sociocultural realities and structural problems. Such education could help shift mindsets, thereby reducing human rights violations and empowering citizens to hold institutions accountable (Dougherty, 2004; Kelsall, 2005; Shaw, 2005, 2007; Basu, 2007; Millar, 2010). Though institutions like human rights commissions and reforms in the police and public sectors were introduced, many were staffed by the same individuals who had previously benefitted from systemic abuse and injustice (Webel & Galtung, n.d., pp. 297-295). These individuals lacked genuine commitment to reform, making it difficult to prosecute or address violations, especially against women, who continued to face abuse and marginalization. The very agencies meant to protect them often turned a blind eye, sometimes even perpetrating the same violations themselves.

The study posits that Sierra Leone's DDR coupled with the transitional process was flawed due to the exclusion of the vulnerable and marginalized groups. Effective institutional reform should include vetting mechanisms, such as those used in "Denazification" or "De-Baathification" (Biggar, 2003, 8), to remove individuals affiliated with corrupt or abusive former regimes. Only by establishing neutral, independent bodies could true justice and peace take root, free from undue influence or complicity in past atrocities.

Methodological and Conceptual Limitations

The use of secondary data to analyze the conflict in Sierra Leone entails both methodological and conceptual limitations. (Humphreys & Weinstein, 2006) The quality and dependability of the data represents a significant methodological constraint. Depending on their production environment, possible biases, and the availability of verifiable information during and after the conflict, secondary sources, such as official reports, NGO publications, and university studies, can have varying degrees of veracity. Political objectives or restricted access to battle zones influenced many of the reports written during the war (1991–2002), which might result in inaccurate or partial accounts. The data's consistency and comparability present another methodological challenge. It's therefore challenging to reach logical conclusions due to the disparities across the sources. Longitudinal or comparative analyses are challenging since, for instance, the number of victims, displacement estimates, and event chronology may vary throughout reports (Cramer, 2009). Furthermore, crucial facets of the intricacy of the conflict are obscured by secondary data's frequent lack of specific information on local dynamics, such as experiences unique to a community or the involvement of less well-known individuals.

Conceptually, secondary evidence may impose interpretive frames developed by external parties, usually Western institutions, which reinforce colonial or simple narratives. Taking the chance to overlook Indigenous ideas of conflict, justice, and healing reduces the depth of study. For example, portraying the conflict as only a "resource war" focused on "blood diamonds" can obscure other significant socioeconomic problems, including marginalization, youth disenfranchisement, and state failure. Due to the absence of

control over data collection techniques, using secondary sources also presents limitations to the study. The methodological decisions made by the original authors, which might not be in line with the objectives or rigor criteria of their study, must be accepted by researchers who use these sources (Johnston, 2014). Furthermore, hindsight bias may be introduced by the retroactive character of many secondary analyses, especially when events are evaluated knowing their results. It's essential to note that the limited generalizability of the study stems from the fact that it focuses exclusively on Sierra Leone. Despite the valuable insights it offers into the dynamics of civil wars and post-conflict healing, it cannot reflect the full range of conflicts in Africa or around the world. The involvement of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), the presence of the British military, and the influence of regional actors are examples of unique features that may not exist elsewhere, limiting the applicability of the findings to other situations.

Conclusion

The study examined how disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) and transitional justice (TJ) mechanisms implemented in post-conflict Sierra Leone revealed critical shortcomings, despite their valuable contributions to peacebuilding discourse. In the introduction, we highlighted the consequences of neglecting marginalized groups such as women and child soldiers in the post-conflict DDR process, focusing on short-term security and ignoring deeper societal healing and long-term reintegration needs for the vulnerable.

The issue of impartiality emerged as a critical concern in the post-conflict reconstruction of Sierra Leone. Notably, the Transitional Justice mechanisms, particularly the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC)—intended to serve as platforms for truth-seeking and reconciliation, were limited in their scope. They failed to adequately address underlying structural inequalities and marginalized key groups such as women, former child soldiers, and those affected by economic grievances that had significantly contributed to the conflict. These shortcomings highlighted the necessity for more integrative and holistic peacebuilding frameworks in future post-conflict settings.

In this context, Galtung's Transcend approach was examined as a potential enhancement to the Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) process. The Transcend method, which prioritizes conflict transformation over mere resolution, advocates for empathy, nonviolence, and the pursuit of creative solutions that transcend zero-sum compromises. Its emphasis on addressing root causes and fostering sustained dialogue aligns with the broader goals of sustainable peace. We argued for the integration of this model into DDR initiatives, proposing that it could facilitate the rebuilding of social trust, promote community ownership, and support participatory reintegration, dimensions largely neglected in Sierra Leone's predominantly top-down approach. Furthermore, the analysis critically engaged with the limitations of both the DDR and transitional justice processes in the Sierra Leonean context.

The insights offered in this article make a significant contribution to scholarly discourses on conflict resolution by critically examining the limitations of conventional post-conflict frameworks and advancing the case for a more transformative and integrated approach. Specifically, the study advocates for the reconceptualization of Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) and Transitional Justice (TJ) as interrelated processes, which, when informed by Galtung's Transcend method, necessitate comprehensive psychosocial, cultural, and structural healing mechanisms. This proposed paradigm shift enhances the field of peace and conflict studies by emphasizing inclusive, context-specific strategies that move beyond mere disarmament to enable genuine reconciliation and sustainable post-conflict

Based on these observations, the following recommendations are offered to guide more effective and context-embedded DDR and transitional justice processes in post-conflict societies.

1. **Promote Integrated and Inclusive Planning:** Transitional justice and DDR processes should be planned in tandem, with deliberate efforts to align their goals, timelines, and implementation strategies. This requires early collaboration between all stakeholders and the inclusion of local actors in the design and execution of peacebuilding initiatives.
2. **Support Community-Based Reconciliation Mechanisms:** Rather than relying solely on formal institutions, reconciliation should be supported through community-led initiatives that engage both victims and former combatants in joint efforts to rebuild trust and restore damaged infrastructure. Such approaches can foster a sense of ownership and emotional healing that institutional processes alone often fail to achieve.
3. **Ensure that Institutional Reforms Address Root Inequalities:** Transitional justice must be accompanied by reforms that tackle the structural conditions, such as inequality, gender-based violence, and lack of access to education, that contributed to the conflict. These reforms should be informed by participatory assessments that reflect the priorities and needs of diverse social groups.
4. **Implement Ethical and Transparent Vetting Processes:** Post-conflict transitions should include mechanisms to ensure that individuals who were complicit in systemic abuses are not reintegrated into positions of power without accountability. Transparent vetting processes can help restore public confidence in governance and signal a genuine break from past injustices.

In conclusion, transitional justice and DDR can only contribute to lasting peace if they move beyond symbolic gestures and engage deeply with the realities of those most affected by conflict. This requires a shift from elite-driven, externally imposed models toward inclusive, flexible, and context-responsive strategies that center the voices of survivors, promote collective healing, and lay the foundations for a just and equitable society.

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