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Seeking community reconciliation through traditional practice. The Sierra Leonean experience.

PhD Thesis

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1. Introduction

Sierra Leone's long and violent war in the 1990s caught the imagination of the outside world with its pictures of inconceivable cruelty and viciousness. Declared officially over in January 2002, the deep physical and emotional scars it left on the people and their communities and the destruction of the country's socio-economic and institutional foundations are still visible today. But Sierra Leoneans have also shown an extraordinary ability to deal with the painful and violent past and to move on. This does not mean that the victims would be able to easily forget the suffering they endured or that the return and (re)integration of the former combatants into the society would always go smoothly and effortlessly. Yet, if you ask around in the villages across the country, people almost always answer the same: "We have reconciled". What do they mean by that? And how have they achieved it?

As other societies emerging from war, one of the major challenges Sierra Leone faced in its aftermath was to find ways for the people to live together again – those who killed and maimed and those who suffered in their hands, those who left to seek refuge in neighbouring countries, those who were displaced and those who stayed behind. In an effort to deal with the legacy of the conflict, the Sierra Leonean Government with the assistance of the international community established two institutions to deliver justice, reconciliation and healing to the nation and its people – the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and the Special Court for Sierra Leone (SCSL). The TRC was charged with "creat[ing] an impartial historical record of violations and abuses of human rights and international humanitarian law related to the armed conflict, address[ing] impunity, respond[ing] to the needs of the victims, promot[ing] healing and reconciliation and prevent[ing] a repetition of the violations and abuses suffered" (TRC Act 2000:Art.6). The SCSL was set up to prosecute those "who bear the greatest responsibility for serious violations of international humanitarian law and Sierra Leonean law" during the war (SCSL Statute 2000:Art.1). The work of these transitional justice institutions has been subject to much debate (e.g. Evenson 2004, Dougherty 2004, Hoffman 2007, Kelsall 2005, 2009, Schabas 2003, Shaw 2005, 2007, Stovel 2006). One of the questions raised in the discussions was a concern over the impact of these institutions on the lives of ordinary Sierra Leoneans and their meaningfulness in the local context. It seems that especially in many rural areas, the TRC and SCSL have

made little impression. This may be both because of practical deficiencies and financial constraints, but also, and more importantly, because they failed to take into account the conceptions of healing, reconciliation and justice rooted in the Sierra Leonean cultural context (cf. Coulter 2009, Hoffman 2004, 2007, Jackson 2004, Kelsall 2005, 2009, Shaw 2005, 2007). While the national transitional justice institutions have attracted considerable attention, there are only a few studies that focus on the process of reconciliation as it unfolded, both independent from and alongside, the official mechanisms in villages across the country.

This study aims to do just that. It seeks to explore the process of reconciliation and restoration of relationships at village level in Sierra Leone, with a particular focus on the role of local ceremonies. It also endeavours to elucidate the ways in which the national transitional justice institutions were perceived and reflected on a local level. The study brings an empirically based research on community coexistence and reconciliation, striving to develop an understanding of the complex world of lived experience in a post-war setting from the perspective of those who live it. While the study is conducted because of an intrinsic interest in the case, there also is a broader – albeit not explicitly pursued – aim to contribute to the debates in transitional justice and peace-building fields regarding the 'local' practices of reconciliation and dealing with violent past in African post-conflict societies.

1.1 Research problem and background

Post-conflict peacebuilding has gained a prominent place in the conflict resolution field in the past decade (Ramsbotham et. al. 2008). But in spite of its frequent use both in practice and in academic writing, there is little consensus about the meaning of the term 'peacebuilding', the activities it encompasses or about when during the life cycle of the conflict it is to be initiated or ended. There is a wealth of literature on peacebuilding and a great number of debates on each of these issues that are beyond the scope and focus of the present study. At least three broad areas, or processes, associated with peacebuilding can be identified: state-building, economic development and social reconciliation and justice (Swedlund 2011:5 quoted in Millar 2011:177). The third area - social reconciliation and justice – is of central concern to the present study.

The concepts of reconciliation and justice are not only referred to in peacebuilding literatures (e.g. Ramsbotham et al. 2008, Lederach 1997, Galtung n.d., Rothstein 1999, Reychler and Paffenholz 2001) but are also broadly discussed in the transitional justice field (e.g. Rigby 2001, Clark 2008, Prager and Govier 2003). In academic writing, peacebuilding (and the broader field of conflict resolution) and transitional justice are distinctive fields, the former firmly established within social sciences and the latter often gravitating towards legal research. However, even a cursory look at the post-conflict situations around the world, in practice transitional justice has become a critical component of liberal peacebuilding, the dominant approach to peacebuilding (cf. Sriram 2007, Shaw and Waldorf 2010:3). They go hand in hand in the externally driven post-war intervention as they share a "liberal vision of history as progress" and a number of fundamental assumptions concerning the desirability of certain institutional arrangements and policies for repairing the harms of the past, addressing the violent conflict and safeguarding its non-recurrence (Shaw and Waldorf 2010:3, cf. Sriram 2007, Kayser-Whande and Schell-Faucon 2010).

Both the international liberal peacebuilding and transitional justice practice also share a common perception (and self-perception) as universal and culturally neutral, or acultural, undertakings. In this respect, when culture is at all considered, it is rather as an 'add-on', as a residual category. As Viktorova-Milne writes: "The prevalent perception among the agents of liberal peacebuilding is that culture, while important, is an auxiliary consideration, which can follow, but not precede, the cornerstones of peacebuilding identified as the spread of democracy, respect for human rights, good governance and so on" (2009:95). Culture is seen as a characteristic feature of – even as a property of – 'the Other' (Said 1985), which is the subject of the liberal peacebuilding and transitional justice projects (Chandler 2010).

In broad terms, culture is featured as either being part of the problem that brought about the violence and thus as something that the "technocratic project of building the rule of law in post-conflict peacebuilding" can resolve (Park 2010a:413, cf. Viktorova-Milne 2009) or as a resource, or a tool, that can be 'applied' to assist in these peacebuilding and justice efforts.

This second understanding of 'culture as a resource' merits further attention here. It has gained prominence in recent years as part of the growing attention to 'local' participation and ownership in international peacebuilding and

transitional justice activities. One of the avenues along this path has been the exploration of African 'traditional' conflict management and reconciliation practices, which could be used for the purpose of securing accountability and reintegration of perpetrators and fostering social cohesion after violent conflict. In an illustrative statement, Bloomfield states: "One increasingly acknowledged role that culture can play is to act as a rich resource for finding home-grown tools to use in the reconciliation process" (2003:46). Understood this way, 'culture' fits well with the current design of peacebuilding and transitional justice interventions that have developed standard 'toolkits' for use in post-conflict societies all over the world (cf. Shaw and Waldorf 2010).

Together with the increased emphasis on the local ownership and participation, the 'traditional' conflict management mechanisms are apt for being included in this 'toolkit'. Thus, for example, the UN Secretary General Kofi Annan's Report on *The rule of law and transitional justice in conflict and post-conflict societies* acknowledges that "due regard must be given to indigenous and informal traditions for administering justice or settling disputes, to help them to continue their often vital role and to do so in conformity with both international standards and local tradition" (UNSC 2004:12). This approach to 'culture' and 'tradition' (which are indeed often perceived as synonymous) in peacebuilding and transitional justice practice essentialises culture, limiting it into a fixed and static set of practices that are "naturally the property of spatially localized people" (Gupta and Ferguson 1997:3, cited in Shaw and Waldorf 2010:6). It is also viewed in a dichotomous opposition to the universal (international standards in the above) and can only complement it in certain situations. At the same time, while 'cultural' or 'traditional' approaches to conflict management, peacebuilding and reconciliation may be viewed in these rather narrow terms, they have become popular in recent years with many international peacebuilders. It sometimes led to romanticised ideas about these 'traditional' mechanisms as a heritage from the authentic pre-modern African past that can be employed to better its future (cf. MacGinty 2008). This can also be attributed to the way in which the subjects of liberal peacebuilding and transitional justice interventions – the conflict-ridden 'Others' - are constructed and understood. Blagg neatly sums up the preceding argument: "Through the Orientalist lens, distinctive and historically embedded cultural practices are essentialised, reduced to a series of discrete elements, then reassembled and repackaged to

meet the requirements of the dominant culture" (2001:230, cited in Cunneen 2008).

But a critique of the essentialist views of 'traditional' and 'cultural' mechanisms for resolving conflict and seeking justice and reconciliation in its aftermath is not and should not be the same as saying that 'tradition' and 'culture' do not matter. There are several conflict resolution scholar-practitioners who move beyond such narrow notions of culture to consider it in broader contextual terms. One of the chief proponents of this thinking - referred to as 'transformative' or 'elicitive' peacebuilding - is John Paul Lederach (1997:107). He suggests that "peacebuilding initiatives and solutions [...] must be rooted in the soil where the conflict rages and must be built on contextualized participation of people from that setting if reconciliation is to be sustained" (Lederach 1997:107). Transformative peacebuilding is a lasting process rather than just a practical activity. Its central component is reconciliation understood as relationship building (Lederach 2000). The transformative approach does not bring any specific prescriptive guide for action or a roadmap to follow in each case. Rupeshinghe points to the contextualized nature of transformative peacebuilding and recognizes the need for particular strategies for particular conflicts because "each conflict situation or context should dictate how the process is designed (Rupesinghe 1995:83). The present study subscribes to this line of thinking believing that sustainable peace is to be built from below (Ramsbotham et. al. 2008: 215, Lederach 1997). It builds on two central tenets of transformative peacebuilding: first, that successful conflict transformation must come from within the society, second, that the transformative process includes the entire society but its emphasis lays on the grassroots level actors and strategies (Lederach 1997, 2000, Rupesinghe 1995). While this literature has been essential in challenging the universalist assumptions of much thinking on conflict resolution and peacebuilding, it stays short of providing a consistent framework for studying the local processes of building peace, reconciliation and justice outside the organized conflict resolution intervention.

In recent years, more studies started to emerge, mainly done by anthropologists that brought a deeper consideration of 'the local' and its cultural context in the post-conflict interventions (e.g. Shaw 2005, 2007, 2010, Kelsall 2005, 2009, Finnstrom 2010). They emphasise the lived experience in the post-conflict situations and seek to bring "a nuanced understanding of what justice, redress

and social reconstruction look like from place-based standpoints" (Shaw and Waldorf 2010:6). The local is not a bounded, "residual space" but rather "the shifted centre from which the rest of the world is viewed" (ibid.). This is an approach that also adopted in the present study.

1.2 Research questions and selection of the case

This research developed and changed its direction and focus a few times as I went along with the fieldwork. Initially, I came to Sierra Leone to look for 'traditional' mechanisms of dispute settlement and the role they played in building peace in the country in the aftermath of the civil war. My approach was modelled on the above mentioned dominant understandings of 'traditional' conflict management practices in the peace-building and transitional justice literatures. Once in the field, I realized that my framework was very limited for understanding the complex ways, in which reintegration, reconciliation and social reconstruction has been happening at a local level. Not only were the local practices and techniques of reconciliation and reintegration more diverse than the 'toolbox' approach allows to understand, but more importantly, their meaningfulness was shaped by the way reconciliation, reintegration, justice and forgiveness were understood by the people who 'performed' them. Instead of focusing on a single 'traditional' mechanism or practice, the research brings a more holistic picture of the process of reconciliation and social reconstruction in the Sierra Leonean villages. It still retains a primary interest in the ceremonial and ritual expressions of reconciliation but studies them in the broader context of the local narratives on reconciliation.

Specifically, this study seeks to explore the following main questions:

How is reconciliation understood in Sierra Leone?

In what ways do local 'traditional' ceremonies and rituals contribute to post-war reconciliation?

How are the national justice and truth-telling mechanisms experienced on the village level?

Sierra Leone was selected as a case study for a number of reasons:

First, the war was not fought along ethnic or religious cleavages. Although some authors (Pettersson 2004, Kandeh 1992) suggest that certain tensions between

the dominant Mende and Temne should be acknowledged,[1] none of the fighting factions had an ethnically or religiously defined membership base and no specific part of population was targeted. This factor could be improving the prospects of successful reconciliation as there are no deep-seated enemy images established among clearly identifiable groups among the population. However, there are other sources of division in the society that could negatively affect the reconciliation process. Among them, one between the youth and the country's elites both at local and national levels is most prominent, also because it contributed to the conflict in the first place. As Shaw observes: "Young Sierra Leoneans are keenly aware of the institutional structures and hierarchies that perpetuate their marginalization" (2010:118).

Second, the war was characterised by brutal violence and cruelty committed by all the warring factions that intentionally targeted the civilians. In many communities, those who were hurt live next to those who brought the violence upon them. At the same time, those who carried out much of the killings, mutilations and other atrocities were often (albeit not always) themselves abducted. Similarly, considering the conflict was precipitated by the decades of structural violence, the line between those who we call 'victims' and 'perpetrators' can thus at times be fairly blurred (Shaw and Waldorf 2010:8). This fact, while rarely taken into consideration in the internationally driven mechanisms, can also be expected to be reflected in the reconciliation process.

Third, Sierra Leone has been often presented as a peacebuilding success. UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon praised the country in 2010 as "one of the world's most successful cases of post-conflict recovery, peacekeeping and peacebuilding" (UNSG 2010). It also was the first country where a truth commission - the Truth and Reconciliation Commission - and a criminal tribunal – the Special Court for Sierra Leone – worked alongside each other - an experiment considered by a many as successful (Schabas 2003). But the decision on the kind of transitional justice mechanisms to be used in a post-conflict country lies usually in the hands of the elites - the governments, the international community, the top representatives of a few civil society

[1] The Mende, the dominant group in the south and east of the country, traditionally dominate the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP), while the predominantly Temne and Limba north is the All People's Congress (APC) stronghold. The RUF leader Foday Sankoh was a 'Northerner' and a Temne, although the first fighting took place in the heartland of Mende territory (Eastern Province). Some Mende therefore perceived the war as an invasion by the Temne from the north of the country. Meanwhile, the Temne often see the war as a south-eastern plot initiated by Sankoh as a paid agent, with the purpose of destabilizing the APC government (Alie 2006:135).

groups. The views on justice and reconciliation of the ordinary people are rarely considered, the majority that bore the brunt of the violence is rarely consulted. The question of how they see the role of these mechanisms in their own efforts to come together after the war and how these coexist with the local understanding of justice, truth and reconciliation is therefore important but rarely explored. Therefore also in this light, Sierra Leone presents an interesting case study.

Fourth, while much interest has been given to the exploration of the local practices of conflict management and justice in African countries that could be used in and adapted to the process of restoring war-torn societies and building peace, Sierra Leone has not attracted – with a few notable exceptions (Shaw 2005, 2007, Kaidaneh and Rigby 2010) - much attention in this respect. Currently, there is a local organization, Fambul Tok running a project of supporting villages in organizing reconciliation ceremonies rooted in the local traditional practice which will be discussed in more detail in chapter 8.6. Their experience shows that there are local techniques of reconciliation, healing and reintegration that are relevant for the post-war needs for social recovery. But little is known about what role these played when there was no outside support or encouragement. Also this makes the Sierra Leonean case interesting for research.

Existing research on post-war peacebuilding and transitional justice in Sierra Leone has focused on three main areas. First, it is the broad issue of ex-combatant reintegration. Initially, studies in this area analysed the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programmes (i.a. Hoffman 2003, 2005, Humphreys and Weinstein 2007, Leff 2008). Specific attention has been given to the problems of children associated with fighting forces (i.a. Denov 2010, McIntyre and Thusi 2003, Williamson and Cripe 2002, Williamson 2006), and to a lesser extent also to girls and women (i.a. Coulter 2009, Stark 2006, Utas 2009). Attention was also given to ex-combatants post-war circumstances (i.e. Peters 2006, Hoffman 2011). Second, as briefly mentioned in the introductory passage above, there are a number of diverse studies focusing on the work of the national transitional justice institutions – the TRC and the SCSL (i.a. Evenson 2004, Dougherty 2004, Hoffman 2007, Kelsall 2005, 2009, Kerr and Lincoln 2008, Schabas 2003, Shaw 2005, 2007). The research focus of these studies ranges from the functioning and coexistence of both institutions SCSL (i.a.

Evenson 2004, Dougherty 2004, Kerr and Lincoln 2008, Schabas 2003) to discussing the impact of these institutions on the lives of ordinary Sierra Leoneans and their meaningfulness in the local cultural context (i.a. Coulter 2009, Hoffman 2004, 2007, Jackson 2004, Kelsall 2005, 2009, Shaw 2005, 2007). Third, a few studies have emerged that focus on the issue of 'traditional' practices and mechanisms of forge reconciliation in the local communities (i.a. Alie 2008, Kaindaneh and Rigby 2010, Stark 2006, Utas 2009). Most recently the focus of many of these contributions has been on community ceremonies supported by Fambul Tok (i.a. Graybill 2010, Hoffman 2008). The present study mainly builds on the research in the second and third categories but aims to fill a certain gap identified in these bodies of research. The review of the existing literature established that our understanding of the ways in which the local traditional techniques of reconciliation and reintegration inform the communities' post-war recovery remains limited. The present thesis seeks to partially remedy this by exploring some of the traditional ceremonies and practices that were performed in the villages without any external support or initiative and by discussing the role these played in the efforts of the people to deal with the challenges of post-war reintegration and reconciliation in their village.

1.3 Research design and methodology

The presents study seeks to achieve a deep understanding of the role of local ceremonies and other practices of social recovery in the process of reconciliation and restoration of relationships at village level in Sierra Leone. It also attempts to understand how these interacted with, converged with and diverged from the nation-wide transitional justice institutions. This necessitates an exploration of the perceptions and subjective experiences of the individuals and communities involved in this process. It was this "interest in subjectivity and the authenticity of human experience" (Silverman 2010:6) that directed the choice of qualitative research approach – both in the collection and analysis of data.

Criticism against qualitative research is well known (e.g. Silverman 2010 or Bryman 2008). It is often labelled as being 'unscientific', with the most common objections charging qualitative research as too subjective, difficult to

replicate, unable to provide generalizations and lacking in transparency (Bryman 2008). According to critics, the often inductive approach to data and analysis characteristic of qualitative approaches means that its findings heavily rely on "researcher's often unsystematic views about what is significant and important, and also upon the close personal relationships that the researcher frequently strikes up with the people studied" (Bryman 2008:391).

The question of generalization is particularly contentious. Indeed, the critical role that the context of the studied research problem plays in qualitative studies limits the applicability of the findings to other contexts. However, as Williams (2000) has argued, it is often possible to make *moderatum* generalizations, "ones in which aspects of the focus of enquiry ... can be seen to be instances of a broader set of recognizable features" as well as "draw with findings by other researchers relating to comparable groups" (p. 215, cited in Bryman 2008:392). In this respect, this study represents an effort to draw attention to the local conception of reconciliation and the related needs and how they sit with the internationally preferred transitional justice agenda.

Concerning reliability and validity of the research, two different criteria specific for assessing qualitative research have been proposed – those of trustworthiness and authenticity (Bryman 2008:377). To achieve research rigour, this study strives to stand the test of both of these criteria.

Trustworthiness consists of four criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility "entails both ensuring that research is carried out according to the canons of good practice *and* submitting research findings to the members of the social world who were studied for confirmation that the investigator has correctly understood that social world" (ibid.). While there was no opportunity to present final version of the study to any Sierra Leoneans, the preliminary findings from the data analysis and observations were consulted with local expert informants, gatekeepers, and other contacts. Furthermore, data triangulation was employed which entails comparing and gathering data through several methods, at different times and social situations (Denzin 1978). In-depth one-on-one or tandem interviews, focus groups, participant observation and secondary sources analysis were all used to ensure a better consistency of the data. The aim in transferability is to produce what Geertz (1973) called a thick description, a contextually rich and detailed account of the environment or group under study. This then "provides

others with what they refer to as a database for making judgements about the possible transferability of findings to other milieux" (Bryman 2008:378). To meet the criteria of dependability, all records including field notes, recordings, coded datasets etc. are kept and the analysis decisions and process are described in detail below. Personal values and theoretical inclinations have been controlled to assure confirmability (ibid.). Authenticity concerns "wider political impact of research" (ibid.), among them fairness is of highest relevance for the present research. It questions whether diverse viewpoints of the different members are fairly represented. To achieve this, the interviews and focus groups in the communities included people of different age groups and both genders as well as people with various war experiences - former fighters, victims of crimes, returnees and those who stayed etc.

The aim of the study led the choice of an intrinsic case study as a research design. As Stake (2000) writes, an intrinsic case study is undertaken because the case "in all its particularity and ordinariness" is of interest and "the researcher wants better understanding" of it (p. 237). The choice of an intrinsic case study is premised upon certain epistemological and ontological positions. The focus on understanding the complex social world of the lived experience and the subjective meanings people assign to it characterises an epistemological position described as interpretivist (Bryman 2008). Constructionist ontology implies that social reality is a creation of social actors (ibid.).

Chabal and Daloz (2006) write: "Unravelling what makes sense to the actors … is to enter the realm of the interpretation of meaning: that is to make the effort to decode the significance of such events from the others' viewpoint. To do that is inescapably to address the issues of culture" (p.4). But while culture is a complex and contested concept in the social sciences (Viktorova-Milne 2009:12), for the purpose of the present study "culture is not to be defined exhaustively, by reference to all the particular elements that might come to represent what it is at a particular (and inevitably frozen) point in time" (Chabal and Daloz 2006:21). Instead, it is more usefully conceived of as "an environment, a constantly evolving setting, within which human behaviour follows a number of particular courses – many of which are contradictory" (ibid.). This is best captured in the classical Geertz's classical premise "… that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun" and culture is taken to be those webs. (Geertz 1973:5). We cannot simply 'enrich'

our peacebuilding and transitional justice 'toolbox' with culturally-sensitive tools but we must strive "to disentangle the relevant webs of significance" that impinge on the process of post-war reconstruction and reconciliation.

1.4 Data collection

The case study is primarily based on interviews conducted during my two field trips to Sierra Leone. During the first one, between January and June 2008, I came to the country to volunteer for a local non-governmental organisation (NGO) and devoted only part of my time to fieldwork for the study. I conducted 8 formal interviews in Freetown mainly with academic staff at Fourah Bay College, local NGOs' and other civil society staff, community and religious leaders. I also spent a lot of time talking to ordinary people in Freetown, people I worked with, I lived with as well as casual acquaintances on public transport, at the market or in cookery shops and elsewhere. I also visited three district headquarter towns in the provinces - Kabala in the Northern and Kenema and Kailahun in the Eastern Province where I also discussed my research project with a number of people from different walks of life. All these conversations, both formal and informal, have profoundly shaped my ideas about the research. I also made my first contact with Fambul Tok in 2008, a local organization that had just launched a nationwide initiative supporting villages in organizing reconciliation ceremonies rooted in local traditional practice. I was offered the opportunity to attend and observe a ceremony in Kissy-Kama Chiefdom in Kailahun District. Overall, the first visit to Sierra Leone was invaluable for making contacts and clarifying the focus of the research. The six months I spent living in Sierra Leone was an opportunity to start getting to know the country, the everyday concerns of the people, their stories, frustrations and aspirations.

The majority of the interviews for this thesis were conducted during my second trip to the country in January and February 2010. I spent twelve days in Freetown and travelled the rest of the time across the country. I visited two districts in the Northern – Port Loko and Koinadugu – and the Southern - Moyamba and Bo - Provinces and one - Kailahun - in the Eastern Province. I

spent seven to ten days in each district town and visited two to four surrounding villages; 18 villages in total.[2]

My choice of villages was guided by several considerations. I chose not to focus only on one village but decided to conduct research in several villages. This was partly motivated by time and resource constraints; I did not have enough of either to carry out an ethnographic research by spending an extended period of time in one place. It was also motivated by the aim of the research to provide an understanding of the role of local ceremonies and other techniques of social recovery in the post-war reconciliation process at village level to which an effort to record the experiences in multiple locations was seen as beneficial. However, the goal was not to compare the findings between different villages and regions but rather to identify common themes across the data that would speak to the stated research questions. The choice of the particular villages was also based on the questions of accessibility and availability of local contacts and 'gatekeepers' who assisted me with accessing the sites. I found my gatekeepers in different ways. Some of them were relatives or family members of my friends and acquaintances that I met already in 2008 in Freetown, some I only made contact with once I arrived in the district headquarter towns. They were usually teachers, religious leaders or local NGO staff. They usually assisted me with gaining access to the villages through their personal relations. This often proved to be an important way of gaining some initial degree of trust. Sometimes there were several people assisting in selecting the villages for interviews. In Port Loko, for example, a local NGO leader guided me to one of the villages as well as introduced me to the Paramount Chief who then helped me with access to another village. The use of multiple gatekeepers decreased the risk of producing biased samples connected to the snowball sampling technique. In selecting the people to be interviewed in the villages, I did not attempt to proportionately reflect the exact age and gender structure of the population. I instead aimed at gaining insights from a wide range of people both young (under 35s) and old, men and women. I also tried to look for people with various war experiences - former fighters, victims of crimes, returnees and those who stayed etc.

Altogether, I recorded a total of 105 interviews during my 2010 visit. 55 of these were one-on-one or tandem interviews (INT) with people in the

[2] For an overview of the research sites see Annex 1.

communities – chiefs, victims, ex combatants, bystanders. Another 30 were community focus groups (FG) with between 3 and 12 participants.

In addition to the in-depth interviews and group discussions with the villagers, I interviewed religious leaders, NGO staff, and academics in Freetown and the district headquarter towns of Port Loko, Makeni, Kabala, Bo, Kailahun and Moyamba.[3] I had 19 individual interviews with experts (E) - NGO staff, civil society members, religious leaders, academics – and 1 expert focus group. The expert interviews were done to obtain a broader range of perspectives and perceptions and to consult the preliminary findings from the villages. In total 261 people participated in the research, which resulted in nearly 160 hours of recorded interviews. As in 2008 when I lived in Freetown, also this time around during the travelling interactions and conversations with Sierra Leoneans in the 'ordinary' daily situations provided me with much contextual insight as many people shared their opinions and observations, their concerns and everyday struggles as well as their joys and dreams.

I used multiple methods for collecting the data: in-depth one-on-one or tandem interviews, focus groups, participant observation and secondary sources analysis. In-depth interviewing is a good method to learn the subjective perspectives of individuals on the issues under study. I started with a list of semi-structured questions covering the major themes such as ceremonies, reconciliation and return of ex-combatants. Then, depending on what my informants were saying, each interview took "different twists and turns and follow[ed] its own winding path" (Brounéus 2011:130). This gave my informants the space to speak for themselves and emphasise the issues they considered important. At the same time, I followed up their responses with new questions and eventually returned to my list of questions. In this way, I was able to gather a rich narrative data while at the same time keep in line with my research aims. The atmosphere of the interviews and, more importantly, the nature of answers, can be seriously influenced by trust, or lack of it. As I did not have the possibility of staying in the villages for an extended period of time in order to build close relationships, I depended to a large extent on my gatekeepers for presenting me to the communities and helping me gain initial trust. This indeed worked better in some places than in others.

[3] The full list of interviews including indexing can be found in Annex 2.

Initially, I did not plan to use focus group interviews. But early on, it turned out that it was sometimes difficult to isolate individuals from a village for one-on-one interviews without creating situations in which those individuals may have felt uncomfortable or singled out. It also turned out that in a more open conversation people encouraged each other, reacted to each other and complemented each other with their own observations, experiences and perspectives on what was being said or corrected each other in details. Indeed, "the contrasting and comparing among the participants help to better elucidate motivations and reasoning, especially if the topic at hand has been a group experience" (Söderström 2011:147). In fact, the participant observations of the dynamics of such groups, the type of reactions, behaviours and attitudes, and body language – nodding, disagreeing, and cheering – also became a very valuable source of data. Following the experience with the first such generically grown discussion group, I insisted that there were separate groups with men and women, as the women's voices were overshadowed by men's.

The individual in-depth interviews lasted usually about one hour, the group discussions slightly longer. I tape-recorded most of my interviews, always with the consent of my informants. Only in a two cases – both in interviews with experts, a lawyer who formerly worked with the SCSL and a member of a local council in Kailahun District – the men did not feel comfortable with being recorded and I therefore only made written notes.

1.5 Data analysis

I started transcribing the interviews and analysing the data already during the fieldwork. This preliminary analysis of the interviews was an opportunity to reflect on the initial questions, their formulation and the kind of responses they were yielding. Furthermore, it sometimes provided new directions that I initially did not think of. This was, for example, the case with the frequent references to a changing relationship between chiefs and youth in the village, a direction that I did not consider to include but that often came up in conversations about (re-)building relationships in the community. The on-going analysis also highlighted several issues that I then raised with some of my expert informants, in order to get their feedback on my preliminary interpretations and findings. Lastly, it also gave me and my interpreters the opportunity to fill in gaps they might have

missed earlier in their interpretation and give context or explanation to local customs as well as to improve the interviewing and interpreting technique.

However, due to time and practical constraints, as transcribing usually took three times longer than recording the interview, and as lacking electricity supply sometimes made charging my laptop difficult, only about 25% of the interviews were transcribed during the fieldwork and the rest was finished upon my return home. The 160 hours of interviews translated in over 400 pages of typed out narrative data, which were complemented by my notes related to observations that I had made while in the field.

The key patterns and themes for analysis were developed inductively from the collected data (Bryman 2008:390). But as Srivastava and Hopwood (2009) note, they do not emerge on their own (p. 77). Rather, the analysis is "a loop-like pattern of multiple rounds of revisiting the data as additional questions emerge, new connections are unearthed, and more complex formulations develop along with a deepening understanding of the material. Qualitative analysis is fundamentally an iterative set of processes" (Berkowitz 1997, in Srivastava and Hopwood 2009:77). In addition those that came out from the interviews, I also identified important themes in the existing anthropological literature on Sierra Leone and examined my data through this framework.

The objective of analysing qualitative data is to determine the categories, relationships and assumptions that inform the respondents' view of the world in general, and of the topic – here local reconciliation - in particular (McCracken 1988 quoted in Bassit 2003:143). I determined the categories and their relationships through a process of coding. Coding – or sometimes categorising, tagging or labelling – is a qualitative research process in which one defines what is happening in the data and in which one "begins to grapple with what it means" (Charmaz 2006:46). Simply speaking, the idea of coding is that you label or tag chunks of data with a code representing the theme, so if a theme is identified in a later interview, you can then go back to previous interviews to see if that theme or process can be used to explain those as well (Charmaz 2006).

The process started with carefully reading and re-reading all the data that I had collected with an aim to divide the data into categories. I spent much time redefining or renaming the categories until I came to a set of categories that I

found satisfactory. As Dey noted about the importance of finding the right categories before starting the actual analysis: “devising a category is making decisions about how to organise the data in ways which are useful for the analysis, and we have to take some account of how this category will ‘fit’ into this wider analytic context” (Dey 1993:103). After I had my initial list of categories I commenced the process of dividing the data into excerpts. But rather than breaking my data up into the smallest possible data, I often chose to keep a few lines or a paragraph together so it would not lose its contextual meaning.

After defining categories, the process of coding started. By coding the actual analysis of the data starts. The codes are links between “locations in the data and sets of concepts or ideas, and they are in that sense heuristic devices, which enable the researcher to go beyond the data” (Coffey and Atkinson 1996:27). I had kept some of the excerpts quite long, as I wanted to make sure to allow all the detail in the data to be captured. For the same reason, often two (or where necessary three or four) codes were assigned to a single excerpt. Once that was done, I could start interpreting the data and weaving the narrative along the key patterns and themes that emerged from the data. The case study is therefore presented in a narrative form along excerpts from the interviews, complemented with my interpretation and analysis and with accounts from other studies.

1.6 Researching other cultures. Some reflections on being an outsider.

The specific problems related to this kind of interview-based research are manifold, most obviously linguistic, ethical, interpretational and cultural. Being European and female does not always make things easier.

Access to informants

As mentioned above, for the introduction to my informants I relied heavily on local contacts – be it NGO workers, interpreters/assistants or school teachers. More importantly, even my contacts had mostly to accept interference in the selection of informants by the village chief. Although I have persistently tried to influence the selection in a sensitive way so to speak to people most relevant for the research, it has certainly influenced my sample. In some places my

choice of informants was not always entirely free but people were asked by the chiefs to talk to me, in others I could freely walk around the village and chose my informants.

Interviewing in Sierra Leonean villages presents additional challenges. Both in one on one interviews and in focus groups I tried to find a private place to speak – however, it turned out that many people and particularly chiefs preferred speaking to me on their front porch surrounded (despite my requests for privacy) by villagers. Although interruption by locals could lead to interesting discussions, worryingly the answers of the chiefs could influence what other informants would say in individual interviews taking place later. Only in one village all interviews took place in the chief's house, in the other communities I could interview people in their own dwellings or other place of choice and without the presence of the chiefs. But the limited time I spent in the villages make it hard to understand the power relations within the village and the position of my informants within these structures (with the exception of the chiefs) and to establish how these may have affected the interviews or motivated informants to provide 'socially acceptable' answers to my questions. Furthermore, as Utas (2009) points out, due to the familiarity with outside NGOs and other institutions, informants at times give responses that they believe are desired by the researcher. Less common in the more remote villages where I undertook my research was what he calls 'research fatigue'. Only in one village it turned out, that my contact person had brought other researchers to the same village and people were very tired of answering to questions of strangers without ever seeing anything back for it. Fanthorpe (2005) warns that the familiarity with post-war intervention by aid agencies has raised expectations when foreigners visit local communities and informants often stress that material needs would go a long way in restoring local relationships. Recognising this "use of grievance as rhetorical device" (p. 40) particularly from my visits in communities in the Northern Province, I strived to distinguish in my research between the requests for help and the emphasis people put on material needs and redress as important factors in reconciliation.

Adjusting one's way of questioning to what is culturally acceptable while still getting to the bottom of issues is a skill that needs to grow through experience. Changing interpreters, which was necessary as the geographic spread of the research resulted in interviews in English, Krio, Temne, Koranko, Mende and

Kissi, did not contribute to making this task any easier. Just as Stark (2006), I noticed that interpreters sometimes tended to turn open-ended questions into closed-ended ones (p. 209). Although the respondent might just have nodded in approval to the interpreter's statement, the interpreter gave a several minutes' long and detailed answer. When I noticed this was happening I tried to rephrase the question and ask it again, or return to the topic later on in the interview. At times interpreters 'manipulated' my questions so that the informant would give the answer that the interpreter believed I was looking for. Listening back to recorded interviews with a third person revealed a lot of new information that at times even contradicted my original notes from the interpreter and thus helped to 'clean' the data.

I worked with six different interpreters, all of which were men. Five of them were school teachers and the sixth a social worker at an NGO. The social and communication skills of the teachers were often helpful in interviews; however, at times their tendency to 'teach' the informants interfered with getting a spontaneous and genuine response. The social worker both arranged the interviews in and around Kabala, where he had worked as a reintegration officer just after the war. His intimate knowledge with the local culture helped in getting a better understanding some of the responses. The downside of his experience with what took place in these communities directly after the war was that he would phrase questions so that they would produce the desired outcome.

Although American or European researchers are all but a new phenomenon in Sierra Leonean rural areas, they are mostly conceived as being linked to an NGO. The concept of pure academic research without direct influence on policy or projects is - quite understandably - often harder to grasp. Informants would frequently ask about the benefit of my research and also answer the questions in terms of local development needed in the hope that this would be reported to those with the means to deploy projects. The frequent response that only assistance from outside could improve reconciliation can for a part be explained by the hope that the interviewer would actually be able to honour such suggestions.

Another sensitive issue to be aware of – also noted by Utas (2009:11) – is the connotation of tradition as being backward or in conflict with Christianity. There is abundant proof that traditional beliefs and world religions go hand-in-hand in local communities. However, in public and to an outsider, a Christian

informant will often deny his participation or belief in the former. Comments such as "that is something only traditionalist do", or "we don't believe in that any longer" were not uncommon.[4]

The reason that we are not practising it … let's assume you are passing on the way and some[one] witnesses you worshipping this Nomoli[5], this false cause, worshipping them, the moment they drink pojo (palmwine), they will say "I met your brother worshipping another god, he has created another god for himself. I will never eat in this house or drink water here". So if that happens to go around the town, youth will be shy and not feel happy over it. But we would want to practice, but because of this mockery and other what people might think makes us ashamed. (FG19)

Time

Placing the ceremonies and other events on a timeline proved quite challenging. First of all, the war in Sierra Leone was a rather fluid concept. Not always did all parts of the country experience war violence at the same time. Displaced persons returned to their homes at various times, some before the signing of the official peace, some long afterwards. Talking about the time 'when the war was over' with different informants did not always mean talking about the exact same space in time. Some communities could have performed ceremonies during what officially was still war, others waited several years until they had gathered all the resources needed to perform the required rituals. Additionally, in the two years before my second field trip to Sierra Leone Fambul Tok has launched its work first throughout Kailahun and later also in Moyamba and Kambia Districts. As Fambul Tok strongly emphasises local participation and ownership of the programme and leaves the design of the ceremonies in the hands of the communities, sometimes it was hard to establish whether the ceremony people referred to was the one supported by Fambul Tok or one they performed earlier.

Speaking to various groups within each community helped in reconstructing the timeline. It occurred that informants with roots in a certain community had only recently returned, not being aware of ceremonies having taken place directly

[4] For further examples of traditional believes being condemned by religious leaders, see Combey (2010:318).
[5] Nomoli are figurines, often made out of soap stone, that are buried in farm land to request the gods or ancestors for a successful rice harvest. For more detail see: Stanley Brown, The Nomoli of Mende country, Africa: Journal of the International African Institute, Vol. 18, No. 1 (Jan., 1948), pp. 18-20

after the war. In the case of interviews with multiple informants it was not uncommon that they corrected each other about the sequence of events. Small scale ceremonial practices were often performed on individual basis and were performed as people returned to their settlements. Families offered small sacrifices to their own shrines and cleansed their own sons and daughters of evils spirits. This being said, due to financial constraints, it was not uncommon for communities to wait several years before performing a community-wide sacrifice.

Researching in post-war environments. Some ethical considerations.

Researching in a post-war environment carries with itself specific challenges as it "interferes with the lives of people who have been affected and who are trying to cope with its aftermath" (Buckley-Zistel 2007:2).

As Buckley-Zistel suggests researchers should consider at least four issues: "what questions they pose, how they approach war-torn communities, how they themselves deal with the painful information they receive and, most importantly, who benefits from their work: they or the people who have lived through the horror" (Buckley-Zistel 2007:2)? Within these questions, matters as power relations between the researcher and the interviewed people – both in terms of the abysmal material differences as well as the control over the interpretation and spread of the gained knowledge also arise.

With the main focus of my research on the post-war situation, I chose not to ask people directly about any details of their war experience beyond the basic information necessary for the categorisation of the interviews. With that decision I hoped to minimise the risk of bringing back any painful memories they may have tried to overcome or forget although I was aware that avoiding this altogether would be hard, if not impossible. Questions about how people and communities were dealing with the past cannot be dissociated from that past itself. However, very early on it turned out that some people were willing to share 'snapshots' of their war stories with me even without being specifically asked. Their stories allowed me to begin gaining a deeper understanding of the war, its events and consequences as seen and felt by those who have gone through it (cf. Buckley-Zistel 2007).

Of the issues cited above, I find the one concerned with who benefits from the research the most difficult to answer. First, it is not just a rhetorical question posed by a researcher seeking a justification for his/her own work. During my interviews - in an effort to create an environment of mutual openness and trust - I encouraged people to ask me questions back any time they would feel they needed to know more about me, my research or where my interviewing were going. Very often – so often in fact that I considered abandoning this practice - they only had a single question: "What can your research do for us?" I never quite managed to find a satisfactory answer to that question. Second, inspired or rather provoked by this direct questioning of my personal motivation by the people I interviewed, I started to ask my 'gate-keepers' from among the NGOs and other organisations, many of whom had previously worked with foreign academics and students on several occasions, how much they ever heard back from these researchers once they had left the country. The answers were maybe not surprising but worrying. The feedback was indeed extremely poor. This in spite of the fact, that the majority of these local organisations' staff who had often been working in the field of community dispute resolution, peace-building, on diverse projects of ex-combatant reintegration and reconciliation for several years were genuinely interested in sharing their expertise, discussing my experiences and ideas, and finding out more about what has been written about Sierra Leone by the outsiders. Yet, many bemoaned that the authors never, or rarely, send the dissertations or articles that eventually write with their help through contacts or information. One may only start mending this by making the findings available electronically for at least those among the contact persons who have access to the internet; however it seems that the power imbalance between the researcher, the researched and those who assist the former in gaining access to the latter will remain hard to mend for a while.

1.7 Thesis outline

The dissertation is divided into three main parts. The first one maps out the discussion about reconciliation in the transitional justice field. In chapter 2, it aims to explore and critically review the contemporary debates and approaches to reconciliation and highlight its main concerns, arguments and controversies. In chapter 3, debates about the African way of justice and reconciliation are briefly summarized. This extended literature review, based on the particularly

important contributions to the field both in academic scholarship and in policy and practice, seeks to present a background that would set the stage for the inquiry into the community reconciliation in Sierra Leone and the role of local cultural practice in this process.

The second part introduces the case study by briefly looking into Sierra Leone's history and present. It starts with chapter 4, which is tracing the causes of the war in the workings of the Sierra Leonean post-colonial state, marginalization of urban and rural youth and a pervasive culture of violence. Chapter 5 follows with a more detailed chronology of the war. Understanding the underlying causes of the war as well as its dynamics and expressions helps in highlighting the challenges the country faced in its reconciliation efforts. The second part concludes with chapter 6 that presents a short overview of the national transitional justice institutions – the SCSL and TRC – that were established after the war to seek justice and promote truth-telling and reconciliation in the country and the experiences with and reflections of the SCSL and of the trial of Liberian ex-president Charles Taylor on a local level.

The third part presents the findings of the field research. It consists of three chapters, each addressing one of the research questions. Chapter 7 seeks to tease out the local understanding of reconciliation and the dynamics of seeking and achieving such reconciliation. The following chapter 8 details some of the ceremonies performed to remake social relationships and restore community cohesion in the aftermath of the war. It further attempts to point out the major functions these ceremonies have fulfilled in the process of reconciliation. The chapter ends with a brief look at other ritual practices such as individual cleansing and secret societies. The conclusion sums up the major findings.

PART I. RECONCILIATION

2. Perspectives on reconciliation

The following chapter attempts to explore and critically review the contemporary debates and approaches to reconciliation and highlight its main concerns, arguments and controversies. My aim here is present an overview of the concepts as they are theorized in the academic literature and used in peace-building and transitional justice policy and practice. The purpose is twofold. First, a review of the field is designed to situate the case study presented in the second part within the context of the current academic and practice-driven research. Second, and more importantly, it is to make an argument for the approach adopted in this study – a place-based enquiry into the process of seeking reconciliation and justice in Sierra Leonean communities. As will be presented below, two important patterns emerge when we examine the field. What we currently see in the processes of seeking reconciliation and justice in post-violence societies worldwide is, on the one hand, an increasingly 'universalised' toolbox in the form of criminal tribunals, truth commissions, 'traditional' mechanisms, and amnesty programmes etc. These instruments are applied in diverse post-conflict contexts and are all - with minor local variations - practically always the same. On the other hand, while these institutions are said to be contributing towards achieving several goals – providing justice, advancing reconciliation, uncovering truth, encouraging forgiveness, assisting healing or (re-)building sustainable peace, there is little agreement on how much each of these institutions contributes to reaching any/all of these goals. More importantly, it is unclear what exactly is meant and understood by these concepts. In this sense, there is – as Clark (2008) writes – a considerable "theoretical poverty" in the study and practice of the processes of dealing with the legacy of violent conflict (p. 193).

This chapter looks at the most important aims that post-violence societies pursue in order to deal with and overcome the legacy of their violent past. The chapter is organized along the major questions of the reconciliation debates:

What is reconciliation and how is it achieved?

Who performs reconciliation?

How does reconciliation relate to other key objectives the post-conflict societies may decide to pursue like justice, truth and forgiveness?

2.1 Locating reconciliation

Reconciliation comes after violence, or more generally after 'harm' – either physical or mental – that negatively affected or damaged relationships between two or more entities, be it individuals, groups, populations, states or others (Santa-Barbara 2007). Violent armed conflicts are one such 'harm', usually involving large-scale destruction of human life and to the social fabric of involved communities, as well as to physical infrastructure and property. Based on the argument that "war and human rights abuses become self-perpetuating process if anger and hatred are not efficiently addressed" (Brounéus 2003:9), reconciliation – through the search for some measure of accountability within one of the transitional justice institutions or the diverse range of transformative peacebuilding activities focused on building relationships and strengthening societal mechanisms for the peaceful management of conflicts – has become an important goal for societies recovering from war or other mass violations of human rights. It is therefore not only an approach to dealing with post-war situations but also a method for the prevention of further violent conflict (cf. Lederach 1997, Long and Brecke 2003).

2.2 Defining reconciliation

Calls for reconciliation in the aftermath of armed conflict or other mass violations of human rights have been heard with growing urgency in many countries across the globe at least since the early 1990s. "Throughout Latin America, Eastern Europe, Africa and Asia, many countries are engaged in transitions that have nothing in common, save that their incipient governments are touting reconciliation as a panacea for their countries' unique ills" (Sarkin and Daly 2004:1). And it is certainly not just the governments. Reconciliation is advocated by different sections of the domestic societies - local civil society organizations, community leaders and survivor groups and supported by the international community – international governmental and non-governmental organizations, donors and funding agencies.

It is generally recognised that reconciliation is vital if peace is to be sustained in the future. But only rarely it is clearly explained what is exactly understood under reconciliation, what it implies or how it is to be achieved. Asking these questions, Suzan Dwyer remarks: "Curiously, given the frequency with which

the term 'reconciliation' is used, no one is saying" (2003:92). For VanAntwerpen, the problem is not as much the lack of definitions of reconciliation but rather "an abundance of [its] meanings" (2008:46). Certainly, scholarship on the subject of reconciliation has proliferated over the last two decades but a consensus on how reconciliation can be defined or conceptualised is hard to find and great disagreements remain.

Assumptions are often made not only about the precise meaning of reconciliation but also about its relationship to other goals sought in post-violence societies, such as justice, forgiveness or truth. Are they constituent components of reconciliation, as statements such as 'there is no reconciliation without justice' or 'reconciliation is impossible without truth' suggest, or are they competing objectives of which one can only be sought at the expense of the other? Empirical evidence supporting any of these claims is at best inconsistent (cf. Fletcher and Weinstein 2002).

The Oxford English Dictionary defines 'reconciliation' as 'the restoration of friendly relations' or 'the action of making one view or belief compatible with another'. Interestingly, the entry for the verb 'to reconcile' adds to the above meanings the expression 'to reconcile someone to' which is 'to make someone accept (a disagreeable or unwelcome thing)'. While in the context of the present debates of reconciliation within the fields of transitional justice and liberal peacebuilding such interpretation of the concept is not applied (and arguably not acceptable), it may actually be useful for analysing the dynamics and outcomes of some real-world reconciliation processes (cf. Kriesberg 2007:7).

An understanding of reconciliation in terms of re-building or mending relationships broken by a period of violence and atrocity is probably the most common. In this sense, Kriesberg views reconciliation as "the process of developing a mutual conciliatory accommodation between enemies of formerly antagonistic groups [... and] of moving toward a relatively cooperative and amicable relationship, typically established after a rupture in relations involving extreme injury to one or more sides in the relationship" (2007:2). For Govier and Verwoerd (2002), the goal of reconciliation is "the building and sustaining of a relationship with sufficient closeness and trust to handle the conflicts and problems that will inevitably arise in the course of time" (p. 186). This goal cannot be viewed separately from the process – as keeping up a trusting relationship is exactly that – a continuous process. (ibid.). Other authors

propose similar interpretation (cf. Santa-Barbara 2007, Bar-Tal and Bennink 2001).

The understanding of reconciliation in terms of re-building or mending relationships implies that there is more to it than just achieving 'peaceful coexistence' among the former adversaries. While peaceful coexistence only requires the formerly antagonist parties to refrain from committing violence against the other, it does not depend on their coming together and (re)forming a relationship (Clark 2008:194).

But while relationship building may be broadly accepted as the central tenet of reconciliation, this does not suffice. What is the nature, the quality and the content of such relationships? How are relationships (re)built or transformed and by which means? And – particularly in case of larger communities - whose relationship matter for reconciliation to be achieved? It is in these complex webs that the different meanings of 'reconciliation' are conceived.

Apart from the broad and 'value neutral' concept of reconciliation as relationship building, there is often a normative element in the way reconciliation is interpreted. "Reconciliation represents the possibility of transforming war into peace, trauma into survival, and hatred into forgiveness" (Sarkin 2008:13). It appeals to the generosity of the human spirit, its ability to overcome, to heal, and to restore and stands in opposition to the committed crimes. Reconciliation as a normative goal also aims at the unification, or rather re-unification of things (or people) that are meant to be together. It implies "the coming together of things that once were united but have been torn apart; a return to or recreation of the status quo ante, whether real or imagined" (ibid.). This notion is however problematic in many contemporary post-violence societies where the recreation of a previous state of affairs in not really desirable. It is particularly true in the many intrastate conflicts where the open violence of the war was preceded by years or decades of structural violence and of marginalization of certain groups of the population. Or perhaps, as in the case of South Africa, where there is no previous state of peaceful and friendly relationships to return to (Krog 1999:165). In spite of the questionable merit of such appeals, several countries built their reconciliation rhetoric around references to such non-violent roots of their societies. The Rwandan government's policies of forging national unity and reconciliation in a society deeply divided by the genocide of 1994 and the decades of political

manipulation of ethnicity and social polarisation that preceded these events are a case in point. The government of Paul Kagame promotes a constructed narrative of a pre-colonial history that was characterised by harmonious relations among all Rwandans, who did not know ethnicity and lived in peace. This ideal, the government argues, was only disrupted by the colonial intervention, and it strives to re-create it by – among other things – criminalising any mention of ethnic categories of the citizens in public (Buckley-Zistel 2011). Some of the many problems of framing reconciliation in these terms are also evident in the Rwandan example. First, the reconciliation narrative is in fact hijacked by the government and used as a political tool to intimidate anyone who disagrees with the government and its version of the history. It silences the stories of survivors and forecloses a societal dialogue on the causes of the violence and on the way forward. Rather than bridging the divisions and fostering relationship building, it blames outsiders for damaging the otherwise 'traditionally' peaceful coexistence and refuses to deal with the real and deeply divisive questions present in the post-genocidal society (Buckley-Zistel 2011, cf. Waldorf 2010).

But the particle 're' in reconciliation (as in reconstruction and resolution) need not be viewed in this way, Galtung (n.d.) suggests: "Like for research it means again. And again. No end. And it does not mean the restoration of status quo ante except if that is good enough" (p. 53).

The notion of reconciliation may also carry strong religious connotations. "...that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation" (Corinthians 5:19, New International Version). In Christian tradition, reciprocated remorse and forgiveness are important parts of reconciliation. Indeed, Christian theology importantly informed the work of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (SA TRC), which has since inspired many reconciliation processes worldwide and sparked much debate among academics and practitioners alike. While it was not officially conceived as a religious body, the leadership of the charismatic Archbishop Desmond Tutu as well as the important role the faith community played in the anti-apartheid struggle meant that the Christian views of reconciliation often prevailed in the work of the SA TRC (Graybill and Lanegran 2004, Borer 2004). Bolstered with the appeal to the spirit of togetherness embodied in the 'traditional' African philosophy of *ubuntu*

(see below), it laid the emphasis on confession, remorse, and forgiveness.

It is precisely this close association of reconciliation with forgiveness in the Christian theology that some authors find very undesirable as it may lead to a wrong impression that one must be altruistic to achieve reconciliation (Brounéus 2003:14). Some of the strongest criticisms of the SA TRC followed this line of argument (Hamber and Kibble 1999). Given the religious overtones of reconciliation as a concept, some authors have gone as far as to argue against the use of the word altogether. Dan Bar-On, for example, sees reconciliation as "basically a religious emotive concept that has been introduced into social sciences discourse, in order to address key issues that earlier cognitive conceptualizations such as formal conflict resolution did not resolve properly" (2005:181). Furthermore, it is an essentially Christian concept not deeply rooted in the Islamic or Judaic traditions that have different religious approach to reconciliation (ibid.).[6] Instead, he suggests other concepts – as they are free from religious baggage and better developed conceptually - such as 'dialogue' or 'working through' to be used in the discourse of conflict transformation and of social healing (Bar-On 2005:182).

Taking yet another angle from which to understand reconciliation, Daniel Bar-Tal underscores its psychological aspects: "The essence of reconciliation involves socio-psychological processes consisting of changes of motivations, goals, beliefs, attitudes and emotions by the majority of society members" (Bar-Tal 2008:365). Such understanding of reconciliation extends it already into the pre-agreement phase of conflict because it is necessary if peaceful resolution of the conflict is to be achieved and receive support in the society (ibid.). Such reconciliation is, however, only required in societies that "evolve a widely shared psychological repertoire that supports the adherence to the conflictive goals, maintain the conflict, delegitimize the opponent and thus negate the possibility of peaceful resolution of the conflict and prevent the development of peaceful relations" (Bar-Tal 2002, quoted in Brounéus 2003:15)

[6] It is beyond the scope of the present thesis to explore 'reconciliation' in different religious traditions. For more discussion see i.e. Irany, G.E. and Funk, N.C. (2000): Rituals of Reconciliation: Arab-Islamic Perspectives. (Washington: USIP) or Rittner, C.; Smith, S.D. and I. Steinfeldt (eds.) (2000): The Holocaust and the Christian World: Reflections on the Past and Challenges for the Future (London: Kuperard)

2.3 Who reconciles?

Just as the meaning of reconciliation itself, the levels of reconciliation and the actors involved are not always clearly stated. This confusion is most frequently demonstrated in the practice of reconciliation. Tristan Anne Borer (2004) analysed the use of 'reconciliation' in the documents and the report of the SA TRC and found the term was used for both 'interpersonal/individual reconciliation' and 'national unity and reconciliation'. While the SA TRC acknowledged the complexity of term and the different levels of reconciliation, it neither clearly specified which of the two it was referring to in its frequent use of the word nor provided a clear definition of reconciliation, who it was aimed at and what were its goals (p. 29). This continuous slippage between different meanings and levels of the concept, Borer contends, had serious implications for the expectations it raised as well as the ways in which the success of the Commission was evaluated (ibid.).

So, is reconciliation the same thing when it refers to individuals, small communities or whole nations? Do they same policies and processes assist achieving reconciliation at all these levels? And what is the relationship between the levels?

As Borer above, many scholars make the distinction between two levels of reconciliation: national/political and individual (Hayner 2002, Prager and Govier 2003). In the same vein, Dwyer (2003) talks of micro- and macro-level reconciliation, with the former referring to "local, face to face interactions" and the latter concerning "more global interactions between groups of persons, nations of institutions, which are often mediated by proxy" (p. 93).

Govier and Verwoerd (2002) however question the dichotomous distinction between individual and national levels, as "individuals and groups can be connected, and in varying ways are interdependent, in many sorts of relationships" such as between families, small groups and communities, professional and occupational groups and others, that one could call the intermediate level, which are also seriously affected by violence or other harm (p. 187). Similarly, Stovel (2006) proposes a three-level framework of individual, group-level and national reconciliation.

Even when the distinct levels of reconciliation are established, important questions remain. What is the relationship between these levels? Can they be

viewed separately or are they closely interconnected? Does, for example, individual reconciliation directly translate to national level reconciliation – or vice versa? And who are the relevant actors and processes at each of these levels?

By linking individual confessions and forgiveness on the one hand and the rhetoric of 'healing the nation' on the other, the SA TRC (and many truth and reconciliation commissions after that) helped to create the illusion that the national 'body' can be cured with the same 'medicine' as the individual, this medicine being the truth about the past. "The identity of the body in question – whether that of the individual giving testimony before the TRC or of the suffering South African nation – is blurred, suggesting that the healing efficacy of truth-telling operates simultaneously on personal and national levels that are homologous" (Shaw 2007:190-191). Hamber and Wilson (2002) reject entirely the metaphor of national healing, arguing that "nations do not have collective psyches which can be healed, nor do whole nations suffer post-traumatic stress disorder and to assert otherwise is to psychologize an abstract entity which exists primarily in the minds of nation-building politicians".

The role for leaders and elites in positions of public prominence at all levels is emphasised in the literature. Reconciliation is an active and planned effort and not a self-driven and spontaneous process – and it is the society's elites who have a key role to play in inspiring and implementing reconciliation policies. In Michael Ignatieff's words: "Leaders give their societies permission to say the unsayable, to think the unthinkable, to rise to gestures of reconciliation that people, individually cannot imagine" (1998:188). But as several authors have argued that in order to be successful, reconciliation process must proceed both in the top-down as well as the bottom-up directions simultaneously (Bar-Tal 2008, Lederach 1997, 2000).

2.4 Justice, truth and forgiveness: ingredients of reconciliation or competing aims?

Several other concepts, those of justice, truth and forgiveness often are frequently associated with reconciliation.[7] These are, just as reconciliation,

[7] There are several others, such as healing, peace, respect, trust etc. but these will not be discussed here in more detail.

complex and multilayered concepts, the meaning of which deserves a closer scrutiny before any claims about their mutual relationships can be made. These concepts and their many links to reconciliation have thus been subject to much discussion and controversy both in academic writing and peacebuilding and transitional justice practice.

Sometimes, reconciliation is presented as a more general concept consisting of several ingredients, among which justice and truth have a prominent place. Kriesberg (2007) distinguishes between four dimensions incorporated in reconciliation "in some combination, at varying levels" (p. 3). These are truth, justice, respect and security. Lederach (1997) proposes an understanding of reconciliation as a place where four elements meet – truth, mercy, justice and peace: "*Truth* is the longing for acknowledgement of wrong and the validation of painful loss and experiences, but it is coupled with *Mercy*, which articulates the need for acceptance, letting go, and a new beginning. *Justice* represents the search for individual and group rights, for social restructuring, and for restitution, but it is linked with *Peace*, which underscores the need for interdependence, well-being, and security" (p. 29). In a more practice-oriented treatment of reconciliation, it is seen as an overarching process which involves a search for truth, justice, forgiveness, healing and reparations (Bloomfield et al. 2003, Bloomfield 2006). What these views, and others like them (cf. Rigby 2001), have in common is that they see the attainment or at least the efforts towards it of these different goals as supportive of and necessary for the search for reconciliation. Furthermore, also these different components are interrelated and complement each other. "Where they are ignored, isolated from one another, or chosen one over the other, we often are unable to create sustainable peace processes" (Lederach 2001:848).

In spite of these attempts to develop definitions and understandings of the dynamics involved in reconciliation, much of the discussion continues to be framed in terms of dichotomous opposites (cf. Shaw 2009). Initially, justice and reconciliation constituted the two opposing poles of the debate that was taking place against the backdrop of the South and Central American democratic transformations. 'Reconciliation' was seen to be practically synonymous with amnesty – to pardoning the wrongdoers and letting go of the past. While this was often presented as a sound political choice in situations where a compromise with the outgoing regime had to be negotiated to secure stability of

the newly emerging democracy, this reasoning was seen by some as morally problematic (cf. Leebaw 2008, Shaw 2009). The modus operandi of the SA TRC, which could grant amnesty to perpetrators of human rights violations who fully disclosed the truth about their crime and were able to present clear evidence that their crimes were politically motivated, shifted the focus towards truth versus justice controversy (cf. Teitel 2003). To its critics, the SA TRC was compromising justice. For Archbishop Tutu and other proponents of the mechanism, it merely embodied another kind of justice – restorative justice (Tutu 1999, Maepa 2005, Bhargava 2000, Asmal et.al. 1997, Villa-Vicencio 2000). In recent years, the discussion took yet another form, and justice was placed in opposition to peace (Sriram and Pillay 2009, Allen 2006).

The different 'mutations' of these debates are arguably down to the polysemous nature of all these concepts. As Shaw (2009) remarks in relation to the justice versus peace debate: "Given this fundamental indeterminacy of justice and its placement in binary opposition to a second floating signifier – 'peace' – the peace versus justice debate offers abundant possibilities for struggles over meaning, morphing across time and place in diverse historical and political contexts" (p. 210). The following part therefore presents a clarification of some of these meanings of the three concepts most pertinent to the case study presented in the second part.

2.5 Reconciliation and justice

The issue of justice has been subject to the most polarized debates within the field of transitional justice and beyond.[8] Post-conflict justice is most commonly understood in terms of criminal prosecution of the perpetrators of violence and mass human rights violations. While this represents a rather narrow definition of justice, a strong 'prosecution preference' is indeed presently discernible in the debates among post-conflict justice and peacebuilding practitioners, activists and, possibly to a lesser degree, among scholars. Disagreements are thus often limited to the issue of feasibility rather than desirability of prosecuting perpetrators which is widely accepted as the appropriate response to past atrocities (Aukerman 2002: 40). There is however a growing body of empirical

[8] There is a history of philosophical and theological thought on the concept and meaning of justice but it is beyond the scope a purpose of this review to look at these. For more discussion see Mani (2002).

studies from diverse post-conflict countries that problematise the assumption that punishment is always the preferred option among the population affected by the conflict (Weinstein et al. 2010, Biro et al. 2004, Longman et al. 2004, Lambourne 2009).

Clark (2008) distinguishes three broad models of justice as responses to crime – retributive, deterrent and restorative. The key difference between these three models lies in what they identify as the purpose of punishing the perpetrators and, related to this, what form it should take. Retributive and deterrent justice see punishment of the perpetrator as the central (and frequently the only) aim – retributive view of justice emphasises punishment as means to bringing the perpetrators to account, giving them what they 'deserve' while deterrent justice approach accentuates rather sending out a message to the perpetrator and to other potential criminals that committing an offence does not stay unpunished. Restorative justice does not regard punishment as the primary aim of justice. The emphasis here is on restoring relationships – between perpetrators, victims and the broader community. In the same vein, Stovel (2003) points out the different ethics of retributive and restorative justice. While legalistic (retributive and deterrent in the above Clark's classification) justice "emphasises obedience to moral principles, presumed to be partly reflected in the law", restorative justice "reflects an ethic of care which argues that people are ethically responsible for those around them with whom they have a relationship" (p.2). In this light, while in the former crime is seen as "law breaking and a violation against the state and accountability as punishment for breaking a law", the latter views it as "a violation of a relationship, an injury inflicted on another person that harms the people involved and the community" and accountability subsequently means an effort to mend those relationships (p.3). In post-war societies, the legalistic approach found expression in the establishment of formal criminal tribunals, international, national or, as in Rwanda, adapted informal 'traditional' judicial mechanisms. The restorative justice served as a model for the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission and similar mechanisms that followed it.

The different facets of reconciliation and justice are variously interrelated (Kriesberg 2007:4, cf. Pankhurst 1999). When justice is understood in purely legalistic terms, reconciliation can be presented as its opposite and perceived as a threat to the cause of justice (Sarkin 2008:15). This works both ways as

prosecutions have been denounced as potentially jeopardizing the reconciliation process (Graybill and Lanegran 2004:4). More recently, however, some of the international tribunals mentioned reconciliation among their goals, albeit usually in passing and without detailing how punishing perpetrators contributes to it (cf. Clark 2008:192). Thus the UNSC Resolution 955 (1994) establishing the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) states that "the prosecution of persons responsible for serious violations of international humanitarian law (...) would contribute to the process of national reconciliation". Similarly, the judge of the Special Court for Sierra Leone in his opening speech of the Revolutionary United Front process declared that the SCSL aims among else at furthering reconciliation in the country (War Don Don 2010).

Others have suggested that the relationship between legalistic justice and reconciliation is one of indifference. Writing about trials, Marta Minow (1998) observes: "Reconciliation is not the goal of criminal trials except in the most abstract sense. We reconcile with the murderer by imagining he or she is responsible to the same rules and commands that govern all of us; we agree to sit in the same room and accord the defendant a chance to speak, and a chance to fight for his or her life. But reconstruction of a relationship, seeking to heal the accused, or indeed, healing the rest of the community, are not goals in any direct sense" (p. 26).

At least since the establishment of the widely publicised SA TRC, restorative justice emerged as an alternative to the retributive model of criminal prosecutions. The reconciliation-oriented nature of restorative justice arguably makes it the preferred alternative for the justice needs of victims, perpetrators as well as the whole communities in post-conflict societies (Tutu 1999). Restorative justice has been commonly associated or even equated with truth commissions. This is evidenced in statements such as this one: "Restorative justice... has been increasingly applied since 1974, with truth commissions implemented in approximately two dozen countries around the world" (Graybill and Lanegran 2004:1). This understanding was also openly promoted by the SA TRC (Tutu 1999, Asmal et.al. 1997, Villa-Vicencio 2000). Stovel (2003) however cautions against conflating restorative justice as a distinct model of justice that must be applied as a whole and restorative philosophy based on a particular set of values and assumptions - such as importance of rebuilding

relationships and reintegration, emphasis on dialogue between all the sides to the conflict, responsiveness towards the needs of both victims and offenders and other – that may be "inserted where possible and appropriate" in the process of addressing past crimes (p. 35). The proceedings of the SA TRC were successfully guided by restorative philosophy but were not an instance of a genuine application of the restorative justice model. Full restorative justice, Stovel warns, would have to provide for the inclusion of victims in the amnesty decisions as well as require white South Africans to take responsibility for apartheid, "either by acknowledging their culpability and responsibility in it or by atoning for their actions", neither of which really happened (p. 37). The same reservation can be made with regards to other truth commissions. The model of restorative justice as an alternative to legalistic criminal prosecutions in responding to mass atrocity thus remains underexplored.

Beyond justice as a response to crime

The dominant focus on justice in terms of criminal accountability in the contemporary discourse may obscure the fact that there are many other forms of injustice, such as socioeconomic injustice, that lie at the heart of many contemporary violent conflicts and must be addressed in their aftermath in order to prevent renewed violence. A few authors have tried to broaden the focus of the post-conflict justice debate beyond the issues of redressing the injustices committed during the course of an armed conflict or other mass human rights violations. Arguing that "injustice is not just a *consequence* of conflict, but is also often a *symptom* and *cause* of conflict", Rama Mani (2002) proposes an understanding of justice that encompasses three dimensions: rectificatory, legal and distributive justice (p. 5). These three areas are interdependent and must all be addressed if justice is to be restored and long-term and sustainable peace promoted. Rectificatory justice refers to redress for violations committed during the conflict period through a combination of tools already introduced above – criminal trials, truth commissions and a range of other, more informal, adapted 'traditional' measures of justice (ibid.:110). Legal justice is synonymous with rule of law and includes reform to the "triad of the justice system – the judiciary, police and prisons" (ibid.:56). Distributive justice is concerned with the removal of structural injustices such as political and economic discrimination and real or perceived inequalities of distribution that often

underlie the conflict (ibid.:9). Wendy Lambourne's (2009) transformative justice model proposes four constituent elements of justice that beside legal justice also include truth and acknowledgement, socioeconomic and political justice. But such broad conceptions of justice in the transitional justice discourse remain scarce.

2.6 Reconciliation and truth

It is popularly stated that truth is the first casualty of war. Reversely, establishing the truth about what happened in the past has often been proposed as both a precondition to reconciliation and to achieving sustainable peace. In line with this argument, Rotberg (2000) stresses that "if societies are to prevent recurrences of past atrocities and to cleanse themselves of the corrosive enduring effects of massive injuries to individuals and whole groups, societies must understand - at the deepest possible level – what occurred and why. In order to come fully to terms with their brutal pasts, they must uncover, in precise detail, who did what to whom, and why, and under whose orders" (p. 3).

But as reconciliation and justice, also truth is not easily defined in post-conflict contexts. Is it to be understood only as the "accumulation of forensically-proven facts" or does it require "a more complex and multi-faceted narrative" (Sarkin 2008:14)? The SA TRC Report distinguishes between four forms of 'truth': factual or forensic truth, personal and narrative truth consisting of the stories of individual experiences, social or dialogue truth that emerges from interaction and discussion, and healing and restorative truth which "places facts and their meaning within the context of human relationships" (quoted in Parmentier and Weitekamp 2011). The SA TRC's underlying assumption that truth leads to reconciliation that was captured on the banners displayed at the public hearings of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission in the slogan 'Truth: The Road to Reconciliation' did however little to elaborate on how each of the forms of truth related to the (similarly diverse) notions of reconciliation. In spite of this it has been so often reiterated that truth-telling leads to reconciliation that it now has "the status of a truism" (Borer 2004:21). Others, however, draw attention to the potential conflict between exposing the truth about the past and efforts at national reconciliation. Truth, it is argued, can hinder reconciliation rather than facilitate it. On this matter, Ignatieff, quoting

an African proverb, writes that maybe, all truth is good but only some is good to tell (1998:170).

In any case, can one 'truth' about the past be established at all? As Clark points out with regard to the South and Central American truth commissions, attempts to construct an 'official version' of truth are problematic as "individuals' and groups' recollections of the past often clash, and may be expressed for a variety of well-intentioned of cynically instrumental reasons" (2008:203). In this sense, truth-seeking is an inherently political process. Mamdani (2000) urges for "an acknowledgement that truth may be not in the singular, but in the plural, and that there may not be one but several versions of truth" (p. 178).

2.7 Reconciliation and forgiveness

Talking of forgiveness in the aftermath of war or large scale human rights abuses invariably arouses emotions. There are disagreements as to whether forgiveness is (or should be) part of reconciliation. Many authors caution against revoking forgiveness too readily in the post-conflict contexts as it may place too much pressure on the victims of violence. Forgiveness, Martha Minow argues, must be a voluntary act performed by the victim. It is, she argues, "a power held by the victimized, not a right to be claimed. The ability to dispense, but also to withhold, forgiveness is an ennobling capacity and part of the dignity to be reclaimed by those who survive the wrongdoing" (1998:17). Expecting or requesting forgiveness from victims means "heaping another burden on them" (ibid.).

For many authors, forgiveness is related to the foregoing the desire of revenge. Durham describes forgiveness as "mourning the passage of revenge" (2000:70 cited in Gobodo-Madikizela 2010:212). Similarly, Clark (2008) writes that "forgiveness requires only that a victim should forgo feelings of resentment and a desire for direct revenge against the perpetrator" (p. 202). It is not necessarily aimed at (re)making any relationship between the wrongdoer and the victim. As such forgiveness is generally conceived as an important step to 'break the cycle of violence'. But some authors go further. Hartwell (1999) sees it as a "powerful expression of unconditional acceptance and love that can be seen as an attempt to stop the transfer of hate from one generation to the next".

There has been much discussion about what is necessary for forgiveness. It is

often seen in close relationship to repentance or genuine remorse. Gobodo-Madikizela (2010:211) argues that at least two important factors - remorseful apology and acknowledgement of wrongdoing – are necessary to create forgiveness within victims. “Seeing the other as a human being – feeling and responding to the other's pain with remorse – is probably the most crucial starting point in the encounter between victims and perpetrators” (p. 217). However, Shriver (1998) stresses that forgiveness and repentance can go both ways – a gesture of reconciliation can inspire a wrongdoer to come forward and repent, or a confession and apology may give victim space to consider forgiveness (p. 11).

Forgiveness, even more than reconciliation, has been also equalled to giving up the pursuit of justice, with letting the perpetrators ‘off the hook’ and with granting amnesty (Lambourne 1999 cited in Clark 2008:202). However, Clark (2008) suggests forgiveness should be seen as a more conscious act that at times requires active and public acknowledgement of crimes committed and leaves open the possibility of punishment (p. 202). Forgiveness is not equal to amnesty or a pardon: it “marks a change in how the offended feels about the person that committed the injury, not a change in the actions to be taken by the justice system” (Murphy 1988 cited in Minow 1998:15). However, when it is applied as a policy at the national level by a governmental body, forgiveness often takes the form of an amnesty or pardon, preventing prosecution and punishment (ibid.:15).

Forgiveness is closely associated with the religious, or more specifically Christian, conceptions of reconciliation. Many of those who approach reconciliation from a religious perspective see forgiveness as one of its elements (e.g. Tutu 1999, Biggar 2001). As reconciliation itself, the introduction of the concept of forgiveness into the debates in post-conflict justice and peacebuilding can be most likely linked to the work of the SA TRC, and has since been subject to much controversy. The title of Archbishop Tutu’s (1999) memoirs, “No Future without Forgiveness”, confirms the prominent place forgiveness occupied in the TRC’s philosophy and work. While truth commissions have been praised for providing a forum where these processes may take place, they have also been criticised for putting too much pressure on victims to forgive, for making them feel compelled to forgive for the common good of the society as a whole (Crocker 2000). The central contention related to

the South African TRC was its use of forgiveness, intrinsically an individual act, as a means for achieving national healing and reconciliation.

Making a distinction between the possible multiple levels of forgiveness – just as in the case of reconciliation discussed above – may help to ease some of these tensions. Forsberg (2001), one of the few authors to do just that, recognizes between individual and societal forgiveness. By forgiving perpetrators, the society takes them "back into the public moral community. It does not follow from this that they should also be received back into the victim's private moral community. Societal forgiveness is not a substitute for individual forgiveness" (p. 60).

This raises another widely discussed issue: can groups or larger communities forgive? Govier (2002) argues that groups are regularly treated as moral agents, and can indeed suffer harm as groups (p. 78 cited in Santa-Barbara 2007:178). Groups, according to Govier, "can have beliefs, attitudes and feelings – including forgiveness – and that, when these are expressed by legitimate leaders, they can be regarded as valid in the absence of widespread dissent" (ibid. cited in Santa-Barbara 2007:179). Hartwell (1999) proposes a more politically focused interpretation of forgiveness depicting forgiveness and hope as a means of launching a new beginning by rebuilding social, political and economic structures on a national level. However, she also writes: "In the end, it may be wise to remember that no matter how much a group promotes or supports a climate for reconciliation and healing, it is the capacity for forgiveness that lies within each individual that arguably influences the long term success of these efforts".

3. An African Way of Reconciliation?

3.1 A shift toward the local in peacebuilding and post-conflict justice

As mentioned in the introduction, since at least mid-1990s, increasing attention has been given in the fields of peacebuilding and post-conflict justice to more culturally sensitive, contextual approaches.[9] Gradually, also in the dominant liberal peacebuilding and transitional justice practice, there has been a visible shift towards 'the local', evidenced in a growing emphasis on local ownership and application of local (usually labelled as 'informal' or 'traditional') mechanisms and institutions of conflict management. Thus Annan urged in 2004 for "respect and support [for] local ownership, local leadership and a local constituency" and emphasised that "indigenous and informal traditions for administering justice or settling disputes" receive due regard in order "to help them to continue their often vital role and to do so in conformity with both international standards and local tradition" (p.12).

Interestingly, the increased attention for 'the local' led to morphing of the above presented 'peace versus justice' debate into a kind of 'culture versus justice' debate, where on one side stood the dominant understanding of justice as criminal prosecution and on the other an essentialised concept of an African culture as inherently forgiving and preferring restoration over retribution (Shaw 2009:213). Uganda became the most prominent site of this contest and it is thus justified to look at it more closely. Northern Uganda has been embroiled in the conflict between the government and the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) since the late 1980s. The conflict has caused large-scale displacement of the local Acholi population, many of whom have now been living in the refugee camps for over a generation.[10] Characteristic traits of the LRA are abductions and use of child soldiers, indeed, the LRA is now composed almost entirely – except its leader Joseph Kony and few other leaders - of abductees.[11]

The *mato oput* is one of the 'traditional' conflict resolution and reconciliation mechanisms of the Acholi people. In the course of the conflict resolution, the

[9] The process mirrored similar developments in the field of conflict resolution. (for a thorough discussion see Miall et al. 1999)

[10] According to a report conducted in Northern Uganda, "eighty-six percent of respondents said they had been displaced from their home at one time or another during the conflict. Displacement was most frequent in the Acholi subregion, where 94 percent of the population reported displacement" (Pham et al. 2007:23)

[11] According to the same report, "one-fifth (21%) of the population in the eight Nothern districts was forcibly taken away or abducted by the LRA for a week or more, 13 percent for at least a month, and 2 percent for at least a year. Half the respondents who had been abducted reported having experienced multiple abductions" (Pham et al. 2007:28)

perpetrator is encouraged to acknowledge his crime, show remorse and beg for forgiveness and at times requested to pay compensation. Once victims have granted forgiveness to the repenting perpetrator, a reconciliation ceremony – *mato oput* – is performed, requiring the both formerly aggrieved parties to share a bitter-tasting drink made of the blood of a slaughtered sheep mixed with bitter herbs and roots in a symbolic gesture of letting go of the past and restoring social trust (Murithi 2008, Allen 2006). In situations of violent death or armed clash between whole clans, another ceremony – *gomo tong*, 'the bending of the spears' – to mark the end of the conflict is performed (Murithi 2008, cf. Baines et al. 2005).

The *mato oput* and other ceremonies have recently received much attention as mechanisms for the reintegration of the LRA ex-combatants into their communities, a solution to the protracted conflict advocated by many Acholi leaders and civil society groups both local and international. Emphasising the Acholi preference for restorative justice over retribution, their advocates have proclaimed much success of these 'traditional' rituals. Murithi (2008) argues that there are lessons to be learnt from the Acholi system and "the cultural wisdom handed down through generations", which tells us "that punitive action within the context of retributive justice may effectively decrease social trust and undermine reconciliation in the medium to long term" (p. 25-26).

Other authors have looked at the revival of the 'traditional' justice mechanisms in Uganda with a high degree of scepticism (Allen 2008). The critics of the 'traditional' ceremonies have adverted to the insufficient legitimacy of the present traditional leaders as well as the lacking authenticity of the ceremonies that have been 'invented' in their current form by local leaders and NGOs (ibid.). Others have pointed out the exclusion of women and youth in the procedure.

But *mato oput* is not the only approach suggested to deal with the LRA violence. In October 2005, the International Criminal Court (ICC), upon a referral by the Ugandan government, issued arrest warrants against Joseph Kony and four other LRA leaders, a decision that sparked a major controversy and opened another round of the peace versus justice debate (see Allen 2006, Waddell and Clark 2008). Allen finds evidence of strong support for the ICC among those in northern Uganda, who know about it and argues that they "require the same kinds of conventional legal mechanisms as everyone else living in modern

states" (Allen 2006:168). A quantitative study led by Pham (2007) found in fact some support for both arguments. Others argue that the traditional practice is the preferred and best solution (Branch 2008). But importantly, this controversy is based on dichotomies that are false and artificial - posing the universal 'justice as prosecution' against the traditional/cultural 'justice as restoration'. What the diverse results from the many studies suggest, is that attention needs to be given to the specifics of the local situation and context and a research on when and why people would chose for the one, or the other, or an entirely different mechanism.

3.2 The myth of harmonious 'tradition'

As we have seen above, the shift towards more culturally informed approaches led to increased attention to the African 'traditional' practices. Indeed, the debate on the role of traditional conflict management practices and institutions in modern post-war situations can be observed both in the theory and practice since at least the early 1990s. 'Traditional' mechanisms and ceremonies have been part of government and civil society considerations in designing post-war peace building strategies at least since the end of the civil war in Mozambique (Stovel 2008).

In the literature, African 'traditional' approaches to resolving conflict and dealing with its aftermath are usually described as being strongly oriented towards reconciliation, forgiveness and restoration and their firm place in African (and Asian) societies "since antiquity" (Bloomfield et al. 2003:112) is presented as a good ground for their contemporary exploration for the challenges of dealing with past violence (cf. Murithi 2008, Malan 1997, Zartman 2000).

Before the brief review of the main arguments starts, it is necessary to at least shortly address the terms of 'tradition' or 'traditional', which are in many ways problematic. They often bear "Eurocentric connotations that tend to view such institutions and practices as patterns followed from 'time out of mind' in static political and social circumstances" (Alie 2008:133). But 'tradition' is not something inert, unaltered or archaic. Rather, it is "inspired by a group's past" but being continually updated, adapted and adjusted to respond to the changing political, economic and social circumstances as well as able to incorporate

external influences in order to survive (Stovel 2006; Alie 2008; Huyse 2008; Zartman 2000). It is in this sense that 'tradition' is understood here.

Brock-Utne (2001) parallels the African 'traditional' approaches to managing conflict to the concept of 'warp and weft' used in weaving. "The concept denotes that even if the most complex of designs are woven into a piece of cloth, the basic structure is formed by two interwoven sets of thread traditionally called the warp and weft" (p. 7). In conflict resolution, the first element is the tradition of family or neighbourhood negotiation facilitated by elders. The second element is the attitude of togetherness in the spirit of humanhood (ibid., cf. Malan 1997). Desmond Tutu, the chairman of SA TRC, has made a strong argument for the idea of a specific 'African' way of reconciliation on these grounds. For Tutu, "In the African *Weltanschauung* a person is not basically an independent, solitary entity. A person is human precisely in being enveloped in the community of other human beings, in being caught up in the bundle of life. To be … is to participate" (in Krog 1999:165). The individual is committed to the community; his identity comes from the community he is a part of. What this philosophy means in the context of the traditional conflict management practices is that the interest of the community is above the interest of the individual (Ngwane 1996: 52). In the verdicts passed, the long-term concern for social harmony prevails over the short-term benefits.

In this light, reconciliation and restoration of relationships and social harmony are the principal goals of traditional conflict management practices as opposed to retribution and punishment. The conflict is viewed less in terms of a problem between two parties but rather understood as one occurring between an offender and the community. Consequently, rather than proving individual innocence or guilt, the ultimate purpose of the conflict management process is mending the broken relationships, reinforcing social solidarity and restoring order and harmony in the community (Ngwane 1996:52). In fact, reintegration of the offender into the community is implied by the demand to restore social harmony as punishing the offender would be "harming the group a second time" (Faure 2000:158).

Another potential merit lies in the participatory nature of the 'traditional' mechanisms. Participation of whole communities is crucial in post-war peacebuilding as it contributes to the sustainability of the process. Traditional

mechanisms are usually public and inclusive. Not only the parties to the conflict have the opportunity to tell their story but also people from extended family, neighbours and other members of the community can take part. This results in an agreement, which reflects the consensus of the entire community as inclusively as possible. Herein a belief is embodied that "the whole group always has some responsibility for what people do, or do not do, as it plays a central role in the education of its members and the position they later on occupy" (Faure 2000:159) while at the same time every individual is a part of the communal body and therefore his action affects the well-being to the whole community. Thus the individual and the community are inseparable and everybody has to take responsibility for the solution and restoration of harmony. This is well represented in the case of the Rwandan traditional *gacaca* courts, an informal, community-based ad hoc meeting convened to resolve disputes among its members. It is attended by the disputants as well as the affected community and chaired by a wise and respected elder who leads the hearings and discussions. The achieved settlement must be acceptable to all participants. The goal of gacaca is thus to "sanction the violation of rules that are shared by the community, with the sole objective of reconciliation" and to restore harmony and social order and re-include the perpetrator (OAU 2000).[12]

Traditional conflict management practices also make use of different methods of healing and purification, performed by traditional healers or other spiritual authorities that serve to appease the spirits and the ancestors and also play a critical role in the mental and spiritual rehabilitation of victims and perpetrators (Boege, 2006:15). Singing or dancing together also plays an important role. In the current practice, such ceremonies are often used as part of former child soldiers' reintegration. "The performance of these ceremonies as rituals of integration create a spiritual tranquillity in the people while individuals living in communities see themselves (feel) protected and capable of confronting any situation which the integration of children involved in armed conflict might bring about" (Bennett 1998).

A further supposed advantage concerns the traditional institutions and authorities. Some believe that while the legitimacy of the state institutions in

[12] The adapted gacaca tribunals set up to deal with the perpetrators of the 1994 genocide are however very different from the traditional ones. In fact, they are much more strongly focused on legal retribution rather than restoration of harmony and reconciliation.

many African states has been shaken by years of misconduct, corruption and conflict, involving traditional institutions in post-war peace building and reconciliation "takes into account that in general people on the ground have a desire for peace building and perceive respective endeavours as positive, whereas state-building is often perceived as irrelevant for peace and order and [...] even seen as negative" (Boege 2006:14).

But the above paints a rather romantic picture of the 'traditional' mechanisms and practices. There are also reasons for caution when contemplating their use in post-conflict settings. First of all, traditional institutions and actors are not always as detached from the state as an idealised perception of traditions as something 'preserved from the better days' might imply. Colonial authorities as well as many post-independence political leaders have used traditional authorities to mobilize and sustain popular support for the regime. Osaghae beliefs that "relevance and applicability of traditional strategies have been greatly disenabled by the politicization, corruption, and abuse of traditional structures…which have steadily delegitimized conflict management built around them in the eyes of many, and reduced confidence in their efficacy" (Osaghae, 2000:215).

Furthermore, these mechanisms are based on a set of social normative values that make up the ground for their effectiveness and are therefore limited to the contexts of small local communities (Faure, 2000:165). "African traditional management techniques depend [...] on the existence of a community of relationships and values to which they can refer and that provide the context for their operations" (Zartman, 2000:224). The lack of such common ground can be observed in the case of young ex-combatants who are often deeply alienated from their communities, their values and ways of life, so that using traditional practices to reintegrate them into these communities might just be ineffective (Boege, 2006:16). Protracted armed conflicts, population shifts, urbanization or intermarriage may too have decreased the appeal and influence of traditional practices. In Uganda, forced displacement and decades of life in the Internally Displaced Persons' (IDP) camps caused that "many people today no longer automatically know their Rwot [anointed chief], nor what his role should be" (Baines 2005:21). As traditional ways of transmitting cultural norms have been restricted in the IDP camps, many Elders also observed they didn't command the level of respect they once did from their communities, and particularly from the

youths (Baines 2005:22).

Lastly, traditional methods and institutions are often conservative and inflexible in the values they aim to protect and may contradict universal human rights standards. In many practices, it is the village male elders who play a central role while women and young men tend to be excluded from the councils.[13] Women can often be victims of the resolutions under customary law - swapping women or giving girls as compensation are not uncommon (Boege, 2006:6).

However, beyond the problems directly related to the way these practices work there is a set of larger issues that are rarely acknowledged. The contemporary understanding of 'local tradition' of dealing with conflict and its aftermath is often limited to, and usually equated with, customary law and its mechanisms of conflict resolution at the local level. This reflects the 'prosecution preference' in contemporary practice discourse. 'Traditional' practices understood as customary law can be fitted well into the 'toolbox' of transitional justice and adapted to contemporary peacebuilding challenges (Shaw and Waldorf 2010:15). There is evidence of this trend both in practice and in theory, the most prominent example being the Rwandan *gacaca* tribunals.

While customary justice still plays an important role in many African societies, many advocates of the indigenous conflict resolution and justice mechanisms present a highly romanticised picture of these traditions. One of the most problematic issues is seeing the customary law as synonymous with restorative justice and reconciliation. There is a tendency to overemphasise the aspect of restoration of social harmony in the customary law mechanisms. Firstly, retributive dimensions and punitive measures are indeed known to customary justice practices in African countries (Shaw 2009). Secondly, the equation of 'traditional' customary justice with restorative justice is also problematic. As Stovel (2007) argues, the joint emphasis on restoration of social harmony and reconciliation must be further interrogated. Reconciliation, according to Stovel, "is not always a good thing" as it may favour the status quo instead of promoting restorative justice, which recognizes that individuals exist within the community but does not privilege the interests of the community to the individual rights of victims and perpetrators. Similarly, the notion of participation in the customary justice processes may be overemphasised as it

[13] In Sierra Leone, some truth-seeking mechanisms are headed by women. There is however no place for young men. See Alie (2008).

usually is not synonymous with open dialogue, one of the core requirements of restorative justice (2007:1).

A related problem is the limited view of 'traditional' practice as synonymous with customary law. This comes with a broader set of assumptions in which 'tradition', 'culture' and 'locality' are often used almost interchangeably, with important consequences (Shaw and Waldorf 2010). This view obscures the fact that there are other 'local' practices and techniques of reconciliation and reintegration. Communities have a wealth of ritual and religious practice they can use and adapt to face their conciliatory and integrative needs after armed conflict. Elsewhere, communities "rather draw upon the performance of everyday life as a means of remaking relationships" (Shaw and Waldorf 2010:20). All these diverse practices, techniques and beliefs invite closer and detailed inquiries into the local understandings of the concepts of reconciliation, justice or forgiveness and the ways of pursuing them, as well as to the areas of "friction" (Shaw 2007) between these notions and concepts and the internationally sanctioned tools designed to achieving them in African post-conflict societies.

3.3 Concluding remarks

As the above review of theorising on and practical expressions of reconciliation suggest, there is not one but many concepts of 'reconciliation'. Reconciliation seems to mean different things to different people, at different levels, in different political, historical, social and cultural contexts. Similarly, critical in any examination of the relationship between reconciliation and justice, truth or forgiveness will be choices made between varieties, types, levels and facets of reconciliation matched to varieties, types, levels and facets of justice, truth and forgiveness. But while the academic debate has to an extent attempted to engage with the complexities of these concepts and problematize their common usage, peacebuilding and transitional justice policies have stayed largely stuck in "simplistic rhetoric" (Forsberg 2001) of slogans such as 'truth: the path to reconciliation', 'there is no reconciliation without justice' or 'let bygones be bygones'. Similarly, it has also been argued that while a specific, unchanging and truly reconciliation-oriented African approach to dealing with conflict does not really exist, there is a strong case for exploring the local meaning of the

concepts before conclusions are made about the relationship between reconciliation, justice, truth and forgiveness in the particular society. We will do just that in chapter 7 by exploring the meaning of reconciliation as understood by local communities in Sierra Leone. First, however, the next part provides a brief insight into the conflict in the country.

PART II. SIERRA LEONE

Sierra Leone is a small country with roughly five million inhabitants on the west coast of Africa nudged between Liberia and Guinea. More than sixteen distinct ethnic groups inhabit Sierra Leone, among which the Mende, Temne and Limba are the largest. The division between the largest ethnic groups is roughly along the south-east (Mende) and north (Temne) lines. Smaller but politically and economically influential groups are the Krio (descedants of freed Atlantic slaves) and the Lebanese, many of which live in Freetown and the wider Western Area. The main religions are Islam (77%) and Christianity (21%), and the country is characterised by a high degree of religious tolerance. Sierra Leone is divided into 149 chiefdoms each headed by a Paramount chief elected by a college of Tribal Authorities. The chiefdoms are further divided into sections, led by a section chief, each section containing a number of villages with their own chiefs. Villages are often subdivided into quarters and families with their own heads. The Paramount Chief provides local administration, under the supervision of a government agent, the District Officer. Among others, the role of the chiefs includes the administration of the chiefdom courts which try minor cases such as theft, public disturbance, battery and adultery. The 'traditional' chieftaincy system owes much of its current structure and nature to the colonial times rather than the pre-colonial social organisation. Although the current chieftaincy system is a British invention, historians and anthropologists believe the power relationship between chiefs and their subjects as it exists today pre-date the modern institution (Abraham 1976).

4. Understanding the war in Sierra Leone

Sierra Leone witnessed between 1991 and 2002 one of the most violent civil wars that engulfed the African continent after the end of Cold War. There have been a number of distinct - and at times contradictory – interpretations of the roots, causes and dynamics of the war. Was it a "pointless conflict based on incomprehensible barbarism" (Richards 2005:9 commenting on a thesis presented in 1994 by Robert Kaplan in *Coming Anarchy*)? Or was it driven by greed, pursued by purely material interests of criminal warlords hungry for the country's diamonds (Smilie et al. 2000)? Or was it brought about by a crisis of patrimonial system in the rural areas that resulted in its inability to fulfil its

obligation of patronage towards a growing number of youth (Richards 1996, Peters 2006)? Or were the prime drivers urban 'lumpen' elements among the street youth socialised over years on the streets on Freetown into a culture of crime and violence (Abdullah 2000)?

Wars do not have a single cause. They also do not just happen. Making sense of the war that tore Sierra Leone apart in the 1990s requires a contextual discussion, in which the historical, political, economic and socio-cultural factors are considered. As Richards (2005) writes: "All war – and 'new war' is no exception – is a long term struggle organized for political ends, commonly but not always using violence. Neither the means nor the ends can be understood without reference to a specific social context" (p. 4). In this regard, it is unhelpful to see 'war' as sudden rupture, clearly distinguished from (an opposed to) a state of 'peace'. Instead of seeing war as an event with a clear beginning and a clear end, it is best seen as a continuum (Richards 2005:5, Utas 2005:139). In order to understand the causes, dynamics and manifestations of the war, it "needs to be understood in relation to patterns of violence already embedded within society" (Richards 2005:11). Several recent ethnographic accounts of Sierra Leone suggest that, indeed, violence is deeply inscribed in the country's historical imagination. Writing about the Mende, Marianne Ferme explored "modalities through which material objects, language, and social relations become sites where a sometimes violent historical memory is sedimented and critically reappropriated" (2001:5). "Local histories", she writes, "are bound up with matter, which carries sometimes eloquent and explicit, sometimes concealed clues to this region's entanglements with slavery and institutionalized inequality, with warfare, and with the precarious balance between economies characterised by the mobile exploitation of natural resources (hunting, alluvial diamond mining) and economies based on the more stationary cultivation of those resources (farming of staple and cash crops)" (2001:6, cf. Shaw 2002).

4.1 The context: the centrality of patrimonialism

The roots of Sierra Leonean patrimonialism lie deep in the country's pre-colonial history.[14] Patrimonialism, one of Max Weber's (1978) 'pre-modern'

[14] This is not to suggest that it has been preserved in some pre-modern form to this day. On the contrary, it has

types of authority, is based on a triadic political hierarchy of patrimonial ruler, staff and subjects (Murphy 2003:63). Under patrimonial notions of social organization, the ruler – be it a king, a chief, a warlord or another 'big man' – exercises authority over his subjects on a personalised basis through his intermediate staff – lower chiefs, warriors or even slaves (Kelsall 2009:75, Richards 2005). This form of governance rests on vertical patron-client relationships. "Followers look up to their patron as to a father, treating his duty to protect as a moral or familial obligation. The 'big man' in turn expects 'family loyalty' from clients" (Richards 2005:122). The patrons provide their clients with basic needs and other material and non-material benefits, mediate access to resources and other opportunities and offer them protection and security. In return, they receive favours, support and allegiance, a share of the clients' eventual wealth, as well as legitimacy and social status (Chabal and Daloz 1999, Richards 2005, Kelsall 2009, Hoffman 2007).

Political systems in Africa have been described as neo-patrimonial, referring to a situation where the formal state structures are permeated by these – informal and essentially private - patron-client relationships (Chabal and Daloz 1999, Bratton and Van der Walle 1994, Erdmann and Engel 2007). The exercise of power proceeds "in the interplay between the formal and the informal" (Chabal 2005:3). While this is certainly true for the political system in Sierra Leone, both at the national as well as at the local level, it is not the complete picture.

Patrimonial relations are not limited to the political sphere. Much of the ethnographic writing on Sierra Leonean societies suggests that most social relationships are organised along the vertical patron-client bond (Ferme 2001, Hoffman, 2007, Richards 2005). Richards (2005) has argued that "patrimonialism is one of the predominant notions of social solidarity and social reproduction in Sierra Leone" (p. 119). Marianne Ferme's (2001) explains this in her research of the Mende: "The crucial point", she writes, "was that everyone must be accounted for by someone else – that everyone must be linked in a relationship of patronage or clientship" (p. 106). The notion of 'being for someone else' embodies the relationships of dependence between juniors and seniors, women and men (p. 110) (cf. Hoffman 2007, Jackson 2004). Albeit situated in a hierarchical social order, "the system is one of thorough

developed gradually into its present form throughout the centuries and was shaped by the interaction, or rather incorporation of what today is the territory of Sierra Leone, into the international trade and political systems.

interdependence" (2001:110). As Ferme writes: "Individual autonomy and independence threaten these larger units with infertile and unproductive splits, such as those represented by husbandless women and by strangers who have less stake in the domestic groups in which they are dependents. Those who are on their own are liable to be suspected of antisocial behaviour, such as witchcraft. But it is not only potential dependents, those 'for someone', who can become ostracised for showing too much autonomy. Big people who are very successful in farming, politics, or business are liable to be equally suspect, particularly if there is a perception that they do not use their wealth and status to help dependents and instead seek only their own profit" (2001:110).

4.2 The birth and the life of Sierra Leonean patrimonial state

In 1787, a settlement for freed slaves was established on the Freetown peninsula, initially as a largely private enterprise, which was taken over by the British government as the crown colony of Sierra Leone in 1808.[15] Just one year earlier Britain had abolished slave trade and Freetown became the base from which the British navy led its operations against slave ships along the West African coast. Many Africans from different corners of the continent were then released to settle and live in the Sierra Leone colony.

The abolition of slave trade had a different impact inland, where domestic slavery was not abolished until 1928. The 19th century in the hinterland was characterised by continuing insecurity caused by warfare between warrior chiefs and merchants involved in long-distance trade (Kelsall 2009: 25). Only in 1896, Britain declared a Protectorate over the interior areas. While the Colony was administered under British law, in the Protectorate the British continued to rely on local chiefs and customary law. A large-scale rebellion, commonly referred to as the 'hut tax war' because it was sparked by an imposition of a flat house tax in the Protectorate in 1898, had a critical impact on the chiefly rule, particularly in the South of the country. Once the uprising was suppressed, many rebellious chiefs were executed, a few exiled, and yet others fled and went into hiding

[15] The first settlers were mainly the Black Loyalists who fought on the side of Britain in the American War of Independence. After British defeat, many of them left either to British Nova Scotia or to London where they usually ended up on the streets without financial or material support. The plan 're-settle' (by itself a very problematic idea as most of the Black Loyalists were born in the United States and not in Africa) was born from the British abolitionist movement. The second wave of settlers who arrived to Sierra Leone in 1792 consisted of the Black Loyalists settled in Nova Scotia.

(Fyfe 1979:147). On the contrary, those chiefs who supported the British during the revolt were rewarded with increased powers. The also British replaced the executed and defeated chiefs with loyal supporters of the colonial administration. This was followed by a profound administrative reform supposed to prevent organized rebellion in the future (ibid.:149). The territory of the Protectorate was split up into many small chiefdoms, each headed by a newly established Paramount chief.

The impact of these reforms and the resulting manipulation of the structures of local relations have been immense and by far outlived the colonial period. The authority of many local chiefs henceforth depended more on their position within the colonial hierarchy rather than on the popular support of their subjects. The British expected the Paramount Chiefs to maintain order in their chiefdoms necessary for uninterrupted trade and were not interested in other aspects of local governance. In 1902, the British officially confirmed the right of the chiefs to demand forced labour and to adjudicate cases based on customary law. This allowed the chiefs to impose heavy fines on those who stood up against them.

Not much changed in the nature of the Sierra Leone state after independence in 1961. Milton Margai became the country's first Prime Minister. His Sierra Leonean People's Party (SLPP) ruled until 1967 when it lost the elections, which the party entered under the leadership of Margai's half brother Albert Margai, to Siaka Stevens' All People's Congress (APC). In the last few years under Albert Margai, the SLPP had become closely connected to the ethnic groups in the south and east and particularly the Mende. The opposition frequently accused Margai of favouritism towards members of southern and eastern ethnic groups in public appointments (Alie 2006:48). The APC had won the elections on votes from the north and Freetown. The party also profited from the fact that Albert Margai had fallen out with a number of young Parliamentarians in the SLPP over chieftaincy issues, which made four of them decide to enter the elections as independents (ibid.:51-2).

Despite a military coup just hours after Siaka Stevens was inaugurated, Sierra Leone and the APC made history as the first opposition party in post-colonial Africa that had ousted the ruling party through democratic elections (ibid:54). After two subsequent coups, APC rule was restored in April 1968 with the swearing in of Stevens as Prime Minister. Patrimonial politics grew into great

proportions during the presidency of Stevens and his successor Joseph Saidu Momoh. “Compared to colonial or SLPP elite accommodations, the new ruling alliance made unusually heavy demands on state resources to buy collaborators’ loyalties” (Reno 1995:80). Stevens was an experienced and charismatic politician and a skilled manipulator willing to do anything to consolidate his power. By 1978 he had turned the country into a one-party state with himself at the helm as President.

Through politics of clientelism, bribes and cooptation on one hand and evading constitution and making use of threats and brutal violence on the other, Stevens managed to silence most of the opposition and gain control over the government, parliament, army and justice within the first few years of coming to power (Alie 2006). Stevens invited the heads of army and police to the government and made sure that leaders of trade unions and other professional institutions had a place in the parliament. Stevens maintained a relatively small and changing circle of loyal collaborators who enjoyed his patronage. The guiding principle of Stevens’ approach to governance is, according to some, best expressed through a Krio proverb, “*wusai den tai kaw, nar dae e dae eat* (a cow grazes where it is tethered), for under APC, people with access to public money were allowed to use it unabashedly for private ends” (Jackson 2004:141). The diamonds financed the new elite accommodation, and Stevens use the income from the sector to tie SLPP stalwarts closer to him and the APC (Reno 1995:79). Chiefs, politicians and businessmen profited from the spoils from the ‘shadow state’ that Stevens created, but they were also exposed to the arbitrariness of the President’s will; the chronic insecurity of office increased their urge to ‘make the most’ of their office while the grace of the leader lasted. This all supported corruption and abuse of power (Reno 1995).

Political corruption had a detrimental effect on the Sierra Leonean economy. As the majority of state income ended in private pockets rather than in the national treasury, the public service and infrastructure were rapidly deteriorating. Between 1980 and 1987, the government spending on education and healthcare went down by 60% (Alie 2006). The situation was made worse by the development in the world economy – particularly the decline in prices of the main export commodities – diamonds, iron, coffee and cocoa and simultaneous increase in the price of imported oil. While the population was growing, the agricultural production was declining due to dilapidated infrastructure, falling

prices and drain of workforce especially into the diamond mines. Sierra Leone moved from self-sufficiency into dependence on rice imports and food aid. In spite of the rapid economic downturn, Freetown hosted the 1980 Organization of African Unity (AOU) summit. For the last money in the state coffers and with huge loans from abroad, special facilities for the summit were built. Because of bad planning, mismanagement and pervasive corruption, the final bill for the conference reached 200 million USD, double the amount initially envisaged. The summit meant the final blow to the country's collapsing economy. All that ordinary Sierra Leoneans were left with was a bitter slogan: "OAU today, IOU [I Owe You] tomorrow" (Jackson 2004:128).

Stevens chose Brigadier Joseph Saidu Momoh to be his loyal successor. When Momoh took over as President in 1985, the country was facing a deep economic, political, social and moral crisis. Momoh's programme of change ambitiously titled 'New Order' remained in the hands of 'old' politicians and its outlooks were bleak from the start. Towards the end of 1987 after a series of protests of state employees Momoh declared a state of economic emergency. One of its key goals were ending smuggling and corruption. He sent the army to the rural areas along the border with Liberia in order to stop the activities of smugglers of diamonds, agricultural production and other goods. Instead of moving firmly against smuggling, many soldiers started actively participating in it. Patrolling the borders and combating illicit trade thus became a new and important source of income for the army and some state officials at the moment when state patronage was declining. In April 1990 Operation 'Clean Slate' authorised the army and Special Security Division (SSD) units to chase out around 10.000 diamond diggers from Kono, allegedly in an effort to decrease the influence of Lebanese traders (Keen 2005:33). With this move, Momoh was hoping to concentrate the diamond sector in the hands of several foreign firms and increase the volume of legal and taxable trade. Instead, the operation brought even bigger involvement of the army in the illicit mining as the poorly paid soldiers replaced the expelled diggers and local chiefs and APC stalwarts took over control of the mining (ibid.). The affected diggers also became an easy target for recruitment into the rebel force when a year later the war entered the country.

Faced with both domestic and international pressure, President Momoh launched a process of restoration of multiparty democracy in mid-1990. But

democratization was threatening the interests of some powerful and influential groups who were profiting from the state weakness and its inability to control political and economic processes: many APC politicians, their business 'partners', and numerous army officers were engaged in the profitable 'anti-smuggling' operations. These people had a big interest in postponing the democratic reforms (Keen 2005:34). When the war started in the eastern border regions of Kailahun and Pujehun in March 1991, it brought an opportunity to do just that. This direct clash between the personal interests of the politicians and soldiers and their official duty to defend the country helps to partially explain how a handful of rebels was able to unleash a violent chaos that gradually over took the whole country for more than a decade.

4.3 Culture of violence

Stevens regularly declared a state of emergency that gave him special powers and with that the opportunity to destroy his opponents (Alie 2006, Reno 1995). He also strived to keep his grip on power by controlling the army and other security services. With the experience of the coups in 1967-68 and aware of the developments in other African countries, he feared a strong army. To ensure the loyalty of the armed forces, Stevens cleansed them of potentially threatening elements from the traditionally pro-SLPP south and east and replaced them with APC supporters from the Northern provinces (Keen 2005). Throughout Stevens' rule, the combat ability of the Sierra Leone Army was systematically weakened, which had dire consequences during the 1990s. Stevens put his security in the hands of the paramilitary police Internal Security Unit (ISU) – in fact a private army, set up with Cuban assistance in 1973 (Gberie 2005:44). The ISU was fully committed to Stevens and the APC and unlike the regular army was well armed. The ISU became to be colloquially called I-Shoot-You for the indiscriminate violence it applied to help Stevens and the APC win elections and suppress student and popular protests (Keen 2005, Reno 1995). Towards the end of the 1970s the ISU was renamed Special Security Division (SSD).

Politics in the Stevens era was gradually becoming more and more violent, to the extent that violence prevailed over other forms of political competition. During pre-election campaigns and elections the APC thugs went on a rampage and attacks against political opponents were common. Although Sierra Leone

was officially declared one-party state in 1978, elections continued to be held every four years. The limited possibility of competition at the national level led to an increased rivalry and violence at the local level. Election loss came to be associated with a total physical, social and moral weakness while victory signalled special physical and occult abilities. Victors often exposed the losers and their supporters to beatings and public shaming, meaning that much more was at stake during election than just an office (Ferme 1999).

Jackson (2004) describes an incident that took place in Kabala in the run-up to the 1977 elections. An independent candidate, S.B. Marah who enjoyed strong support among the population stood against an APC candidate Kawusu Konteh. Konteh, who was then Minister of Mines, was unpopular in the district. Two years before the election, he was involved in manipulating the election of a Paramount Chief in Kurubonla, which saw an APC preferred man – Madusu Lai II – installed as Paramount Chief (p.119).

"Within a day of the registration of candidates in Kabala, Kawusu's APC thugs began terrorising the town. They drove about in trucks, firing their weapons… People were frightened. The market closed. Police were intimidated. Realizing the situation was getting out of hand, S.B. asked the police to intervene, but the police protested that they were powerless to do anything. […] Kawusu, his wife, and Madusu Lai II left Kabala with nine trucks filled with armed thugs, their destination Kurubonla… Most men from Kurubonla were still in Kabala, where they had gone to support S.B.'s registration. The thugs were now high on cannabis, and when they encountered the women of Kurubonla, singing protest songs against Kawusu and celebrating S.B.'s candidacy, they lost control and fired into the crowd. No one knew how many were killed. Two bodies were subsequently taken to Kabala. Others were buried or thrown into the flames when Kawusu's thugs looted and sacked the town" (Jackson 2004:119-120).

During elections in Pujehun in 1982 one of the opponents of the influential APC politician Francis Minah was murdered. Minah's opponents then launched a campaign of defiance known as *Ndogboyosoi*. General discontent and anger because of marginalisation and underdevelopment of the region as well as protest against indiscriminate violence by police and army in the operation against illicit trans-border trade surfaced in the campaign. The brutal response by the APC displaced thousands of families, often across the border to Liberia (Keen 2005:18). Many people were killed, incarcerated or disappeared. When

almost ten years later rebels from the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) entered the Pujehun District, family members of those who disappeared in the suppression of the *Ndogboyosoi* were among the first voluntary recruits (Richards 1996:22).

As a former principal of Fourah Bay College noted: "The idealisation of violence by Mr Stevens and his political cohorts produced a belief among a whole generation of young Sierra Leoneans (some of them future recruits of the Revolutionary United Front, or RUF) that violence pays, that it is or can be a way of life, and that it is the shortest and most effective route to achievement and success" (Newsway 1998:12 in Keen 2005:18).

4.4 Patrimonialism on the local level

The neopatrimonial logic that was ordering the exercise of power on national level was reflected and in fact closely linked to power structures on the local level. On the one hand, the local landless peasants in the villages were tied in a relationship of dependency to the chiefs and landowners, on the other hand, the chiefs themselves had become tightly nit into Steven's patrimonial network throughout the 1970s and 1980s (Reno 1995).

Peters and Richards (2011) trace the contemporary tensions between chiefs and their subjects back to "an agrarian order that emerged from the West African social world shaped by the Atlantic slave trade" (p. 377). According to them the chieftaincy system developed into two distinct forms during the 19th century: warlords and agricultural producers. Warlords lived of controlling and protecting or raiding the major trade routes from the Upper Niger to the Atlantic and depended on support from young men able to fight. These warlord chiefs were common in the southern border region with Liberia where the Atlantic slave trade still thrived. In other districts where slave trade was in decline a second type of chieftaincy emerged, that of agrarian chiefs who had diversified from supplying food to slave vessels into meeting the food needs of the infant colony of Sierra Leone. When the British declared the Protectorate over the hinterland in 1896, a number of warlord chiefs revolted to protect their slave trading interests (p. 378). After suppressing the 'hut tax war' as it became to be known, the British created the institution of Paramount as a form of indirect rule.

Under the system set up by the British the Paramount Chiefs were given extensive powers. The British were effectively assisting the Paramount Chiefs "in the suppression of local rivals, and reducing the option of secession from a chiefdom or of withholding payments or compulsory labour from a chief [by his subjects]" (Keen 2003:71). Chieftaincy was also made a lifetime and inheritable position limited to members of the ruling houses. As Abraham (1978) has demonstrated, these rules in no sense continued pre-colonial practice but were arrangements devised by the British to secure a modicum of local stability through the practice of divide and rule. "The overbearing attitudes and behaviour imbibed by the Chiefs from their colonial masters led to their assuming new and overwhelming powers over their subjects... and was to have grave implications on the ways in which traditional rulers related to their subjects and on the socio-political organisation of the communities" (TRC 2004/Vol.3A:8).

The colonial administration, as well as the post-colonial governments, was well aware of the importance of securing cooperation and control over the chiefs. "Once you are assured of the loyalty of chiefs, responsibility towards the rural populace can be abrogated except for carefully targeted patrimonial distributions at election time. It is an equally rational strategy for an unscrupulous individual once assured of central government patronage (or indifference) to exploit legitimately-won chiefdom office for personal gain" (Fanthorpe et al. 2002: 15-16 cited in Keen 2003:71). Chiefs profited from the system by diverting house tax payments, attracting (and abusing) development aid and the right to grant mining licences, giving them resources for strengthening their position as patron. Moreover, the village seniors (chiefs, headmen and elders) gained the ability to define customary law or impose fines and other punishments, all of which "asserted and legitimated their power and control over the allocation of resources against the interests of juniors, women and migrants." (Berman 1998: 321, quoted in Boersch-Supan: 6). Their power was extensive. What Mamdani (2005) writes about Uganda, holds as well for Sierra Leone: "The chief combined in his hands executive, legislative, judicial, and administrative powers. When he faced the peasant, his fingers closed and the hand became a clenched fist" (p. 7).

Although slavery was officially abolished in 1928, forced labour for chiefs and community elders survived in local communities as a heritage from domestic

slavery. The abuse of young men by chiefs and other local landowners is closely related to what is called as the 'wealth in people system' (Shaw 2002, Richards 2005). This system is rooted in the shortage of local labour resources necessary to farm the land (especially in the harvest time). To secure sufficient capacity to successfully grow enough rice, the farmer needs to control his labour forces "by building ties of dependency and indebtedness through kinship, marriage, parenthood, warship, pawnship, and, in the past, slavery" (Shaw 2000:37).

Peters and Richards (2011) recognise a number of ways in which landowners could secure sufficient labour. First of all, under customary law, the chief has the right to call his subjects for community labour. However, chiefs used to abuse this privilege for personal gain rather than for projects that would benefit the whole community, at the most projects like road repair would benefit the local middle class involved in trading (Richards 2005). Young men related to the chiefs were often excused from these duties (Peters 2006:37), while those that refused would be fined high amounts which would only leave them with the option to leave the community (e.g. INT43, FG19, FG21).

Secondly, other landowners would access labour force through being patrons and protectors of labour-sharing co-operatives. Thirdly polygamists with large upland farms would encourage their wives to take up relationships with young men, after which the local courts would find them guilty of "woman damage" and force them to work on the husband's land as a fine. A fourth way, would be for landowners to become patrons to a 'stranger seeking land'. The granting of a plot by the chief would require the stranger to support his patron in "a range of ill-defined ways" (Peters and Richards 2011:378) including harvest labour and electoral support. Peters and Richards conclude that such a unstable and unpredictable relationship makes it hard "to plan farming as a profitable business in the face of open-ended claims by landowners" (idem.:379).

An additional way to secure labour both by landowning and landless classes often recognised in the literature (cf. Richards 2005: 584-5, Shaw 2002: 158; Fanthorpe 2005: 37) is the so-called "bride service" that a husband needs to provide to his family-in-law and mostly comes in the form of working on the land of his wives father and brothers. Marriage was also used as a way to incorporate strangers into the local community and its relationships of dependency (Ferme 2001: 81-111, Shaw 2002:158).

If local youth would refuse to work for the chief – either as part of forced labour 'owed' to the chief or as fine for woman damage – the customary court would often impose fines that were too high to pay. The youth would have no way of appealing against such fines, and "there is a strong feeling among young people in the villages that elders make up the law to suit their own purposes" (Peters 2006: 37). These practices were common across the country right up to the civil war. Ex-combatants reported that the "high and arbitrary fines for 'woman damage' and other alleged offences against customary law" was one of their main motivations to fight (Archibald and Richards 2002, Fithin and Richards 2004). A village chief in the Pujehun District told me that unaffordable fines imposed on youth often drove them away:

The chiefs […] could just levy a fine on the youth […] which also caused the war: Sometimes the chiefs would levy you Le 200.000 which even the chief wasn't able to pay. If you wouldn't have that money, a small plantation that your parents have, you go and pledge it. There is no other way to live, the next thing you resort to [is that] you vacate the chiefdom. That was also a cause of the war. (INT3)

Although the government of Sierra Leone now acknowledges that corrupt and oppressive governance in the chiefdoms contributed to the general climate of alienation that propelled the nation into conflict (Fanthorpe 2005:31-2), it was Paul Richards who through fieldwork with former combatants from all fighting factions proposed the idea that rural circumstances and particularly the relationship between the local chiefs and oppressed youth was one of the main causes of the RUF rebellion (Richards 2005, Mokuwa et al. 2011).

Under Stevens local chiefs rapidly became tied into the national patrimonial system. Reno (1995) describes how Stevens tied local chiefs into his patrimonial network through offering them positions on the board of the National Diamond Mining Company (NDMC) and providing them with other opportunities to make private gains. Through the chiefs Stevens managed to divert most of the profits from the diamond industry into his 'shadow state'. To make the chiefs dependent on the ruling APC party, Stevens centralised decisions on licenses for diamond digging. As chiefs were more engaged with making private profit than in developing their communities, the system, promoted a situation where many chiefs lacked strong support within their chiefdoms (Keen 2003:72).

Through setting up monopoly trading instruments known as marketing boards, Stevens also drew the agricultural sector into his shadow state, exploiting it for private gains. The rural labouring classes of young people from former slave backgrounds found themselves doubly exploited – by tradition at home, and through government taxes on agricultural production. Chiefs had either been tied into the diamond industry, or if not, then they would try to compensate by exercising their power over local youth. As Richards (2004) writes chiefs had become either "puppets of Freetown or predatory on youth". Some youth migrated as labourers to alluvial diamond districts, but even there the land-owning chiefly classes controlled mining land through the 'time-honoured' rules, disciplining production and extracting wealth through 'custom', alongside the government's own violence-based methods of taxing flows of mineral wealth (Reno 1995).

Research shows that young people who had suffered abuse at the hands of the chiefs became the early recruits to the RUF particularly in Sierra Leone's Eastern Province (cf. Mokuwa et.al 2011, Richards 2005). It was clear from "the brutality of the treatment meted out to Chiefs and other figures of status or authority" (TRC 2004/Vol.3A:8) that many of them had joined the rebels to take revenge (cf. Peters and Richards 2011, Fanthorpe 2005, Alie 2006, Archibald and Richards 2002, Jackson 2006). A man in a village in Kailahun that I spoke to vented the same emotions:

[...] before now the relationship [between chiefs and youth] was something different, because they were forcing young men to leave the town and go elsewhere. So therefore when I hear of something that has come to destroy [the chiefs] I will join it. So when I come I am going to revenge.(INT45)

4.5 Crisis of youth

The 'crisis of youth' has featured prominently among the explanations of the causes of war although the interpretations of how it fed into the conflict differ (Richards 1996, Abdullah 2000). Undoubtedly, young people were one of the groups worst affected by the deteriorating economic situation and the general political decline in the country. The effects varied, understandably, depending on where one stood.

Since the end of the 1970s, a student movement began to form at Freetown's

Fourah Bay College, the country's main university. Students were expressing dissatisfaction with the regime, the declining quality of education and with the politicisation of the university soil where the stalwarts of the APC and their relatives had (as the only ones) access to scholarships and lecturing positions. Following a violent suppression of student protests in 1977, student politics gradually radicalised – eventually becoming, according to some observers, one of the ideological sources of the rebellion in the 1990s (Abdullah 2000). The radical student movement was informed by a variety of sources of revolutionary thinking from abroad; Muammar Qaddafi's Green Book had a prominent place among these. In 1985 about forty student leaders were expelled from the university; some of them subsequently travelled to Ghana and later to the training camps in Libyan Benghazi. It was around this time that the student movement split up over the question of a violent revolution. Only a minority of students was in support of armed struggle – and it was these students that left for Libya to learn 'the art of revolution'.

University students were not the largest group of young people hit by the economic and social downfall of the country. As in other African countries, the population was rapidly growing and becoming younger. At the same time, educational facilities were declining and employment opportunities in the formal sector were lacking. As the future looked bleak for many of the country's youths, it fostered disaffectedness, frustration and anger. Education has historically held a special status in Sierra Leone. Since colonial times it was seen as a route to 'modernity' in contrast to the 'illiterate backwardness' of the 'traditional' way of life. Education also offered an alternative route to secure livelihoods for those who did not have access to land administered by the chiefs. In a symbolic expression of the depth of the crisis, Momoh stated during his visit to Kailahun District, the most marginalized of the country's regions, that education was a privilege and not a right (Peters 2006:46). Several years later some of the combatants quoted his statement as one of the motives for taking up arms.

In the second half of the 1980s most children left school before they finished basic education, usually because their families could not pay for expensive text books or examination fees. Others were forced out of school by the absence of teachers. The decline of education was apparent especially towards the end of 1980s when Momoh's government stopped paying the already low wages of

teachers and other state employees altogether. Teachers focused on providing basic livelihoods for themselves and their families instead of teaching in dilapidated schools. In 1987 less then 30% children above the age of 12 were attending school (Beckley 1993:68 in Keen 2005b:78)

Once they were compelled to leave school the youth had three options (Peters 2006). They could stay in the village and do agricultural work. This was not usually on their own land but in an unequal bondage on the land of the chief or other prominent land owners. Girls could enter an early marriage. Diamond fields were their second option, where many left in search of wealth. In this respect, diamond mining to a certain extent and for a period of time defusing the simmering social conflict because it was able to absorb big numbers of these young 'renegades'. The last possibility was going to Freetown with the hope for employment in the local informal sector. The new comers only extended the ranks of unemployed and homeless youth already living on the street (p. 39-42).

The numbers of 'street youth' in Freetown grew. These youth were often meeting in places called *potes*. They hung out here, drinking palm wine and smoking marihuana waiting for any small, oftentimes illegal, job opportunity. It was in their ranks that the APC politicians hired violent thugs to threaten and beat opponents during election campaigns. In the 1980s, many radical university students as well as middle class youth started to spend their time with the excluded youth in the *potes*. Also here, revolutionary thoughts were discussed and spread. It also became a prominent recruitment ground in the up-coming rebellion (Abdullah 2000).

5. The war – a chronology

A chronological description does not do justice to the complexity of war. Furthermore, the present one is by no means exhaustive.[16] A short outline of the main developments and turning-points is nonetheless necessary.

5.1 The RUF incursion

The beginning of the war in Sierra Leone is generally dated to March 23, 1991 when a small group of about a hundred combatants invaded the village of Bomaru in Kailahun District from neighbouring Liberia. The Revolutionary United Front (RUF) as the fighters called themselves was led by a former army corporal Foday Sankoh and comprised of two groups of Sierra Leoneans. Its core was formed of combatants who had received guerrilla training in Libya in the late 1980s. They were joined by new recruits, mostly Sierra Leoneans held captive in Liberia by Taylor's National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL), just before the invasion was launched (TRC 2004/Vol.3A:102). The RUF fighters received support from Liberian rebels from the NPFL[17] and Burkinabe mercenaries (Richards 1996:5, Alie 2006:132). Sankoh and NPFL leader Charles Taylor had met in Libya while undergoing military training and Sankoh had taken part in the initial NPFL attack on Liberia launched from Ivory Coast. It was in his conquered territory that Taylor allowed Sankoh to train his RUF fighters (TRC 2004/Vol.3A:100). Taylor is regarded as the main sponsor of the RUF incursion (Keen 2005:37), and many Sierra Leoneans blame him for fomenting the war in the country.

If it had not been for Sankoh announcing that the RUF had started a war against the APC regime over the radio, chances are that the start of the conflict might have gone unnoticed (Hoffman 2011:32). There had been clashed along the border with Liberia for a while at that stage. The area was a refuge for both the war-affected Liberian population and the anti-NPFL fighters and there were occasional incursions by the NPFL. Further, the involvement of the Sierra Leonean Army (SLA) in the illicit trans-border trade had at times resulted in violent clashes over money or goods (TRC 2004/Vol.3A).

[16] For a more elaborate account of the history of the war see the TRC Report

[17] The National Patriotic Front of Liberia has started a war in the country in 1989 when it toppled the President Samuel Doe. The NPFL initially supported the RUF and provided a substantial number of the troops for the invasion.

Neglected by the central government, the border region had been an area of APC opposition and there is some evidence that the RUF may have initially had some sympathy among the population in Pujehun District and some areas of Kailahun District (cf. Alie 2006:133, Richards 2005:581, Combey 2010:296) Building upon the popular disaffectedness and frustration, the rebels presented themselves as liberators and spread a message of a better and just future. A chief in a village in Kailahun told me: *When the war came some of us were told not to fear and remain where we are, [then] we saw how serious it was and we couldn't flee. So some people then joined into the fight hoping it could lead to good things.* (INT42)

The numbers of the rebel forces soon swelled and in less than a month the RUF had occupied the entire Kailahun District (Alie 2006:132). Although the RUF had some initial support, "[l]ater recruits were captives from village raids or abductions in refugee camps, including children, both boys and girls, in large numbers" (Weinstein 2008:438). The army, divided by years of politicization and neglect under the APC rule, poorly equipped and inexperienced, was unable or - as argued above in chapter 4 - unwilling to meaningfully respond to the incursion. President Stevens had reduced the role of the army to not much more than a ceremonial one in favour of his elite security force the ISU (TRC 2004/Vol.3A:148). At the start of the war the national army barely counted 3.000 soldiers, reservists included. Their equipment was outdated and low pay had resulted in high levels of corruption and abuse of civilians (Keen 2005b:83, TRC 2004/Vol.3A:245). The RUF gained control over a fifth of the country's territory before Momoh's government, with substantial help from Guinean and Nigerian troops and anti-NPFL fighters from the United Liberation Movement of Liberia for Democracy (ULIMO), pushed the RUF back to the eastern border region of Gola forest early in 1992 (Alie 2006:134).

In April 1992, Momoh's government was toppled by a group of young army officers frustrated by the government's disregard for the conditions facing the common soldiers on the bush front while the war funds were being embezzled by high army commanders and politicians in Freetown. The coup ended the twenty-two years of APC rule swiftly and without much resistance. The soldiers set up the National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC) and appointed 27-year-old Captain Valentine Strasser as head of the military regime. In a country where power and respect are usually reserved for old men, their youthfulness was a

source of worries to some people – the NPRC was teasingly referred to as "Na Pikin Rule Contri" (Children now rule the country) (Keen 2005:94). But their youth also raised hopes that tomorrow's politics could be different, free of old practices, abuses of power and corruption. The youthful mutineers were popular especially among the youths (Alie 2006, cf. Shaw 2002)

The NPRC promised to quickly end the war and allow the resettlement of the displaced and repatriation of refugees (Richards 1996:9). They pledged an early return of the country to a democratically elected civilian government and initiated critical reforms to the state administration and programmes to improve the ailing infrastructure (Alie 2006:141). While the NPRC launched investigations into corruption of the APC regime, their own practices soon started resembling those of their predecessors. The junta members were involved in illegal trade of diamonds mined by the soldiers in the east (Keen 2005).

The RUF – which was at that time still confined to Kailahun and Pujehun Districts – came forward with an offer to negotiate a peace deal with the military junta. The NPRC opted for a military solution and instead stepped up its recruitment efforts. The army ranks swelled from the pre-war 3.000-4.000 men to around 15.000-20.000 in 1993-94 (Fithen and Richards 2005, in Peters 2006). The majority of the conscripts came from among the unemployed and socially marginalized youths in Freetown, which meant that the social base of the new army dangerously started to resemble that of the RUF. Discipline of the soldiers rapidly dropped (Alie 2006:150, cf. Keen 2005, Hoffman 2011, Kandeh 1999). This was to have serious consequences for the course of the war and for the civilian population in the future. The SLA was also (albeit not officially) recruiting children who fought, worked or mined diamonds for their commanders. Poorly trained but heavily armed, scores of chronically destitute lumpen youth were deployed in the countryside where they did more to terrorise innocent civilians than engage the enemy (Kandeh 1999:363).

The SLA gradually regained control over most of the RUF occupied territory and by November 1993 the RUF "stood squarely on the border with Liberia and on the brink of oblivion" (TRC 2004/Vol.3A:175). Why exactly did the NPRC decide to declare a unilateral ceasefire at this stage and did not finish the RUF off has been a matter of much speculation. Some claim that it was sheer greed on the part of the NPRC and other SLA commanders who would lose the opportunity to make profit from looting and illegal mining if the war ended

(Peters 2006:48). Other accounts point out the reliance by the SLA on "the vastly-exaggerated accounts filtering through the civilian population about the fearsome potency of the insurgents" in estimating the strength of the RUF (Richards 2005:381). The army subsequently advanced "with tedious over-cautiousness" and "showed the RUF combatants more respect than was perhaps necessary" (TRC/Vol.3A:176). Yet other explanations put it down not so much to the ulterior motives or deficiencies on the side of the SLA as to a change of tactics by the RUF. Both weakened militarily and without a supply of new arms after a row with Taylor's NPFL, the RUF adopted guerrilla warfare tactics to which the SLA was ill-equipped to counter (TRC/Vol.3A:320). During 1993, the RUF set up several bush camps from which it conducted hit-and-run attacks against the army. It also started raiding villages in order to obtain food, medicines and manpower (Peters 2006:49). The thick and inaccessible terrain of the rainforest was thus the main tactical advantage of the RUF against the poorly trained and pain and inadequately equipped soldiers (Richards 1996). There were also growing accounts of SLA soldiers who practically left the army and worked alongside the rebels or carried attacks on villages on their own masking it as RUF acts. A phenomenon of *sobels* – "soldiers by day, rebels by night" - was thus born, foreshadowing what was to become an overt alliance between the army and the rebels in a few years time (Richards 1996, Alie 2006, Keen 2005). A chief in Moyamba District told me:

It was very difficult for people to tell the RUF from the soldiers. Because they were often in the same uniforms. So it was very hard to say that these were RUF and these were soldiers. And in fact, most of those that did the destruction around this area were wearing the same uniform. And some soldiers deserted their barracks joined the RUF. I cannot say who was a soldier and who RUF. (INT17)

Caught in a situation where civilians could no longer trust their own army, civilian-led militia initiatives for their own protection started to flourish. The weak national army had started to seek help from the local communities' traditional hunters probably as early as 1991/92, and more systematically since the takeover by the NPRC. The hunters had an intimate knowledge of the rough terrain of the rain forest. The traditional hunters are also linked to the Poro society (see chapter 8.1) and apart from practical knowledge they also relied on esoteric and magic weapons (Hoffman 2011, Keen 2005; Ferme 2001; Kandeh

1999). The Kuranko *tamaboro* hunters from the northern district of Koinadugu were the first hunters to organize for the war. The *tamaboro* wearing the traditional *ronko* gowns and amulets protecting them from usual and magical weapons aroused fear in the rebels (Alie 2006:149). The successful cooperation of the *tamaboro* and SLA was short-lived, however (Jackson 2004:144). As the distrust of the army grew in the communities across the country these Civil Defence Forces (CDF), as they would become to be known in the course of the war, started to emerge as an important player in the conflict. Civilians started organizing defence groups around the traditional hunters also in other regions – there were the Mende *kamajor*, the *donso* among the Kono or *gbethi* and *kapra* of the Temne.[18] The hunters were bound through initiation rituals by many taboos and they had a code of behaviour emphasising discipline, loyalty and self-sacrifice. Common among these groups was a belief that initiation would render them bulletproof (Jackson 2004, Ferme 2001, Hoffman 2011). They imposed strict laws on the members of the communities that they resided in, which, if broken, would result in loss of their ability to be bulletproof.[19] The punishment for breaking the laws of the Kamajors was harsh. One Kamajor that I interviewed in the Bo District explained as follows:

Kamajor: The laws that were put by us: if anybody broke those laws we would deal with that individual. […] The action that would be taken against any defaulter: we made a cage to imprison all those that broke our law. We would put them in the cage which was made of sharp objects. You could barely sit inside the cage, and you could hardly turn else you would be hurt by those sharp objects. We would be throwing water at you while you were in the cage. If you broke the law, the fines that you would have to pay the Kamajors would protect us from being wounded by the bullets. The cage was for Kamajors that broke the law, but also for civilians that broke the Kamajor law and didn't pay the fine. The relatives of locked up civilians would come and pay the fine. If they didn't pay the fine, and we Kamajors would be hit by a bullet we would definitely be wounded. The fine would normally be rice, chickens, oil.

Me: can you explain what sort of laws the Kamajors had? Why did they apply to the civilians as well?

[18] The Kamajors were probably the best known among these hunter-militia groups, and I will refer to the various local militia using the name Kamajor throughout this study.
[19] See "Brief history of bulletproofing" see Hoffman 2011.

Kamajor: There were some laws that were purposely for the civilians. After 6 o'clock you cannot beat with the Matawudo [grinder], you cannot beat rice inside that, it would affect us. That law applies to everybody, even in this town where we were living, they would not remove palm cannels [to take oil from the palm trees] If you break that law by removing the palm cannel we would deal with you if we were in town. (INT4)

In the early months of 1994, the RUF took Kono District and the diamond-rich Tongo fields in Kenema District, dealing both a military and financial blow to the NPRC. The rebels then launched a coordinated offensive around Christmas 1994 across several areas of the country, some of which 'tasted the war' for the first time. They took rutile and bauxite mines in the south and at the beginning of 1995 they stood in front of Freetown. It was in recognition of the army's intractable 'sobelisation' that the NPRC government decided to hire Executive Outcomes (EO), a South African security firm with interests in Sierra Leone's diamonds, to help wage war against the rebels (Harding, 1997; Rubin 1997 in Kandeh 1999:364). In order to avert the pending takeover of the capital, the NPRC contracted EO in March 1995, paying them reportedly USD 1,7 million a month and granting them diamond mining concessions (Riley 1997: 287-92 in Zack-Williams). Several hundred mercenaries were tasked with securing the capital, regain control of the rutile, bauxite and diamond mines and then clear the remaining parts of the country from RUF. They were also supposed to train the SLA and the civil militias. With the help of local civil militias, EO was able to recapture the diamond mining areas and temporarily turn the tide of the war against the rebels (Kandeh 1999: 364). As a result of the ongoing abuses of civilians by government troops and Liberian ULIMO fighters that assisted the SLA in fighting the RUF, paramount chiefs called for these troops to be withdrawn from their territories in favour of state supported CDF units (Keen 2005:133).

5.2 The democratic intermezzo

The NPRC did not rush with handing the government back to civilian hands. It nonetheless started the process in 1994 by inaugurating an Interim National Electoral Commission and convening a National Advisory Conference to discuss the details of the democratisation process. The conference set the date for the

election for February 1996. A month before the election, Julius Maada Bio took over from Strasser as a chairman of the NPRC in a palace coup. There were doubts in some corners about the advisability of holding elections before peace was achieved. However, it is alleged that most of the sceptics were among those who had something to lose from the end of the military rule (Stovel 2008:110).

The election took place on schedule in late February 1996. The security situation in many parts of the county was critical and in some areas in the north and east it was impossible to organize the election at all. The period between November 1995 and June 1996 also saw the first wave of amputations, in which the RUF was punishing the population for participating in the election (Hirsch 2001). A farmer from a Bo Ngleya village spoke of the amputations to the TRC: "*People armed and in combat uniforms attacked our village and killed many people. They went all round and shouted that we, in the village had voted for President Kabbah as President of the Republic of Sierra Leone and because President Kabbah is a proud man they are going to cut off our arms so that we will never vote for him again. It was in 1996 and they said that we should go to him to treat us and give us another hand. Four of us were amputated, two men and two women*" (TRC/Vol.3A:474). Also some SLA units tried to sabotage the election and there was shooting heard in Freetown, Kenema and Bo on the election day (Alie 2006:163).

The SLPP came out victorious in the election with 36% of the 750.000 votes cast and its candidate Alhaji Ahmad Tejan Kabbah was inaugurated into the presidential office on 29 March, 1996. The RUF refused to participate in the election arguing it had no trust in the ability and willingness of the NPRC to conduct fair elections. In fact it was probably its justified doubt that people would give them their votes (ibid.).

President Kabbah did not have much trust in the army's ability to defend his government and the country. He appointed Chief Samuel Hinga Norman, the respected *kamajor* leader, as Deputy Minister of Defence and from 1997 as National Coordinator of the Civil Defence Forces. The fight against the RUF was to be spearheaded by the CDF, assisted by EO. The hunter militia had now evolved to a 'quasi-national army' which did not go down well with the SLA (Zack-Williams 1999: 152).[20]

[20] For a detailed account about how the local civil defence groups were formalised into a state supported militia see

As the hunter militia became more institutionalised, especially after 1997, many of the traditional rules loosened and the militia increasingly took part in committing abuses against the civilian population (Keen 2005:276-80). The increased in-take of CDF recruits led to the "dilution of ranks" (Hoffman 2011:237). A fundamental problem was that the social base of the Kamajors had some similarities with that of the RUF and the Sierra Leonean Army (Keen 2003: 86).

Hoffman (2011) claims that the shortened version of the initiation used for these new recruits was "of a qualitatively different order from those versions that had come before" (p. 237). Also Ferme (2001) notes that magic rituals used to initiate the new recruits "were sometimes mimicry of purportedly traditional practices, of which they took only the surface appearance" (p. 223). An informant in Bo District that was initiated into the Kamajor society in 1996, told me:

In 1997 when the military joined our patrol, when the Kabbah government was toppled […] it started at that point. There were people that were resigning from the military and coming to join the Kamajors. Even the rebel groups, some of them came to the Kamajors. Prisoners that were freed [by the junta] came and joined us. These people were all taken together to be Kamajors, some of them were not initiated in the normal procedure. Some of these Kamajors we did not even allow in our own home town, because they were more dangerous than the rebels (INT1).

The rivalry between CDF and SLA deepened and there were clashes between the two since early 1997 (Alie: 174). During September and October 1996, the joint effort of CDF and EO destroyed the RUF's main camp 'Zogoda' and pushed the rebels from key positions in the south-east. Parallel to stepped-up military efforts, Kabbah's government held peace negotiations with the RUF in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire. Under pressure by military losses, the severely weakened RUF signed the Abidjan Peace Accord on 30 November, 1996. The Accord called for an immediate cessation of all hostilities, disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration of all combatants, withdrawal of the EO forces and for a transformation of the RUF into a political party, absolving the movement of all responsibility for its past actions. It also spoke of an electoral and judicial

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Danny Hoffman's "The War Machines" (2011).

reform and improving conditions for the people of Sierra Leone in many areas (Abidjan Peace Accord 1996).

But the peace was short-lived. The RUF used the time to regain strength and rearm (cf. Alie 2006:176). The government terminated the untenably expensive contract with EO in January 1997 and its security remained solely in the hands of the CDF, ECOMOG – a Nigerian led West African peace force that had originally been located in the country to help restore peace in neighbouring Liberia – and the unreliable SLA. Sankoh's arrest in Nigeria in 1997, where he allegedly was arranging arms supply for the RUF, sounded the death bell to the peace accord. Although some RUF members were willing to continue the peace process, the new leadership of the RUF under Sam 'Maskita' Bockarie launched an offensive (Keen 2005).

5.3 The Armed Forces Revolutionary Council and its aftermath

The sidelining of the SLA by Kabbah's government created much resentment among the army's ranks. In the morning of 25 May 1997, a group of soldiers from Wilberforce barracks in Freetown staged a successful coup d'état stating the government's favouritism of the CDF among their main motivations (Alie 2006:176; Peters 2006:53, Zack-Williams 1997). The Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC), as the junta called itself, chose Johnny Paul Koroma, an army officer, who was at the time awaiting a trial at the Pademba Road prison for an attempted coup few months earlier, as its chairman. Some believed him to be a prime example of the sobel phenomenon (Gberie 2004:147).

The AFRC ordered the CDF to disband and invited the RUF to come and join the military government in Freetown, making the convergence between the army and the rebels - the 'unholy alliance' – official (Alie 2006:177). The SLA was dissolved and replaced with the 'People's Army' – a joint force of ex-SLA (about 80% of its soldiers) and the RUF. They declared RUF leader Foday Sankoh – in detention in Nigeria at the time – as Vice Chairman of the AFRC. Some of the APC politicians supported the AFRC, thereby earning ministerial and other civil service positions (ibid:178). As Keen (2005) concludes, "[h]ad the war really been between soldiers and rebels, a joint regime would have been the recipe for peace that Koroma was claiming" (p. 210).

The toppled government, supported by Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) leaders, preferred a negotiated departure of the junta to a military solution (Gberie 2004:159, cf. Alie 2006). Several rounds of diplomatic meetings between the AFRC representatives and the Sierra Leonean government resulted in the Conakry peace plan in October 1997. Although the soldiers stood to gain a lot from the plan, including another six month in power before the scheduled hand-over to the civilian government, they were making ever new demands. Eventually, the exiled government and representatives of some ECOWAS countries opted for a military solution.

In February 1998, the Nigeria-led ECOMOG launched a major operation against the AFRC in Freetown. Together with the CDF who had been fighting the People's Army in the provinces for most of the second half of the previous year, and supported by the loyal SLA troops, police and students in the capital, it gained control over most of the city within two weeks. The AFRC was overthrown but not beaten. In order to prevent any more civilian casualties in Freetown, ECOMOG allowed the escaping RUF/AFRC fighters a free passage out of the city. The retreating combatants moved northwards and north-eastwards to Kambia, Tonkolili and Koinadugu Districts.[21] Some of them headed further on to Kono and took over the diamond centre of Koidu by the end of February. The AFRC and RUF units continued their violent campaign and started to regroup and expand, forcefully recruiting in the villages (Peters 2006:54).

In Freetown, the fall of the junta was followed by a wave of mob justice. Groups of self-appointed popular 'judges' were searching for and dealing punishments to combatants, supporters and sympathisers of the AFRC. Also the ECOMOG and CDF executed any suspected rebels on the spot. Often, the internally displaced who had nobody around to confirm their identity and spare them the unjust punishment were killed innocently (Stovel 2006:116).

In October 1998, the ex-AFRC started a march back towards Freetown. On their way, they forced thousands of civilians to walk along. As the renegade soldiers headed southwards, they were again joined by the RUF. The planning of the operation was however in the hands of the soldiers. The destruction of the

[21] The retreating AFRC/RUF combatants split up into three groups when they reached the town of Masiaka. The first group moved on to Mile 91 and then northwards to Magburaka, the second continued through Lunsar to Makeni - some of them later met up again and moved towards Kono. The third group set out for Port Loko and then Kambia (Alie 2006: 183). For the geographic information, see Annex 1.

capital was meant to be a revenge for the execution of 24 ex-AFRC officers and the exclusion of many more from joining the restored SLA (Keen 2005:220).

Freetown was attacked on January 6, 1999. The ECOMOG was caught unaware, faced with a mass of civilians used as human shield with fighters dispersed in the crowd. A reverend in Freetown who during the war took care of orphaned or lost children, told me:

I was there on January 6, I entered the city with the rebels at night. […]. We were more than half a million people from Wellington to the city, if you turn and look back you don't see anything, [but] human beings. If you look in front of you, human beings. I was with them, we all came. (E5)

The 'battle over Freetown' was fought practically over every street corner for over two weeks. Yet again, civilians suffered the brunt of violence, not only in the hands of the AFRC/RUF but also by the ECOMOG peacekeepers. The eastern parts of Freetown suffered most damage; as the invaders were pushed out of the city, they destroyed and burnt virtually everything in their wake and kidnapped thousands of civilians as porters or new recruits.

5.4 The Lomé agreement and the road to peace

Domestic and international pressure for a negotiated end to the war increased after the invasion of Freetown. As in 1998, the rebels and renegade soldiers were pushed out of town but not crushed militarily. Nigeria, by far the largest contributor of personnel and finances to the ECOMOG operation, announced its plans to gradually withdraw from Sierra Leone.

A new round of peace negotiations that started in the Togolese capital of Lomé in May 1999 was concluded less than two months later with a new peace agreement. The Lomé Peace Agreement was essentially "a power-sharing deal that involved buying off the RUF leaders with amnesty and prime jobs" (Stovel 2006:121). It granted a blanket amnesty to all combatants and provided for a transitional government of national unity and deployment of a United Nations peacekeeping force (Lomé Peace Agreement 1999). Abraham (2004) notes that the difference between the Abidjan and Lomé peace accords is that the latter was "all carrots, no sticks" for the RUF (p. 213). The RUF was 'reinvented' as a political movement - the Revolutionary United Front Party - and Sankoh became

a vice-president and Chairman of the Board of the Commission for the Management of Strategic Resources, National Reconciliation and Development. Koroma was in the end appointed (somewhat paradoxically) the chairman of the Commission for the Consolidation of Peace, set up to supervise the implementation of the accord. However, as Koroma was later to fall out with the RUF it was not easy to fulfil this task (Alie 2006:201). In an aim to reconcile the nation President Kabbah called on the people to 'forgive and forget'.

At the time of signing the Lomé Peace Agreement, the RUF held most of the Northern and large parts of the Eastern Province including the diamond fields in Kono and Tongo. Following the signing of the peace agreement, in October 1999 the UN Security Council established a 6,000-member UN Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) under chapter VII of the UN Charter, to replace ECOMOG. By December, UNAMSIL troops from Bangladesh, India, Jordan, Kenya and Zambia had begun to arrive, and in February 2000 the Security Council agreed to increase their number to 11,000 (Alie 2006:200) UNAMSIL launched the Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) programme in October 1999 but by May 2000 only about 19,000 combatants turned up in the registration camps, many of them without weapons. Some of the demobilised combatants were subsequently rearmed by the government to fight the RUF (ibid.: 201). In early May 2000, the RUF took more than 500 UNAMSIL troops hostage in several locations and confiscated their weapons and vehicles. In a reaction to the kidnappings and RUF's continued breaching of the peace agreement, a peaceful march was organized in Freetown by several civil society groups from the city centre to Sankoh's villa. The demonstration was hijacked by Koroma's ex-AFRC fighters and resulted in a violent clash and a number of civilian deaths on both sides. Sankoh himself escaped but was captured in Freetown few days later (BBC May 18, 2000).

The RUF attempted to attack Freetown in the wake of the May events and Sankoh's arrest but was repelled by a motley coalition of pro-governmental forces – the new national army, CDF, ECOMOG and the West Side Boys, a group formed of some ex-AFRC fighters. In yet another violent incident a few months later, a splinter group of the West Side Boys kidnapped eleven British soldiers. A dramatic rescue "Operation Barras" by the British elite SAS force destroyed the kidnappers and sent a potent signal to all the RUF and other potential dissenters that no more ceasefire violations would be tolerated (Peters 2006:55).

The continuous breaches of the peace accord also led president Kabbah to reconsider its amnesty provisions and in August 2000, he requested the UN to establish a joint UN-Sierra Leone Special Court to prosecute those who bear the greatest responsibility for war crimes and crimes against humanity.

The final ceasefire was negotiated in November 2000 in Abuja in Nigeria. The DDR programme got back on track in May 2001 and by the end of the year, it extended even to the RUF strongholds in Kono, Kailahun and Kenema Districts in the Eastern Province (Peters 2006). Fighting declined but attacks on civilians continued. On 18 January, 2002 President Kabbah declared the war was officially over. The war had led to the death of upwards of 50,000 people (mainly civilians), the maiming and mutilation of thousands, and the displacement of more than a third of the population of 5 million (Gberie 2003:637). The process of reintegrating ex-combatants into civilian life continued until December 2003. In total, 72.490 ex-combatants were disarmed, among them almost 7000 children (NCDDR 2004 cited in Shaw 2010).

6. The National Transitional Justice Institutions

6.1 The SCSL and TRC

Recent years have seen a worldwide proliferation of transitional justice institutions established to assist post-war and post-authoritarian countries to deal with their violent past. Sierra Leone was no exception in this respect; both criminal prosecution and truth-telling were sought in the country, by the Special Court for Sierra Leone (SCSL) and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) respectively.

The establishment of the TRC was laid down in the Lomé Peace Agreement. This was a result of several months of tireless efforts by a number of Sierra Leonean civil society groups and human rights advocates (cf. Dougherty 2004). The peace agreement granted a blanket amnesty to all the combatants and the TRC was initially envisaged to be the only accountability mechanism. As stipulated by the Lomé Peace Agreement, the task of the TRC was to "address impunity, break the cycle of violence, provide a forum for both the victims and perpetrators of human rights violations to tell their story, and get a clear picture of the past in order to facilitate genuine healing and reconciliation" (Art.XXVI). It was supposed to look into the human rights violations committed since the beginning of the war in 1991, and explicitly tasked with recommending "measures to be taken for the rehabilitation of victims of human rights violations" and submitting a report to the government that pleaded "immediate implementation of its recommendations" (Art.XXVI). The Government of Sierra Leone passed the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Act in February 2000; the TRC was inaugurated in July 2002 and its initial operational phase began in early October 2002. Between December 2002 and mid-April 2003 it collected a total of 7706 statements from victims, perpetrators and witnesses across the country and from refugees in Gambia, Guinea and Nigeria (Conibere et.al 2004). On April 14, 2003 public hearings opened. In the following three months until July 11, the TRC held five-day long sessions in Freetown and in each of the country's district headquarter towns.

Following violations of the Lomé agreement, president Kabbah's government approached the UN Secretary General on 12 June 2000 with a request to initiate an establishment of an international criminal court. The UN already previously expressed its preference for criminal justice. According to Human Rights Watch,

the UN Secretary General's Special Representative Francis Okello attached a hand-written disclaimer to the Lomé peace agreement declaring UN's unwillingness to recognize "the accord's amnesty provision as applying to crimes of genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes, and other serious violations of human rights and humanitarian law" although the UN did not further act upon this disclaimer either through a protocol or a Security Council resolution (HRW 2000). Following Kabbah's appeal, the UNSC Resolution 1315 passed on August 14, 2000 requested the establishment of a criminal court and on 16 January 2002, an agreement was signed between the UN and the Government of Sierra Leone establishing the Special Court for Sierra Leone (SCSL). The court became operational seven month later in August 2002. The SCSL was conceived as a first-ever hybrid international criminal court, mandated to prosecute crimes both under international and domestic law, and involving international and Sierra Leonean personnel. Sitting in Freetown, it was hoped the SCSL would overcome one of the greatest criticisms against international criminal justice being too distant from the countries where the prosecuted crimes were committed. The Statute of the SCSL gives the court "the power 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" (2002:Art.1). In 2003, a total of thirteen people were indicted by the SCSL's Prosecutor David Crane. The first trial began in June 2004, against three members of the CDF: Chief Hinga Norman, Moinina Fofana and Allieu Kondewa. Hinga Norman died in custody before judgment was issued; the Appeals Chamber Judgement in May 2008 handed down sentences of 15 and 20 years for Fofana and Kondewa respectively. The RUF trial against Issa Hassan Sesay, Morris Kallon and Augustine Gbao began in July 2004; Sesay was sentenced to 52 years, Kallon to 40 years and Gbao to 25 years in April 2009. The former members of the AFRC Alex Tamba Brima, Ibrahim Bazzy Kamara and Santigie Borbor Kanu stood trial between March 2005 and February 2008. After the Appeals Chamber judgement dismissed their appeal Brima was sentenced to 50 years in jail and Kanu and Kamara to 45. Three key players in the conflict were indicted – the RUF leader Foday Sankoh died in custody in July 2003 and his deputy and RUF Battlefield Commander Sam Bockarie was killed in Liberia in May 2003. The former head

of AFRC Johnny Paul Koroma is considered by the SCSL to be at large.[22] The trial of the former President of Liberia Charles Ghankay Taylor was the only outstanding case of the SCSL when I conducted my fieldwork in early 2010. Rather than inquiring about the general attitudes of people towards the SCSL, I therefore decided to ask about their perceptions and knowledge of this specific case. Some general remarks on the work of the court came up in the conversations with my informants but the bulk of information in 6.2 below concerns specifically the Charles Taylor trial. A brief overview of the process is therefore justified here.

Charles Taylor was indicted by the Special Court for Sierra Leone on June 4, 2003 and charged with 11 counts war crimes, crimes against humanity and other serious violations of international humanitarian law. He has denied all the charges and pleaded innocent. The key task for the prosecution is not to prove that crimes were committed in Sierra Leone – which Taylor does not deny – but to prove that Taylor had direct connection to the Sierra Leonean rebels – that he gave them orders, supported them and knew about the crimes they were committing and did not act upon that. It took almost three years to negotiate his hand over to the Court from Nigeria where he was offered asylum as part of the Liberian peace deal. He was eventually arrested and transferred first to the Special Court in Freetown in 2006 and later that year to The Hague.

The trial has been taking place in The Hague on the premises of the International Criminal Court[23] where it was moved out of fears that a process in Freetown would create instability in the region, particularly in Sierra Leone and Liberia. This however means that it is taking place far away from the citizens of Sierra Leone – which contradicts the idea of "hybridity" of the SCSL. It further negatively influences the impact (in spite of the efforts of the Outreach programme) that the Court has on the ordinary Sierra Leoneans who lost the ability to closely follow the trial.

The trial had a somewhat rocky start when Charles Taylor, arguing that his right to a just process was not fulfilled, fired his defence counsel and decided to boycott the trial until his defence was given time and resources comparable to those given to the prosecution. But since then it has been a rather unspectacular

[22] Allegations were heard during the Taylor trial claiming Koroma was murdered in Liberia on Taylor's orders but this was disputed by the defence on the grounds that it was unfounded (The New Democrat, 25 October, 2010).
[23] It was later moved to the premises of the Special Tribunal for Lebanon.

process. The process started on January 7, 2008 and was initially hoped to take twelve to eighteen months. Eventually, the guilty verdict was read out on April 26, 2012 followed on May 30 by a conviction to 50 years.[24] To date, the Charles Taylor trial has cost over USD 50 million paid by donor contributions mostly from the US, together with the UK, Canada, the Netherlands and Nigeria.

Sierra Leone was the first country where an international criminal court and a truth commission operated concurrently. It was in fact an experiment, viewed by commentators as "a laboratory in which to examine how the two bodies, special 'institutionalized' courts and truth commissions, relate to each other" (Schabas 2003:1065). As Shaw points out, the language of experimentation raised serious ethical questions: "Beyond this disturbing image of Sierra Leoneans as experimental subjects and those who run the Special Court and TRC as white-coated scientists lay the even more troubling implication – sometimes made explicit by expatriated in Freetown – that Sierra Leone was less important in itself than as a model for other countries" (Shaw 2010:119 referring to her conversation with Danny Hoffman).

It has brought several problems – not only in terms of the actual operations and outcomes of these institutions but also in the way Sierra Leoneans perceived these institutions and how they reacted to their respective missions.

As mentioned above, the TRC initially had a broad support among the civil society groups who urged its creation and were involved in the preparatory phase leading up to its setting up (Dougherty 2004). Many of them however lost trust in the TRC even before the crucial statement taking had started. There were accusations that the selection of the national commissioners was politically driven as they all had close ties to the ruling SLPP, the staff recruitment was also plagued with serious problems (cf. Stovel 2007:195-196). The parallel operation of the SCSL, which – given the clear preference among the donors for criminal justice - attracted more attention and funding, left the TRC severely underfunded and led to some of its activities having to be cut down (Dougherty 2004).

Further clashes arose in the area of the practical operations. The question of information-sharing has been particularly contentious. This issue was also subject of wild public imagination. According to a local NGO leader in

[24] At the time of writing Taylor's defence team has filed for appeal to the setence.

Freetown, there was a rumour going around about an underground tunnel connecting the two neighbouring buildings of the TRC and SCSL through which people and information were shared (E10, cf. Kelsall 2005:381). It was also reported that the fear of the SCSL using self-incriminating testimonies given by the perpetrators to the TRC meant many of them stayed away from the Commission's hearings (Kelsall 2009, Coulter 2009, Shaw 2010). For many Sierra Leoneans it was hard to distinguish between the tasks and mandates of the TRC, SCSL and other national initiatives such as the DDR programme which resulted in hesitant cooperation with all of them (Coulter 2009, Shaw 2010, Stovel 2006, Kelsall 2009).

The confusion among the population as to the respective roles of the SCSL and TRC cannot be entirely attributed to problems in communication and the fact that "the existence of the SCSL complicated matters because people now had to understand two separate transitional justice institutions and the relationship between them" (Dougherty 2004:46). As Danny Hoffman writes: "the efforts of the accountability institutions to establish a singular narrative of the events of the war in Sierra Leone privilege an ideal of the therapeutic properties of public discourse not shared by many Sierra Leoneans" (Hoffman 2004:338). Kelsall (2009) has persuasively argued that the Special Court failed to accommodate the local culture in which it operated, while Shaw (2010) noted that "despite the TRC's victim-oriented mandate [it] often appeared remote from survivors' concerns" (p.112). She further contends that both mechanisms failed to address the social and economic injustices from before the war (ibid.:131, cf. Shaw 2005, 2007).

Sawyer and Kelsall (2007) conducted an opinion survey into transitional justice in three districts of Sierra Leone in 2005. They found support for the TRC and SCSL in the country, inferring that there is a genuine desire for some form of accountability process. Importantly though, these attitudes were based, to a large extent, on ignorance of what the two institutions actually did and at times on confusion between the two. The authors therefore concluded that, if such institutions are to be successful in their goals, a sound understanding of their work rather than broad uninformed support is vital. In the next part the knowledge of and attitudes towards the SCSL and the Taylor trial will be examined in order to establish how meaningful it has been to the process of reconciliation and dealing with the violent past in the local communities.

6.2 The reflection of international justice on the local level: the Charles Taylor trial

Sierra Leone hosted two large international transitional justice institutions – the TRC and the SCSL, as described above. No study of community reconciliation could thus be complete without a look at the dynamics of the encounter between these institutions and the local reconciliation efforts. At the time of my research in 2008 and 2010, the TRC has already finished its work and the SCSL was wrapping up its operations in Sierra Leone, with its only pending case of the former Liberian president Charles Taylor taking place in The Hague. My interviews therefore focused primarily on the Taylor case and the SCSL because it was still regularly reported on the radio.

Most people in the villages that I visited knew about the existence of the Special Court and the ongoing trial of Charles Taylor. Their information usually came from regular listening to radio broadcasts. Some of them mentioned a visit by SCSL representatives in the village, referring probably to the officers of the SCSL Outreach Programme. The generally high level of awareness was contrary to suggestions given to me by a number of NGO workers and academics in Freetown who were sceptical about the knowledge people upcountry would have about the court (E10, E11). To the extent that just being aware about the existence of the SCSL and the Taylor trial in itself seen as beneficial, this high awareness confirms success of the praised Outreach Programme.

Further conversations, however, mostly revealed that the knowledge people have is either very shallow or confused and rarely goes beyond knowing about the SCSL's existence (cf. Kerr and Lincoln 2008, Kelsall and Sawyer 2007, BBC World Service Trust 2008). This lack of detailed knowledge in turn reflected on how the villagers perceived the relevance of the court for them, their community and for Sierra Leone. This was a typical reaction to my enquiry about people's awareness of the Taylor trial:

We only heard about Charles Taylor but we don't know him. Yes, we learnt about his arrest. But we do not know where he is tried. We only know a little thing about him... Since we know very little about it, it is not really important to us. (INT27)

This situation can partly be explained by issues of practical nature, such as communication problems, but cultural factors also play a critical role. Given the

high illiteracy rate, making the population aware of the work and purpose of the SCSL, or of the transitional justice institutions in general, was a challenging task. Two media have been widely used – picture brochures or posters and radio, which is the most common and effective communication tool in the country. For most people, radio was the only source of information they had about the trial. The broadcasting – mainly by the UNAMSIL radio and the BBC was in either English or in Krio. Statements such as the following were common particularly among women in the rural areas who do not understand either of these languages and whose ability to learn about or understand what is going at the SCSL is therefore seriously constrained:

We are not much aware of it, because we don't speak English or Krio. Though we hear from others that his trial is on the radio, we have to rely on what others tell us. […] On the radio we only hear Charles Taylor, Charles Taylor. But whatever they are saying about him, or about the court, or what he did, we don't know. […] All that they told us about Taylor is that he is a wicked man and we've heard that he is in jail but we don't know where. […] When we hear it, sometimes we get confused, as if it is a thunderbolt that has just cracked. As a result of what we have gone through, we get confused or scared when we hear his name on the radio. But we don't understand what they say. (INT16)

In other places, lack of radios compounded the problem.

It does not seem that physical outreach to the communities by the SCSL officers did a lot to change situation. Instead, it brought problems of its own. In four of the villages people confirmed that they had visitors from the SCSL who showed them a film about the SCSL and 'sensitised' them either on the general purpose of the institution or on the Taylor trial (INT3, INT17, INT28, INT50). But I did not find significant difference in the knowledge between those villagers where they had a visit from the SCSL and those where they did not.

In two of the villages, informational posters still reminded of these Outreach programme visits (see Annex 6). I saw the first posters in a village in Port Loko District. The first with the title "Greatest Responsibility" showed a map of Sierra Leone with five of the indicted men behind bars. In front of the map, there was a crowd of Sierra Leoneans, each with one raised arm and one finger pointing towards the incarcerated perpetrators. The other illustrated a vision of "Sierra Leone after the Court", when "together the Special Court and the people

of Sierra Leone will move towards peace and justice". This was symbolized by a group of civilians, young and old, standing in a rice field, looking over the ocean at the sun rising on the horizon.

These are some of the comments people made about these posters when I referred to them:

We do not understand the pictures on the chief's veranda. We just take them to be ordinary pictures, like a calendar. We don't know that they are depicting the Special Court. We are not aware of the Charles Taylor trial since we live in rural places we hardly receive news. (FG11)

We are not able to recognize any of these people, because we do not know their faces. When these pictures were brought, we were not educated properly as to why some are behind something like a fence on a map while others are outside. They told us that they are giving this to us to see what happened during the war or something like that and then they gave us the papers and then went back. […] We heard about the Special Court, but we do not know the people that were tried. […] Charles Taylor was once a president of Liberia. But I do not know his whereabouts now. (INT28)

My second encounter with the Special Court posters was in a village in Koinadugu District. Here, the black and white drawing graphically depicted some the worst atrocities committed during the war – a woman being raped at gunpoint by a group of combatants; two obviously amused rebels holding a toddler by hands and legs while a third one is swinging up a machete to slit the child in half; villagers having their arms cut off as limbs of others are already scattered on the ground; others being burnt alive in a car. Myself feeling uncomfortable looking at the depicted scenes, I asked about this poster in my interviews:

Me: Why do you have the poster on the chief's house?

Elder: The poster was put up there by the Special Court representative. He came by and plastered it on the wall. He also played a video, but we do not understand what takes place in the Special Court.

Me: Do people look at that picture? How do you feel about seeing it?

Elder: We feel sad because of what happened. When we see the poster we recall those incidents.

Me: Why don't you take it off of the wall?

Elder: Because outsiders hung it there and we might get in trouble for removing it. We never said that we wanted it, but it was brought by outsiders so we cannot judge it. We don't want to watch it but it was put there by others with permission of the elders, we actually don't want to remind ourselves of this but it's not our fault. We don't want to talk about those events again. It is not our wish to have it, but we don't want problems. (INT17)

Others expressed similar sentiments. People clearly found it very distressing to look at those pictures. Instead, they stated a preference for moving on, not talking about the past anymore and not being reminded of the war experience (see chapter 7).

The purpose of trying Charles Taylor

Most people thought it was good that Charles Taylor was facing trial. But they often had different reasons for their support. Some people blamed the war and their suffering on Taylor, for others the main reason were security concerns and fear. There also were a number of people who felt no trial was necessary.

Several people gave general and vague but the more resolute statements about Charles Taylor and his connection to the war in Sierra Leone, naming him as the main or even the only cause of the conflict. These statements are illustrative:

It is horrible to even kill one person. But Charles Taylor came with this war that made people do even worse things to other people. (INT15)

All the problems we are facing are because of Taylor because he was the architect of the war. (INT10)

It is because of this man that we know all the 'secrets of war'. (FG22)

During 1990, he promised the late President Momoh that if he hosts ECOMOG in Sierra Leone to intervene in Liberia, the country is going to taste the bitterness of war. And after he said that the war overtook this place. (INT26)

It is difficult, if not impossible, to trace the origins of this perception of Taylor as the main 'architect of the war'. His own announcement in a BBC World radio interview in 1990 that Sierra Leone would "taste the bitterness of war" (referred to in the last quote above), may have contributed to this, although only three of

the informants actually referred to it explicitly. More often such statements about Taylor's involvement came in the form of "they say", "we hear", "according to what we are getting" which may suggest that radio or the SCSL Outreach visits may at least partly be sources of this image.[25]

Security concerns were strongly articulated by most people as the major reason for their support for incarceration of Charles Taylor. This is arguably closely related to the previously discussed perception of the war as brought about by Taylor's vicious planning in the first place, although not everyone who gave security as their main concern blamed the war entirely on the Liberian president. These statements were typical:

If he was not indicted we would be in the bushes hiding. So we are afraid of him. (FG17)

The atrocities that will occur now will be more dangerous than those that just occurred if they free him. (INT4)

The fear argumentation thus appears both with reference to the past conflict as well as – and much more often – in relation to the future of the country and the life of the people and the communities.

Conspicuously missing from the above statements supportive of the court are any references to the need for 'justice to be done' that underlies the transitional justice institutions in the rhetoric of its proponents. This was even more evident in the answers and reactions to the question of what would happen if Taylor is found innocent by the court and walks out free:

They should not release him now. That is very important to us. I am giving you an example: if you catch a lion or a tiger, they are wild animals, and you lock them up for some time and keep them in a cage. It will become angry when it is not free to move in the bush like that. After some time you release it, it will be wilder than before. Very wild by next time. […] You must keep him there. (INT20)

[25] The structural causes of the war in Sierra Leone as discussed in chapter 4 are largely supported by the TRC report, and recently the risk of casting too much blame for causing the war on Taylor was pointed out by his legal defence team. After his conviction on April 26 2012, his lawyers said that "their client should not be made to shoulder the blame alone for what happened in Sierra Leone's war" and that the court should not support "attempts by the prosecution to provide the Sierra Leoneans with this external bogey man upon whom can be heaped the collective guilt of a nation for its predominantly self-inflicted wounds" (http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-18082584: accessed 10.06.2012).

There were however also a few people who did not see any benefit in trying Charles Taylor and refused the SCSL on the grounds that there is peace now and that reconciliation has happened. In their answers resonated the widespread appeal to 'forgive and forget' (as will be discussed in Chapter 7):

For us, since the war is over, and there is peace, there is no need for the trial of Charles Taylor. (INT24)

Because we said – let us forgive each other. So he also should be forgiven. (INT37)

In this view, the trial cannot do anything for Sierra Leoneans and their efforts to come to terms with what happened during the war once they agreed to move on. Furthermore, as Stovel (2006) points out, there is an apparent contradiction between the 'forgive and forget' that the Government and reintegration agencies had been preaching in the direct aftermath of the war and the SCSL that sought to keep some of the perpetrators accountable. This was echoed by a number of my informants that believed that Taylor should not be tried in the light of Kabbah's plea to 'forgive and forget'. A Kamajor in Bo (INT1) told me:

The decision [to try those people] was not taken properly, what they should have done is to tell the people to forgive, tell them that all has passed and [they] should have not arrested anybody. But at the moment that they had arrested somebody it meant that they did not help them. The ex-combatants in general, they did not help them at all by arresting their leaders and putting them into jail. Forgiveness did not occur in that particular sense.

The prosecution of some of those that 'bear the greatest responsibility', did not always help those that returned to their communities integrate any easier. This is also confirmed by Shaw's (2010) research, who finds that the argument that justice mechanisms promote integration is not based on the realities on the ground (p.114).

Discussion and Analysis

The most important reason why people in Sierra Leone want Charles Taylor to be imprisoned are fear and security concerns. This is significant in itself. It points at the continuing feeling of insecurity in the countryside, not as much an immediate one but rather a continuing lack of trust in the state's ability to

provide its population protection and security. The Sierra Leonean war was preceded by decades of declining state presence especially in the countryside, which led to its virtual disappearance during the war. Although the country has been stable since the war ended in 2002, people's confidence in the state institutions is still limited. With this in mind, having Charles Taylor - whose critical role in fomenting the war in Sierra Leone is widely known (although not always truly understood) - taken away from the region indeed makes many people feel safer. As a young woman in Port Loko told me, removing Charles Taylor "*helps to maintain the peace in Sierra Leone"* (INT22).

On the other hand, the idea of tribunals helping to restore the dignity for the victims by providing them with the desired retribution does not resonate widely in the responses. Indeed, there was virtually no mention of a need for retribution in the interviews. There are other needs that the informants see as a priority in their dealing with the war experience. One of the reasons why international justice often fails to satisfy victims is that it is happening in a world that is extremely different and distanced from theirs (not just geographically but also through the moral universe that it occupies). The standards and privileges that are given to the accused perpetrators are much better than their own and outside their reach, and are thus often viewed as "*adding to the crime*" (E19). While most people in the villages are not aware of the total amount of money spent on the SCSL or on Charles Taylor, those that do have an idea tend to see it as a waste of money.

They often argue the money should have been spent on the war victims in Sierra Leone instead: "*We, who are the true sufferers during this war, the money that they are using on Charles Taylor case, if they had taken the money to give to people who are victims to this war, it is better"* (INT48), or bemoan the comfort and attention Charles Taylor is receiving in The Hague:

He has a TV and has a comfortable life, he has everything. He is living a happy life. Nice place to sleep, food, everything. [...] For a notorious person to be enjoying such luxurious life, and us who suffered not even being able to afford a meal for the day... the question of whether we are happy about it or not is even beyond imagination. We are not happy. Our voices won't reach there. What he is enjoying we will not enjoy until the end of our lives. A goat here is different than a white man's goat. (Meaning: The conditions here and in The Hague cannot even be compared. Taylor is better off, is treated better.) (INT17)

Kerr and Lincoln (2008) also note that "regardless of whether these people's freedom had been withdrawn and they were being prosecuted for bearing the greatest responsibility for the worst crimes against humanity, all that people saw is that these people were getting what they didn't have; namely food, shelter and security" (p.23). A civil society leader in Freetown concluded that the Charles Taylor process was not meeting any of the needs of the victims or the population at large. He doubted any contribution of the SCSL to ordinary Sierra Leoneans on these grounds, arguing that *"the reconciliation really has to touch the life of the victims*" (E10).

Many of the statements suggest that people perceive of the SCSL as a foreign institution, belonging to some distant outsiders in Freetown and to the international community, referred to often as 'them' and not 'us'. This is true of the way people spoke about receiving information about the court or the way they spoke about Taylor's involvement and judgement - and sometimes in explicit statements on the issue of the ownership of the whole process:

We have reconciled, we forgot about it. So whatever you are doing there with Charles Taylor, it is just to satisfy your own needs - whether you want to demonstrate human rights, whether you want to demonstrate democracy, transfer of anger [...]. How is that going to benefit Sierra Leoneans? [...] People here still need reconstruction, so why can't you bring the money and help the people's lives? Go to most of these villages and you see the walls of the burnt houses, people are not able to rebuild it again... [...] You are not going to satisfy me or many Sierra Leoneans, you only want to satisfy yourself that you are transparent in democracy, you are transparent in justice, for me Charles Taylor trial is useless, you can do whatever you feel like doing with him, for me I am coping - we have peace, the country is gradually developing, nobody is thinking of bringing fighting back again, so we are ok. (E19)

In the eyes of many, the SCSL and the Taylor trial are there because the international community (or the 'white people') wanted it to be there and it is then up to them what will or will not happen. Sierra Leoneans either have no interest, no say in it or no benefit from it.

Overall, the findings suggest that the SCSL and the Taylor trial have a very limited relevance for the local communities and their coming to terms with the war. It bypasses the local understanding of reconciliation and its proceedings as

well as its underlying philosophy are removed from the local reality. While people have shown approval with Charles Taylor standing trial, their concern was security and not justice. This confirms what other authors have suggested that "for many 'survivors', tribunal justice fails to palliate their sense of injustice" (Stover and Weinstein 2004:333 quoted in Kelsall 2009:7). The claim by the SCSL prosecutor Brenda Hollis on the day that the guilty verdict against Charles Taylor was pronounced that "this judgment brings some measure of justice to the many thousands of victims who paid a terrible price for Mr. Taylor's crimes" (BBC, April 26, 2012), does not thus resonate with my findings in the local communities. In chapters 7 and 8 below I will turn to the local understandings of reconciliation and the processes that better fulfil the needs related to them.

PART III. RESEARCH FINDINGS

As evident from the brief discussion of the war above in chapter 5, the violence that engulfed Sierra Leone for over a decade left deep marks on the local communities. People lost family members and friends, many were kidnapped, many maimed or raped. Refugees and internally displaced people spent extended periods of time away from their homes. As people started returning to their homes they often found their villages destroyed. Their houses had been burnt down, their farms infested with weed and taken over by the bush, and their ancestral shrines and sacred bushes ruined and desecrated. The task of rebuilding the communities, both the physical structures as well as human relationships, was overwhelming.

But Sierra Leonean communities also have – like other communities worldwide – established strategies of coping, of healing and of coming together in the aftermath of violence and conflict. These are found in "the performance of everyday life" and/or in "ritual and religious practice" (Shaw and Waldorf 2010:20). The following two chapters are looking at these two realms in turn. The meaning of reconciliation as it is described locally is first outlined, followed by a presentation and analysis of the local narratives about whether and how such reconciliation has been achieved. It also looks at the practice of reintegration and the post-war relationship between the chiefs and youth. Chapter 8 looks specifically at the role of ceremonies and other traditional practice. The narrative is built around excerpts from the interviews that are interpreted and complemented with participant observation and with findings from other research.

7. Community reconciliation in Sierra Leone

7.1 Meaning(s) of reconciliation

The English word of *reconciliation* has made its way into Sierra Leonean common parlance most probably through the work of the country's Truth and Reconciliation Commission and activities implemented by local and international NGOs. Consequently, it is usually used to describe the national level efforts; the terms used to describe the process at the community level are different.

On the individual level, reconciliation is expressed through the notion of having '*kol at*' (cool heart). Although having '*kol at*' is a personal condition, its meaning is strongly relational. It means that one's heart does not contain feelings of anger, resentment or grudge against others and refers to the person's capacity to have proper social relationships with others (cf. Shaw 2005; Boersch-Supan 2009). Indeed, Shaw points out in her analysis of the local concepts of personhood that parts of the body are often used "as tropes for the capacity to relate to others" (Shaw 2000:40).[26] A young man in a village in Kailahun District likened '*kol at*' to 'peace of mind' which was a necessary condition for one to be part of a working community:

If you have peace of mind as an individual, you will come together with the others, eat together, hug each other and that will bring reconciliation. (FG19)

Collective reconciliation at the level of a community, be it a family, village or a larger group, is best expressed by the phrase '*le we mak wan word*' (let's make one word).

A single tree cannot be a forest. So one person cannot promote or develop the community until others go with him, you go together, put things together, then you try to work for the better to develop this community. It is unity. And that is wan word. (INT35)

Unity and the ability to work together resonated very strongly in people's descriptions of what reconciliation was about. The progress of reconciliation – or the lack of it – was often illustrated by reference to practical examples of accomplished or ongoing work in the village:

There are certain illnesses and we have no medical centre here – if we have an outbreak of cholera, if you are ill, people will take a hammock and carry you to the next village with the medical centre. Every time. And it shows [that] we are united. (FG22)

Other examples were often given, such as assisting each other with rebuilding houses or brushing farms together. The idea of cooperation was also closely observed in the organisation of reconciliation ceremonies. Under the economic duress, the only way that communities could gather the minimal sacrifice

[26] Shaw (2000) talks specifically about the Temne; her findings are arguably also valid for other groups in Sierra Leone. 'Kol at' is the expression in Krio, the Sierra Leonean lingua franca, the expression in Temne is "ka-buth ke-thofel" (Shaw 2005:1), in Mende it is "ndi lei" (Boersch-Supan 2009:13).

necessary to perform a ceremony was to require contributions from its members. Organising a ceremony with contributions from everyone in the community could be considered as an important result of cooperation, encouraging the participants to cooperate for further development.

These expressions of reconciliation go beyond a mere statement of peaceful coexistence as they emphasise cooperation. This must be seen in the context of the vital importance that social networks play in the local context.

7.2 Achieving 'kol at' and restoration of community cohesion

People in the communities that I visited almost unanimously confirmed that such 'unity' or reconciliation had been achieved in their place. What accounts for this apparent success and what is the nature of this unity?

Interestingly, people did not readily relate achieving reconciliation to the issues most often associated with the concept in the transitional justice debates as discussed in chapter 2. They did not mention the need to know the truth about the past, nor to see the perpetrators punished. Instead, two themes were often mentioned as important and interlinked ingredients of achieving reconciliation: forgetting and material redress. Let me now look at both of them in turn.

When asked about achieving individual and community reconciliation, or about dealing with the violent past more broadly, many people spoke about 'forgetting'. As an ex-combatant in Kailahun said:

Everybody said let's get forget about all these things. We are all one, let us reconcile. That was why we performed that ceremony. (INT39)

The processes in place are however more complex than first meets the eye. For one, it would be wrong to see the appeal to forget, or rather 'forgive and forget', in opposition to seeking acknowledgement of the past wrongs (either through truth-telling or criminal accountability), as it is often presented in the peace versus justice controversy within transitional justice.

'Remembering' war or the inability to 'forget' was expressed as an individual rather than a community matter. More importantly, 'remembering' was related to present material hardship resulting from the war. Not one of the people that I spoke to put down their inability to achieve '*kol at*' to the need of knowing what exactly happened, who caused their suffering nor to seeing the perpetrators

receive judicial punishment for what they did. A man in a village in Kailahun District (FG29) summarized these sentiments in a proverb: *If you've come to apologise, show me where you killed my father.* In other words, asking questions about the past only produces more questions and resentment, which both make it impossible to move away from the past.

This confirms the findings of Rosalind Shaw who speaks in this context about 'social forgetting'. She sees it as a process "different [...] from individual forgetting, in that people still have personal memories of the violence. But speaking of the violence - especially in public - was (and is) viewed as encouraging its return, calling it forth when it is still very close and might at any moment erupt again" (Shaw 2005:9).

The prevailing response to dealing with the past in terms of 'forgive and forget', or even its more moderate expression of "I can forgive but I cannot forget" has sometimes been put down to a specific Sierra Leonean cultural characteristic (cf. Shaw 2009). Many outside observers have been fascinated by the 'forgiving nature' of the local people. Richard Dowden (2008) admits he is "always struck by the spirit of forgiveness" and "talent for reconciliation" at the end of African wars, including the one in Sierra Leone (p. 305). I also heard reference to the culture of forgiveness from a number of Sierra Leoneans in Freetown during my first visit in 2008. My interviewees in the villages, many of whom said they have forgiven, however never spoke of the forgiveness as of a natural quality they possessed.

Before we look into the nature and meaning of forgiveness, let me start with an excerpt from an interview with an elder (FG10) who lost his father in the war. The RUF locked him up in a house with many others and set them on fire. He saw forgiveness in these terms:

Elder: We only accept to forgive because we have no other alternative. For the sake of peace. Like we, the old people, it was only with the help of god that we were not killed during the war. We will never forget, we are forgiving, but we are still reminded of how our homes were vandalized and how people here were injured.

Me: If you had a choice what would you like to happen to the perpetrators, what would you suggest?

Elder: We have no alternative but to leave our case to god.

Two important aspects of forgiveness in post-war Sierra Leone are evident from this passage: a strong sense of pragmatism and deep religiosity. A child reintegration officer similarly summarized to me his interpretation of Sierra Leonean forgiveness:

In Sierra Leone people use the expression: 'Aw fo do?' In English it is 'What to do?' It means to say 'what has happened, has happened'; 'lets leave it as it is, lets accept it as it is, lets move on, lets not dwell on it'. And because Sierra Leoneans are deeply religious, some people will maybe also say a passage from the Bible or Quran that talks about forgiveness and moving on. So that is how we deal with issues generally, from politics to social issues, to everything. (E9)

Coming together, accepting the former fighters into the community's midst was to many simply the only available option to secure peace for the future. Forgiveness meant avoiding further violence. Indeed, statements such as "We have the belief that if you punish them, they will not be happy about it and revenge" (INT32) were very common.

This view was also often presented to the communities by the country's government and by the local traditional authorities. There was a very strong appeal by Kabbah's government to the nation to accept the ex-combatants and 'forgive and forget' (Shaw 2009, Boersch-Supan 2009). Several people even today refer to the president's post-war message:

Kabbah called for peace and reconciliation in Sierra Leone... he said to accept those people that have done things in our homes, in these places, let's have peace and forget about it. (INT48)

The second element in the Sierra Leonean's forgiving attitudes is their strong religiosity. According to statistics, Sierra Leoneans are about 77 % Muslim, 21 % Christian and 1 % traditional/animist (Thomas 2007:59). Most Sierra Leoneans however practice animist beliefs along their Muslim or Christian faiths, belong to the local secret societies and take part in diverse ritual practice (cf. Shaw 2009:214). As discussed previously, religious identities were not among the sources of divisions that fuelled the civil war. On the contrary, Sierra Leone is characterised by religious tolerance and respect. The Interreligious Council of Sierra Leone played a prominent role in bringing together the warring factions at the Lomé peace talks and later continued "preaching of

God's message of repentance, forgiveness and reconciliation" (Turay 2000:53).

Sierra Leoneans often turn to religion in their responses to the experiences of the violent war and their religious beliefs undoubtedly shape their ideas of forgiveness, reconciliation and justice. In many local communities, religious leaders were very active in promoting reconciliation and religious spaces provided a safe space where former combatants could plead for acceptance into the community. In a village in Kailahun District, the local imam, who himself was held captive by the RUF and exploited for forced labour for three years, called for unity in the mosque:

We all gathered at the mosque and said all that have grievances for your brother or sister, let us all shake hands. There are no more grudges. (INT46)

But religion is not only source of charity and forgiveness. God was, for many of my informants, to be also the ultimate arbitrator of justice. People often declared their forgiveness in this life together with an expectation of justice being served by god in the hereafter. These statements are representative:

We were told that nobody should revenge. That was the first message that came to us. Everybody was made by God. And if the person knows that all that he was doing was bad, then it is left with the Almighty. But we ourselves, we were made by God, so we don't have to revenge... They [the chiefs] were just telling us – let us forget about it, let us leave everything to the Almighty to decide. (FG20)

In two villages people told me stories confirming in their eyes that such divine justice was indeed at work. They spoke of ex-combatants who returned home but died soon after as a result of the crimes they committed during the war:

I think we had two or three people here. Two of them are dead now. Only one is still alive. But he is not healthy again. (....) Because that particular individual invited the fighters to come here and to kill everybody. And he himself is now dead. God did not answer to his own thinking, his own prayers, so he died before us. (INT32)

Rosalind Shaw also finds "a strong sense of the relationship between human forgiveness and deferred, divine retributive justice for the unknown perpetrators" in her interviews in the village of Gondama (Shaw 2009:219). In a similar vein, Igreja (2007) notes in his study from Mozambique: "it is part of the socio-cultural system of belief that the spirits of dead victims or God or the

evil tongue can enact justice by punishing the perpetrators of various crimes against innocent civilians" (p. 370).

To a certain extent, placing the ultimate justice in the hands of God has to do with the history of injustice on the Sierra Leonean territory and people's known inability to seek due justice from the state institutions. It is thus not only an expression of deep religiosity but also of the prolonged failure of the Sierra Leonean state to provide people with justice, rule of law and security. Shaw also finds that many people "located forgiveness within multiple continuing forms of structural violence in the present: powerlessness, exclusion, poverty, marginality, insecurity" (2009:222). Forgiveness in this sense, she writes, "does not denote the absence of culpability but rather its expansion to implicate a much broader set of actors and institutions - the failure of the state, the failure of government, the failure of the legal system, the failure of education, the failure of development, the failure of the international community" (Shaw 2009:222). For this reason, Laura Stovel warns against reinforcing a belief in ultimate justice because "it also may lead [people] to accept lack of justice which is both their due and is needed to end impunity" (2006:71). There is another way of looking at it, however, if we accept that justice can indeed have "a supernatural dimension" (Igreja 2007:370). Leaving the punishment in the hands of God and other spiritual powers means that people can concentrate on their more immediate needs to restore a functioning community, which is paramount in an environment often characterised by scarcity of resources and high degree of mutual dependence (cf. Igreja 2007:369-370).

Statements about people's inability to 'forget' the war – and achieve '*kol at*' – tended to be followed by people's requests for material assistance in various forms – with rebuilding and reconstructing their houses, Court Barries or bridges, with supporting their children's education etc. (cf. Shaw 2007). Material compensation makes 'forgetting' and achieving '*kol at*' possible, or at least easier, by giving the survivors the opportunity to rebuild their life and move on:

All hearts are not equal […] *Those that had houses and those houses were burnt, even if that person may have peace of mind, at any time he or she reflects back to the past he will have no peace perhaps because that person is old now and cannot afford to put up another house. So that is the problem now.* (FG21)

In her ethnographic account of the TRC hearings, Rosalind Shaw finds that many of the civilians, who testified publicly in front of the Commission, did that in the hope that it would help "exchange their painful memories of the past for a sustainable future" (Shaw 2007:203, cf. Millar 2010, Stovel 2006). Jackson (2005) similarly observes that in spite of the Sierra Leonean custom of not dwelling on the past "the possibility [exists] that some will see the Western emphasis on talking through one's grievances, of publically confronting one's oppressor, and of punishing those who perpetrated human rights abuses, as a more effective way of securing benefits than silence and resignation" (Jackson: 369). 'Forgetting' the war, and thus reconciling, seems then to be intimately linked to the ability to (re-)build one's life and livelihood.

7.3 Of truth and trust: the dynamics of reintegration

Of the 18 villages that I visited, in 13 people told me there were former combatants living among them and that they have been accepted.[27] The general preference to 'forgive and forget' discussed in the previous section might invite an expectation that the ex-combatants would just settle down in the communities and be accepted unconditionally. The reality is much more complex than this.

Certainly, it seems that no open and public discussions about the particular crimes committed by the ex-combatants took place in most of the villages. 'Confessions' and apologies on the side of the ex-combatants were rare. Much ambiguity surrounded the narratives through which people explained how apology, forgiveness and acceptance worked. Apology (or accepting one's guilt) is stated by many as an important condition for forgiveness. Similarly, Stovel (2006:241) finds that many people expected the ex-combatants to apologise, but that apologies were not forthcoming (cf. Boersch-Supan 2009).

None of my informants had heard of any ex-combatant apologising in person.[28] In spite of not receiving an apology, my informants confirmed that they have forgiven now and reconciliation has occurred in their village and in Sierra Leone at large. This passage from an interview with women in a village in Moyamba is informative:

[27] It is hard to tell whether this is the real number, as will be discussed below, people had several reasons for denying the presence of ex-combatants.
[28] The exception being Fambul Tok ceremonies – see below.

Me: And can you reconcile with someone when you cannot forgive him for what he has done?

Woman: No. You forgive the person before reconciliation.

Me: How do you forgive?

Woman: Through an apology. When somebody apologizes, you can forgive. You cannot repeat evil for evil. So if the person comes and confesses and then apologizes, you will reconcile with that person.

Me: What if he does not apologize?

Women: Well, even then, you must give him the benefit of the doubt. Because the person knows what he has done. So if he says he is not going to apologize, then you give him the benefit of a doubt, then you continue. (FG23)

Giving the ex-combatants the 'benefit of the doubt' seems what many people in the villages indeed did. This was not easy and mostly was not automatic. An appeal to forgive and accept people by the national and local authorities as well as by the reintegration agencies certainly seems to have gone a long way in assuring peaceful coexistence and a start of reconciliation in many communities.

The village elders remain to play an important role in several aspects of the reconciliation process. They often served as intermediaries in the reintegration process, both as partners to the reintegration agencies and in cases of individual acceptance of the ex-combatants. A NGO worker in Bo aptly pointed out the crucial role of the chiefs in the reintegration process: "*Because whoever sits in the lap of the chief should be taken the greatest care of*" (E1). In the same vein, John Williamson indicates that "local chiefs and their counsellors were key initial points of entry into communities. NGO personnel discussed the situation of the former child soldiers with these traditional leaders, stressing that these children had been abducted and forced by adults to become part of the RUF or other groups. Eventually, chiefs allowed them to approach key people in the community... These leaders, in turn, influenced other local residents" (Williamson 2006:193).

Returning ex-combatants therefore entrusted their fate to the chief, who would accept them in the name of the entire community and mediate their return. Groups of returning fighters would first meet the chief to get his approval for their return. They would give him an account of what they committed during the

war and left it to him to inform the town. A chief in a village in Moyamba District explained:

Me: When the war was over, did those who were with the RUF say that they were with rebels in the bush and what they were doing etc.?

Chief: Some confessed. They said that they were with them. That they fought alongside with them and were in the bush.

Me: At what occasion did they tell their stories?

Chief: Not under duress. They came and they confessed.

Me: Who did they confess to?

Chief: During that time when they came, they went to the chiefs. We just don't accept people when they come like that, they first go to the chiefs and report to them. So during that time they confessed these things.

Me: So they confessed only to the chiefs, not to the community...

Chief: To the chiefs, not to the community, no.

Me: So community had to accept them without knowing what they did?

Chief: Well, we the chiefs tell the community: Your brother has come, he was like this, but don't take him like that, just accept him as a brother. (FG18)

It is also necessary to examine the concept of 'confession'. There is little to suggest, that it would entail a detailed narrative of what exactly happened or of the crimes the ex-combatant had committed. Instead, it seems that the fighters would often give the chiefs a "socially desired explanation" about why they fought and which crimes they had committed (Shaw 2010: 124-6). Young people would often rely on stories of abduction and forced drug use to explain their deeds (Coulter 2009, Shaw 2010). As will be discussed below in relation to the Fambul Tok ceremonies, it seems that these 'confessions' were performative acts demonstrating the ex-combatants willingness to accept the authority of the chiefs and demonstrations of their 'changed hearts' and humbleness (cf. Shaw 2010) rather than acts of telling the truth about the past.

The civilians would not have many other options but to accept these ex-combatants. Individual apologies or compensation were not forthcoming once the chiefs agreed to welcome them to the community. As an NGO worker in Freetown noted in the below statement, once a returning fighter had been

pardoned by the chief there was little that the actual victims could do:

You have gone to the community, they have confessed, "I burned your house, I killed that child, I did this, but please I am sorry and I did that because of drugs, forgive me". And the chief would stand up and say: "Look, my son, you have [been] forgiven today." They have a ceremony, they eat and they go away. But the chief is still speaking on behalf of the people that really suffered - the person whose hand was cut, the person whose house was burnt down. He is only speaking as authority. So this man whose house was burnt will not make any retaliation because traditionally, the chief speaks for us. If the chief speaks, who are you to contest that statement? The chief has said, we have accepted you, you are now part of us, and we have forgiven all you have done. So if I go and say: "No chief," or I do the contrary, I [...] will be contesting the powers of the chief. (E10)

At times, the chiefs reinforced the acceptance and appeal to forgive by introducing bylaws or other forms of orders and bans were that forbade people to refer to the returned fighters as ex-combatants, rebels or any other names related to their past:

One of the first things that happened when we returned was that by-laws were introduced that no one should point hands at anyone else and saying he or she belonged to this or that faction. If you say that to someone else and there are witnesses, they will take you to the chiefs... (INT38)

As will be discussed below, these acts of acceptance, sealed with the introduction of bylaws, often happened as part of ceremonies. They cannot be understood solely as enforced upon the communities as they in many respects expressed a joint desire for a closure and for moving on. Arguably, the chiefs just as their communities had few other options at their hands and their appeals to forgive expressed an ambition to promote peace and reconciliation in the village. It represented the common practice of 'directed forgetting' - "displac[ing] explicit verbal memories of this violence through a range of social and ritual practices (...) the purpose of which was to create 'cool hearts' that form the basis for life in a community" (Shaw 2007:195). It is in many ways also in line with the role of the chiefs in the conflict resolution mechanisms in the practice of customary justice. In many everyday conflicts people would go to the chiefs or elders and ask them to mediate. Probably for this it also means

that the communities were familiar with such practice and thus largely accepting of it.

Nonetheless, it seems that the acceptance and 'forgetting' was in most cases not entirely unconditional. Two closely related factors play a crucial role - the ability of the ex-combatants to contribute towards the common good and their willingness to 'fit in' seem to be the 'makers or breakers' of their reintegration. The first in fact links importantly to the local notion of reconciliation emphasising working together, coexistence and unity. Rather than just being accepted, perpetrators were being valued through contributing to the development of the community (Stovel 2006: 154-60, cf. Shaw 2010). This was confirmed by a chief in a village in Kailahun:

Me: How did the ex-combatants reintegrate?

Chief: When we came back we knew people were left behind here. We knew it was war and they did wrong, but we didn't blame them. They had food because they had been farming. When we returned, they gave us food and encouraged us, we encouraged them. We were all the same, and we didn't mind them, and we didn't need to point fingers. We needed to forget and reconcile and develop the town. […] There was a large swamp that we decided we should develop into a communal farmland for the town, no one was exempted. Returnees and ex-combatants all worked together. (INT42)

A return to 'normalcy' means also accepting one's place in the society and performing one's social role. Indeed, as Shaw argues, the ex-combatants were evaluated "on every day action, humility, hard work, and sobriety" (Shaw 2010: 131). Arguing that quotidian life in Africa is "a good deal more expressive and histrionic", Jackson writes about the Kuranko: "Kuranko do not fetishize the ego as we do, but emphasize a person's social nous. As such, authenticity is consummated in the way one realizes one's given destiny or plays one's social role. The name of the game is not self-knowledge, but knowing one's place *and making the most of it*. For this reason, theatricality implies something very different from acting out. Rather than spontaneously giving vent to one's feelings, one learns to perform the gestures and emotions appropriate to one's role" (p.137). During the war, some of the social roles were temporarily reversed. In its aftermath, accepting their reestablishment could be seen as an expression of the willingness on the part of the ex-combatants to 'reconcile'

with the community. In this light, "regret may be less important than compliance" as a chief told to Peters in Kono (Peters 2006:155). Abducted female ex-combatants in Kabala indeed needed to show through behaviour that they were willing to comply with the social norms:

I feel better now, but it came with time. At the beginning, I was feeling sad. My friends did not accept me back. But after that – five month, six month – they saw that I behaved just like them and believed that I will not do bad to them. And now we all came together. (INT10)

7.4 Chiefs, youth, human rights and reconciliation

From the above discussion, it is evident that chiefs and elders have played a vital role in the reconciliation and reintegration processes. Indeed, they retain an important place in the communities, both as the agents of the state and administrators of customary law as well as guardians of much of the ritual practice. However, the chiefs and other traditional authorities have also been widely criticised for their role in fomenting the civil war. As discussed in Chapter 4 they have been accused of corruption and abuse, particularly towards young men. As Archibald and Richards (2002) write: "The rebel RUF in its earliest forays into eastern and central Sierra Leone (in 1991) targeted and killed government agents, including chiefs and court chairmen. From the outset it was clear that some rebel cadres were settling old scores for justice gone sour" (p.344). Their role in contributing to the causes of the conflict makes the above described centrality of chiefs in reintegration and community reconciliation practices problematic. Several authors have brought attention to the aspect of remarginalization of the ex-combatants and the reestablishment of their subordination and dependence on the chiefs, conditions that brought the war in the first place (e.g. Shaw 2010, Stovel 2006, Fanthorpe 2005, Keen 2003). However, post-war research has also revealed that the chiefs for a number of reasons still enjoy popular support or at the least acceptance locally. Keen (2003) quotes a report by Department for International Development (DFID 2002) noting: "The recent consultations at chiefdom level in Blama, Mano and Rotifunk re-confirmed public acceptance of the institution of chiefs despite open criticism of the corrupt and arbitrary way in which some office holders behaved in recent years" (p.89).

While a return to the familiar social order was one of the greatest priorities,

evidenced for example in the support for the restoration of the chiefly structures and in the role chiefs played in the reintegration process, this by no means to say that everything just returned to its pre-war state. The relationship between chiefs and subjects had been influenced by several factors. Displacement had led to people being exposed to new ideas and systems making it less likely that they would accept abusive behaviour from the chiefs (Keen 2003:89). Archibald and Richards (2002) write that "between a retreating chiefly patrimonialism and the vengeful egalitarianism of the RUF [opened up] a space in which an emergent individualism began to take hold" (p.357). Ferme and Hoffman (2004) also note this increased sense of individualism (p.84). Jackson (2006) asserts that even from within the chieftaincy itself, there were calls for reform led by the newly elected chiefs (p.106). We will therefore briefly turn to issue of the dynamics of the post-war relationship between the youth and the chiefs as this is an important aspect of reconciliation in the local context. This is not limited only to the ex-combatants but to youth in general.

Particularly in the communities in the eastern and southern districts, the youth often told me that they had organised themselves and had come to an arrangement with the chiefs about under which terms they would contribute to local development and public works:

When we returned, the elders told us to clean the town, and when we were doing it, it was not because they were using force on us. We as young people were the future of the town and we had to come together to make sure that the town is growing. (…) But if the elders fail to do what is right it is going to delay any work that might be given to us in the town. So youth in town that are healthy will always work. If you are healthy and refuse to work it will be a problem on your side. That is now a bylaw. Also if elders wrong youth, we will also gather and deliver a complaint to the elders, and if we meet and they see it is true then the elders are ready to apologise. Not bow down before us, but they tell us they are sorry and will not do it again. We will accept it. (INT38)

Overall, in most places, conversations with the youth suggest improved conditions and relationships. However, problematic issues remain. The discussion about the relationship between the youth and the chiefs often shifted to the topic of human rights. Numerous NGOs have been involved in 'sensitising' local chiefs about their past mistakes and about human rights. However, chiefs and youth seem to have opposing interpretations of human

rights law, which might threaten the local community cohesion. Although abuse and forced work for the personal benefit of the chief was one of the issues that led to dissatisfaction among youth before the war, after the war youth in some cases would be hesitant to take up work that would arguably be beneficial for the community as a whole – e.g. repairing the road, digging a well etc. In some places, there was a visible rift among the chiefs and the youth in the village. In my interviews with the chief in a village in Pujehun District (INT3), he bemoaned the lack of respect given to him by youth since the end of the war:

Before the war, we were having our own traditional ways of settling disputes. But now they came and passed on us the human rights laws... In those days I would call a young man: "hey, young man, come!" but these days when I say "hey, young man, come", he will not come: "I am going about my own business, you are not the one feeding me", he will say. That is a problem.

The interviews with the youth presented a mirror image:

"It is happening that the chiefs are still not listening to the youth. In those days [before the war] people didn't know their rights, but because of the war we have come to realise our rights." (FG4)

Although there is clearly tension between the elders and the youth about the interpretation and respect of individual rights, in many communities the elders had either reflected on the past wrongs or recognised the increased bargaining power of the youth, resulting in a less authoritarian relationship. As the youth in Koinadugu District told me:

The difference between, during and after the war: before the war the leaders were very oppressive, [the youth] make money for them without receiving compensation, [and] at the same time the youth was suppressed. Now the elders need to go through negotiation, if they want the youth to work for them they need to negotiate and pay the youth money. They prepare food and then the young ones will do the work and there is not problem in the society. (FG6)

8. Ceremonies and ritual practice in reconciliation

Rural communities in Sierra Leone use a wealth of ritual and religious practice to respond to violence, regulate and remake social relationships and restore community cohesion. Ceremonies and rituals of a great variety took place in post-war Sierra Leone (e.g. Shaw 2005, Stovel 2007, Utas 2009, Stark 2006). In all the villages, people confirmed that they performed a ceremony or a coming-together event of one sort or another to mark the end of hostilities. They were performed on family as well as on community level and within the community's secret societies. They often shared common features and served common purposes although the specific forms and features vary from one chiefdom to another. Indeed: *"Even within a community there are various societies or traditions that maybe performed here, but could not be performed in another chiefdom"* (E4).

This chapter starts with an overview of the role of ritual practice in reconciliation on community level in Sierra Leone with a particular emphasis on the relationship between the community and their ancestors. It then moves on to describe how four different villages used rituals and ceremonies to bring their community together after people had returned from the war. The themes and features that are found in these descriptions will be discussed and analysed in order to tease out the most important functions these ceremonies played in the process of reconciliation.

8.1 Traditional belief systems

The ceremonial acts such as reconciliation and cleansing rituals or pouring of libations have their roots in the traditional belief systems, which share some important similarities among the different ethnic groups in the country (Manifesto 99). Fundamental to these beliefs is the belief in the supernatural. This has three main elements. The first is the belief in a supreme being (now God of major religions). Second is the belief in spirits or natural divinities that mainly reside in the bush and can be either good or bad. Third is belief in the spirits of the ancestors who continue to influence the day-to-day affairs of the living (Alie 2008:136; Manifesto 99:31). *Whatever happens we will speak to the ancestors so they will communicate with god to tell this is what has happened to us, but we want god [to hear] that since they [the ancestors] are intermediaries*

between us the living and the dead. So we speak to them. For example in the farming season we speak to them, go and tell the order to god that we have done some farming here [and] we need more yield. Like women are in the town, some are in pregnancies and we don't know what is happening with some especially those who are pregnant they will ask the dead to assist in cases of giving carefree birth to children. Or fishing in the town, when we fish, let us get more fish and more yield in the town. That is things we ask the dead to communicate with god so we have that connection. (INT45)

The ancestral spirits of the community reside in shrines or 'sacred spaces' (Kaidaneh and Rigby 2010:244). The community shrine often takes the shape of a little 'house' in the village. Under its roof the villagers put stones or other objects that represent those that have 'gone ahead'. In Port Loko District one elder described their shrine to me:

Shrines where those stones were kept in remembrance of the ancestors, mostly little structures were erected before or after the town, you never erect them in the middle of the village. Those stones, only when an elder died in the village or a society person died in the village, a stone would be collected and put there. But only when old people died not when young people died. Old people of which they thought they could serve as ancestor. So they could not be forgotten so easy. It makes us feel the presence of the ancestors. (INT25)

Also natural features in the landscape are locations where offers to the ancestors are made: *[...] people since long ago believed that their ancestors are not too far away from them, and they live in the mountains, by big rivers and the big trees and that type of thing ... in the bushes* (E17). A failure to attend to the relationship with the ancestors or properly address the defilement or destruction of the shrines might result in the withdrawal of the ancestral favours and bring about 'bad fortune' in the community. This is also common in other parts of the continent. As Honwana (1998) writes about ancestral spirits in Mozambique: ".. if they feel neglected they can punish people by provoking illness or can even cause death" (p. 17).

For the communities it is important to retain the favours of the ancestral spirits, such as good harvests and catch, health and general well-being. To this end, communities as well as individuals feed the ancestors by offering sacrifice in the form of rice, kola nuts or animals such as a chicken or a fowl, a goat or a

cow.

The pouring of libation is part of many larger ceremonies but can also take place independently. It basically is a simple ceremony during which water, palm wine or an alcoholic beverage is poured on the ground in a request to the ancestors for well-being or other favours. Pouring libation can also mark an end to a dispute when done by the elders after mediating between two people that have had an argument. It seals the agreement that has been reached and restores the relationship with the ancestors.

People also frequently spoke of 'pulling Sara' which means making a sacrifice, for instance of chicken, rice, other food items and even clothes. "The *Sara* is a sacrifice in order to get something in return. In the case of sexually abused people it is a way to get rid of spirits that are not allowing the survivor to rest" (Utas 2009:37).

Ridding the secret society bush or farmland of bad virtue is referred to as 'cleansing' or 'washing' of the bush. Gittins (1987) writes that when a relationship between the living and the ancestors has been spoiled there is the need for it to be restored through 'washing the bush'. Crimes like rape, incest, and defilement of the bush or shedding blood spoils the relationship between the living and the ancestors and therefore requires cleansing rituals or pouring libation to take place to deal with such spiritual pollution and appease the spiritual world (Manifesto 99:34). The pollution of secret society bush or farmland can be caused by a single individual but affect the entire community. "This purification ritual [for intercourse in the bush] was necessary for the whole village community, because failure to perform it resulted mostly in irreversible calamities. … the logic of solidarity based on the idea that 'one man's business is everybody's business', took due forms in such cases" (Combey:70). It follows from this that community members expected those who had spoiled the relationship with the ancestors by committing all kinds of sins during the war to go through cleansings to avert bad fortune for the community.

There are also annual ceremonies. Most of the villages that I visited confirmed that they used to organise annual ceremonies before the war which included sacrifices to the ancestors, dancing and masked-devil performances on a community-wide level. Women in a village in Moyamba District described their annual celebration to me:

There is a place here, about half a mile from here – a high hill and there is a lake there. We used to go there - we would collect rice, rum, animals and there were mask devils and we danced there all time and eat and drink. When the priest chief would be ready, we would cook food, put it in a dish and pray on it in our way and then we pushed the food to the lake – and at some point it would sink, which meant that the ancestors accepted it. It was first the men and the women did the same. (FG17)

These ceremonies usually involved long planning, "preparing the sacred sites and making necessary arrangements for hospitality as other communities are always invited to attend" (Kaidaneh and Rigby 2010:245). "On the day of the celebration, most inhabitants go to the sacred site, with leaders and elders taking position close to the inner part of the shrine. Communities follow a broad program of events that include greeting and the recital of the names of ancestors, confession and requests for forgiveness, libation, offering, and appeal, and the restoration of convivial social interaction" (Kaidaneh and Rigby 2010:245-6).

Re-establishing the relationship with the ancestors, appeasing them, was an important priority when communities returned to their villages: *When we came back this place was deserted. Most of our grandfathers are buried here. We wanted to perform some ceremonies and pour libation to let the ancestors know that that we are back and pleaded for peace. We showed them that we didn't abandon them. We asked them for good harvest and healthy children.* (INT42)

The ancestors would use dreams to communicate to certain people in the community that a sacrifice should be made if good fortune was to be secured or retained. Such dreams motivated "the community to undertake particular forms of religious action" (Combey: 93). In a village in Moyamba District, an old man had a dream, in which "*he saw the ancestors coming, they were having cowry shells and calabash and eggs and they came and gave it to the chief and then they told the chief to bring that as a sacrifice for this town"* (FG21). Elsewhere, a fortune-teller paid a visit to the village to bring a message from the ancestors (FG29).

As Gittins (1987) writes in his book on Mende religion a basic distinction can be made between ancestral and non-ancestral spirits and between rituals performed in the community at large and those in specialised groups such as the

secret societies (p. 153). Secret societies are sodalities widespread among the inhabitants of Sierra Leone as well as other societies of the Upper Guinea Coast of West Africa. The adjective 'secret' is misleading and some have suggested using other terms instead such as forest societies or forest sodalities or cult associations (cf. Fanthorpe 2007; Richards 2005). The existence and purpose of the societies is publically known – as Gittins notes, knowledge about what goes on 'in the bush' is quite widespread (1987:138). The activities and ceremonies of the secret societies take place in secluded areas of the bush outside the village and their functioning is connected to a number of rules, bans and sanctions. The secrecy lies in the fact that members of the societies are forbidden to share any information about the societies' affairs with non-members. Non-members also cannot take part in any society activities and ceremonies and are banned from entering the secret society bush. The most common secret societies in Sierra Leone are Bondo (in the south it is usually called Sande) for women and Poro for men.[29]

Secret societies mediate and control the power of the supernatural – the world of ancestors and spirits, so that they work in the favour of the community. The powers of the spirits are often incorporated in masks and other artefacts and 'medicines' (Fanthorpe 2007:1) and is activated through diverse ceremonies. The preservation of the grace of spirits also requires observing many taboos and laws. Crimes such as murder, rape, theft or others are offences against 'the medicine law' and secret societies therefore also carry out punishments of the transgressors (ibid.:4). The societies also serve as educational institutions that supervise the rites of passage of young girls and boys into adulthood. Production of 'fully socialized human beings' is one of the main purposes of the societies: "The basic idea here is that people are no less repositories of spiritual power than 'medicines', the dead ancestors and the wild creatures of the bush. These powers are sex-specific and so harnessing and controlling them necessitates the separation of the sexes", writes Fanthorpe, and later continues: "learning how to nurture powers contained in masks and medicines teaches initiates to recognize and regulate corresponding powers within themselves and thus adhere to culturally prescribed behavioural norms specific to their sex" (ibid:2-4). For the vast majority of people, joining secret societies is "part of

[29] There are other men's societies such as Wunde or Gbangbani (Fanthorpe 2007). One of the specialised societies were the Kamajor militias during the war although in the form they appeared were founded by High Priest Initiator Allieu Kondewa (see Fanthorpe 2007:2 or Hoffman 2011).

the normal process of social maturation in the communities in which they were born" (ibid.:14).

8.2 In the communities[30]

Moa

Outside Kailahun, along the road to Guinea, I visited the village of Moa, one of the largest communities among my research locations. When I first came, the village was preparing for the visit of a delegation of donors that had assisted in the rebuilding of the village school. Local youth was preparing the school and mending the potholes in the road.

Kailahun District suffered from prolonged economic exclusion under the APC one-party rule system. The Imam who I interviewed in the village said the situation had been so bad that people had literally been praying for the war to come (INT46). When the war eventually came most of the population fled to nearby Guinea. During the war the RUF had a base near the village and forced the remaining villagers to work the land for them. The Imam and his wife were among those that suffered during the occupation of the village:

When we worked for them and it was during the harvest time, they drove us to farm and flogged us not to eat the food we harvested [...] Three years we worked for the rebels. When we set traps in the bush, if we caught an animal and they saw it, they would take it from you and flog you. It was taken away from you, so there is nothing you can do. (INT46)

According to the Imam by the time the first group of returnees came back from Guinea around 1999, only a single brick house was left standing. Today, compared to villages that I had visited in the surrounding area, Moa looked quite affluent. It was clear from the way the buildings – the houses, the school, the Mosque and the Court Barrie[31] – looked that many of them had been erected recently. Although at least two NGOs had assisted in rebuilding the village, the people in the community professed that they had greatly relied on self-help. The Imam described the cooperation, emphasising it was a proof that reconciliation was achieved in the community:

[30] The names of the villages have been changed to pseudonyms as I promised anonymity to my informants.
[31] The Court Barrie is a central structure found in almost every settlement that serves as a central point for important public meetings. Sometimes also referred to as Court Barre or Court Barry.

[…] some examples are building houses, building structures. These houses were built in three months time. People group together to plant some plantations in the bush, we all put our hands in one basin and eat. (INT 47)

After an interview with the local chiefs (FG29), they offered to take me to their ancestral shrine. We walked along a footpath leading into the thick forest on the edge of the village. Just across a stream, under a big tree stood their ancestral shrine (see Annex 4), a simple wooden structure with a zinc roof. The chief proudly insisted that I photograph it. He told me that during the war, even the RUF leader Foday Sankoh had visited the shrine.

My informants recollected the ceremony that took place at this shrine after the war. When the elders of the town assembled the villagers to announce the ceremony would be performed they asked everyone to contribute rice and other food stuffs for the sacrifice and a shared meal. Young men were asked to go hunting and provide animals for the ceremony. Once the necessary food was collected, the community gathered under the big tree to offer sacrifice, which included a goat and rice, to the ancestors. They asked the ancestors to accept all returnees back and to let the village experience peace and unity and to forget about the war. The participants offered prayers for those that had died during the war and the elders asked the ancestors to forgive those who had committed bad deeds. After that the food was cooked and everyone shared the meal. The meal was followed by a celebration, of which dances where an integral part.

One of the women explained to me why it had been decided to organise the described ceremony:

So all of us did it in order that we ask the ancestors to really accept us as we have returned home from war and when we are together lets first continue to experience peace and unity in the town. That nobody is named with this war, "you did it, you did it, you did it." Let's all forget about that. So we did some ceremony. To remember our forefathers what happened. (INT48)

In addition to ancestral blessing for a peaceful future coexistence in the village, this passage also points to an important second aim of the ceremony, sealing the past by no longer casting blame on anyone for bringing the war or committing wrongs during the war. Because our local contact knew that I wanted to speak to as many different parties as possible – including ex-combatants – he was happy to lead me to them. However, in my interview with the Imam, he assured me that

no ‘such person’ (ex-combatant) was living in the community. In the end, it was impossible to talk to the ex-RUF as he twice failed to be at his home at the agreed time. However, I did interview a Kamajor (INT49), who experienced the ceremony as an encouragement and a confirmation that the past was being left behind by everyone:

To me it was good as I am a citizen, in the ceremonies performed it was said we wanted to make peace, it was good for me to hear that from the elders and the people said that during the ceremonies. That was very good for me.

Since then he claimed he had not experienced any discrimination.

Similarly a woman who was raped during the war felt that the ceremony had given her a feeling of inclusion.

When we made that celebration, most of the things we did, they helped me to forget about certain things like feeling alone and having a stigma. I am ok, because I feel that I am not ignored in the community, everyone I meet [says] “sorry, sorry, sorry” and all those things. I mean, I am feeling better. Every time there is a meeting with the women I am invited, I go there, we do things together, so it has a very big impact on me that sort of ceremony. (INT47)

The ceremony did not include any elements of apology or truth-telling. The recounting of the war experience was limited to the chiefs denouncing the crimes that had been committed during the war in general terms, not casting blame on any individual combatants who had actually committed these crimes.

As emphasised above, elders used the ceremony to denounce the crimes that had been committed in the war by some of the community members, while at the same time instructing the community to refrain from pointing fingers at individuals. Participation in the ceremony meant accepting its aim of community reconciliation and opened space for inter-personal relations to return to normal. The Kamajor explained:

As far as I am aware, when we came back, all those things were done, those ceremonies. That was according to custom or culture and there was no need for people to announce what they had done. And also those fighters they felt that if this was the way it was done then that was in the interest of the whole community. (INT49)

The victims in the village that I spoke to (INT46, INT47) confirmed that no

apology or confession was needed since the ceremony had taken place. The elders (FG29) explained to me that ceremonies had always served to seal what had happened. *[They] show the people that something has been done, that it was bad, but something has been done to cleanse it off.*

An important goal of the ceremony was to restore community cohesion. Because of the war the community had changed. Not just perpetrators that originated from elsewhere had decided to stay, people had returned married, or with children who were raised elsewhere. Important people had passed away. During the war people had taken up different roles, the traditional hierarchical power relationships had been shaken. The ceremony also had a social function of "mak[ing] sure that we are all the same" (FG29):

We did that because we needed peace and needed to revive the minds of the ancestors because we were gone and left the town and only a few people stayed here but we have come back to put hands together and make peace. That is the reason why we did that we still have peace now.

From my interviews it emerged that the village had no tradition of personal cleansings or healings to rid people of their traumatic experience or to cleanse them of 'spiritual pollution'. As one informant said (INT47):

Especially as I am also a victim of the same problem [rape] – no one ever came and said since this has happened to you, to make you feel better let's perform some cleansing ceremony. Or do something to see that what happened is no good. I have not seen it performed for anybody else.

According to the chiefs, before the war the community members practised a range of cleansings related to breaches of the moral code (incest, intercourse in the bush), however, the only one that remains to be practised is the washing of women that have given still birth. The decline in the ceremonies performed on a regular basis was closely related to the damage and influence of the war on people's attitude towards these traditions. During and after the war major religions had made new inroads in the community:

The impact is that the religion has really intruded into the entire traditional rules and norms, we have forgotten about them, as we believe in praying to god in the Islamic and Christian way and that wipes out the tradition a bit in the way our fathers used to do. (FG29)

But also the absence of villagers knowing how to perform certain ceremonies or the destruction of artefacts needed to perform them correctly had contributed to their demise. Since this is the case the community "look[s] for new ways of dealing with things" (FG29).

The secret societies in the village were facing a similar fate. Neglected by a generation that was raised in exile and missing certain essential and hard to replace artefacts, the villagers had hardship to restore the societies to their former glory. Despite these drawbacks, across my interviews it was commonly agreed that the men and women should at least make an effort to restore these institutions as they were perceived as critical for the life of the community:

Me: What was impact of the war on the women's society?

Young woman: The destruction of those places has great impact on us, we are not happy about that. Things that we used to do, like discussing the truth [in the sacred bush], and these things are now destroyed, and we are not happy about that.

Me: Has there been any effort of reviving this and get new artefacts?

Young woman: We are trying to revive them, because some of us believe that without those things we are trying to destruct the culture at our own cost.

Me: What has so far been hindering the revival?

Young woman: Our return is still very strange to us, although it has taken some time, but as we continue, once we have our dwelling places, and we are now settled finally, people will feel that they are still part of the customs and traditions, we will try still to revive them and look out for the people that can restore them. (INT47)

Bahun

This small village of barely 200 people is located several miles out of Kabala. The badly maintained forest road taking us there made me expect the worst. However, the atmosphere in the village was very friendly and welcoming. My field notes from that day mention a complete and rare absence of requests for material assistance. Before the war the farmers in the village had grown citrus fruits and mangoes and at one time they were even breeding fish in artificial

ponds. The war first entered into the Bahun in November 1994. During the initial attack by the RUF four villagers were killed and several children abducted. After the war a number of these children had returned and were, according to the villagers, successfully reintegrated.

An account of a ceremony in the village is not only another example of how these ceremonies looked but also hints at the many meanings and purposes they had in bringing about community as well as individual reconciliation. Below are some of the features and purposes of the ceremony that was performed in the village after the war:

When the war was over, we came back and offered a sacrifice of white bread [beaten flour and kola nut]. *For the people that have gone, for them to return because we were scattered. By doing that they started returning, bit by bit from different places of hiding. We offered a big sacrifice, a bull, once we returned in full. That we offered because of the bad things that went on and that we saw and also to reunite ourselves. (*FG5)

Two women in the village gave a more detailed account of the big sacrifice that the above quote mentions:

It was a priority to offer a sacrifice of a creature [a red bull] for peaceful and healthy living for the community as a whole. It took place in town. First during the night a 'play' was performed for more harmony by the women.[32] *A dance was performed by the women. This included a prayer to the ancestors. They will swear that all that brought evil to them will suffer. We asked the ancestors for protection and for nothing sinister to happen again. Also the men went to the bush to consult the spirits and then organised their own 'play' at night. After we did these activities, men and women separately, we came together as the whole village and made the collective sacrifice of a red bull and ate it together. It created unity and oneness.* (INT16)

They later continued on the effects of the ceremony:

It has gone a long way in assisting us and in ensuring for us that something like that [war] was not going to happen again. Also for those that have gone, and praying for those that are not present for their safe return. It wasn't automatic,

[32] The 'play' that is referred to was a secret ritual done by the secret society – separately by the women's Bondo society and men's Gbangbani society. For the most part, this occurred in secrecy in the bush. The two separate events were followed by the joint ceremony inside the village.

not that after a ceremony all is done. It will come over time and we have patience. But when we see the result we believe that it comes because we performed all this. We did all these sacrificial ceremonies to live in peace and harmony until god meets us. […] We believe that the ceremonies will help in achieving that. (INT16)

The elders emphasised another important aim of the ceremony:

[…] 'the play' in essence was to ensure that no one can hold grudge to the next person, like "oh this person was responsible for this act or this person was responsible for this act." That is why we made 'the play'. (INT15)

Although the ceremony was said to have fulfilled the important role of bringing people closer together, the community had the feeling that more needed to be done to secure the favours of the ancestors. According to the elders, a ceremony to honour those who had passed away during the war should still be observed and the pollution of the farming bushes still needed to be addressed:

Up to this day we have not offered sacrifice for the lost ones. To our own perception this has [caused] disturbances in our farming activities. Also the use of women, the raping of women in our farm, bushes has added more to the problem. Because normally before the war, the harvest we used to get is not what we are observing now, in terms of rice, in terms of ground nut, whatever we plant. So we live with the assumption that this is still haunting us. (INT15)

Indeed, there has been no other ceremony since the one performed at the end of the war described above. There have been no annual ceremonies for many years. As the women explained:

It is not as it was in former times. Because of the meagre harvests it is impossible now. Before, at the end of the harvest times, we would invite other villages and celebrate [play] together. Then the men would go to their secret bushes and offer libations and perform symbolic activities, trying to appease the ancestral spirits. But now the harvests are meagre and we cannot do it any longer, that is why it is not happening as it used to be. (INT16)

The separate men's and women's 'play' that was part of the ceremony suggests that secret societies also play an important role in bringing people together and contributing to reconciliation. Indeed, efforts were made to restore these institutions. During the war the rebels had burnt down the shrine of the Bondo

bush including all tools for initiation, and women were raped in the society's sacred bushes. As a result, *"there is no secret now, the rebels scattered all the secret objects and forced people like men and women to tell what was happening in the secret bushes – so they now know each other secrets"* (INT16).

But the women have tried to restore the glory of their Bondo society as much as possible. They had collected contributions to buy some of the necessary artefacts and made sacrifices at their shrine. In the year before my visit, they had been able for the first time to carry out an initiation ceremony. The women experienced this as *"proof that the ancestor spirit is present with us"* (INT16). The Poro society of the men was suffering similar difficulties, and although the men did not voice their grievances as strongly as the women, they also were in the process of restoring their society shrine.

After the war children that were abducted by the RUF returned to the village. According to my informants, happiness was the prevailing feeling among the community when they returned. Nonetheless, the children were thoroughly interrogated by chiefs before being treated with local medicine by herbalists:

We were very happy. We welcomed them when they came and we were happy for them. For them to integrate well we interviewed them thoroughly about what they underwent when they were with the rebels. If they partook in eating human flesh or drinking human blood, or what else they did. So after investigating all that, we had medicine there, native treatment, herbalists who we call to treat them. Because some come with sore stomach, some with strong anaemia, some with puffy face or swollen body. (INT15)

The children would be covered with a blanket while breathing in the steams of a heated herbal potion. Afterwards they were washed. The treatment would help children forget their bad memories and treat illnesses they might be suffering from.

Several women recounted other ceremonies that they performed. These were to honour their oaths they had taken to perform a certain gesture if only they would see their kidnapped children again:

Many things happened when we saw our children back, because of our oaths we made sacrifices, and Yakasei dance to show appreciation that their return came true. Some women scraped their heads, to have bold heads as they made a vow to see the children again. Then some of us offered a vow to see our children

again, those persons washed the feet of their children and drank the water. Some of the children had illnesses and rashes for which we boiled herbs. This was mostly limited to individual sacrifices and not village led. (INT16)

Tula

This village in Moyamba District is just over an hour drive and an additional ten minute walk from the district headquarter town. Like many villages in this area it was a stronghold for Kamajors, many of whom still live in the village. With three churches and one mosque on a population of just over 200 inhabitants, the major religions hold firm ground. But this region of the ethnic Kpaa Mende is also known for its traditions and ceremonies (E2, E7).

Women in the village described to me in detail the ancestral place at a lake outside the village where annual ceremonies used to take place before the war.

There is a place here, about half a mile from here, a high hill and there is a lake there. We used to go there, whenever we wanted to worship we would collect rice, rum, animals and there were mask devils and we danced there all time and eat and drink. When the priest chief would be ready, we would cook food, put it in a dish and pray over it in our own way and then we pushed the food out onto the lake, and at some point it would sink, which meant that the ancestors accepted it. It was first the men, and then the women did the same. (FG17)

Since the war, these ceremonies have not been performed, however: *"It is supposed to be initiated by the elders of the village; but when we tell them that we have to do it, they tell us to be quiet and ask us why we are so interested in going to the shrine",* the women narrated and continued with their explanation: *"It is because of this religious interference, if at all we are to come together and ask about the ceremony, the pastors and the preachers will tell us to go to the mosque and church and they preach to us, so we are also afraid."* For the interviewed women, such disregard of the community ancestors has had a serious impact on the community in terms of bad harvest or high child mortality as well as for the coming to terms with the war past, which is impossible in the absence of ancestral support. As a result, the ancestors would send them dreams in which they requested that they be fed again. But the women felt powerless in the face of the elders' refusal to carry through the rituals.

One of the youths described the kinds of symbolic dreams people were having:

But as we have neglected that, since that time ancestors are talking to people in dreams, they say "we cannot help this town, when you do not feed us we cannot do anything for you. There is diamond in this town, we want to help, everything here is made out of diamonds but until you resume feeding us it will not be exposed to you". Because of the intervention of the religion this has not yet happened. (FG19)

The chief and two elders that I spoke to first said that they did not find it all that necessary to visit the ancestors - "*we are just giving our thanks and prayers to God. Because the things that happened, that we have peace now is somehow miraculous... so, now we ask the Almighty God directly without considering our ancestors"* (FG18). Later, when I raised the same issue again, the chief added a more pragmatic reason: *"one of the reasons is because times are now difficult. Whenever you want to perform a ceremony you need a goat. And you need maybe also chickens. To collect the money for these items is not an easy task. So for this reason, some of these things die out"* (FG18).

Despite not having organised a community-wide ceremony to make a sacrifice to the ancestors, there were some secular meetings at which war related grievances were directly addressed. Upon return, the abducted children had told the chiefs about their ordeals. The chiefs had then approached the community and pleaded for the acceptance of the returnees who were *"our brothers and although they had done wrong they should be accepted"*. Also the male secret society functioned as a platform to settle war-related grievances, albeit for men only. The chief explained: *Because we gather our people, talk to them to forgive those that have destroyed our land and our properties and so what we talked there, then it is alright. Everybody accepted.*

Due to lack of resources and the destruction of the Bondo bush, the female society in the village had not yet managed to restore most of its activities since the end of the war. The women believed that this had led to miscarriages and still births among the local women. The elders claimed that the Poro society had initiated new members once or twice since the ending of the war, although they acknowledged also their society bush had suffered from destruction that was hard to mend.

[...] you know, man-created something, man-made something, can be made

again. But with god-created things if you spoil them, only god has to make it. So if most of these things have been destroyed, people can't continue their society business. (FG18)

Although the village performs cleansings after the farming bush has been polluted due to intercourse, cleansing of the war rape victims did not take place and from a community point of view was not considered to be necessary. About the rape victims, the women told me that, *"we are living peacefully, they [are] never neglected, we are working together. They were forced it was not their fault."* (FG17)

Konga

After almost two hours of driving through the forest from Port Loko, we crossed a river by a provisional ferry. In the rainy season, the ferry is unable to cross the river, basically cutting the village off from the outside world. At one point during the war, rebels had been based near this village and the community had suffered numerous attacks in which many people including the Paramount Chief were killed. The inability to perform a proper burial for him, and the perceived negative effects of that had resulted in a feeling of bitterness among its population. It was clear from the interviews that before the war the village had had a very rich traditional life and that the male and female societies had performed important roles in maintaining both the 'spiritual health' and social cohesion of the community. Before the war the entire community would come together once a year at a big stone in the thick forest surrounding the village to pray for good fortune and make a sacrifice. *"The food can then be eaten there, as much as you want, but the left-overs need to remain in the bush"* (FG12). My informants also pointed out several big trees around the village which used to be the locations of various shrines.

The current Paramount Chief was a very old man who said to have fought in the British Navy during World War II. Recently he had wounded his leg and he was no longer able to walk without support. The women that I interviewed later believed the Paramount Chief's injury to have been caused by the unappeased spirits. The Paramount Chief frequently lost the thread of the interview and his council of elders, a group of five male family members in their 40s and 50s, had to step in. The elders voiced serious concerns about the lack of a fitting funeral

for the previous Paramount Chief and the heads of the local secret societies that had passed away during the war. Without a proper ceremonial burial, they said, it was impossible to properly install new people in these positions. But at this point, the village lacked the money and the experts with the knowledge needed to perform these ceremonies.

If you don't have money, it is difficult [...] to talk about rituals. We would need red, white and black cloth. Wine, rice, fowls, money and a cow... but at present a cow is charged with a lot of money, which makes it difficult. At times, it is insisted on the colour of the cow that is fitting the rituals. [Then the] hiring of experts [from another chiefdom]. We also need to invite other tribal authorities from other locations and arrange their feeding. (FG12)

This was confirmed by a young interviewee:

As you know the war lasted for a very long time. [...] the native tools for the ceremonies are mostly kept in baskets. Most of these baskets were burnt down. They were seriously affected. You know there is no documentation like western medicine, when you lose something you write it down. Traditions transfer orally, from one generation to another. So if this house owns the tradition of the community, you have people to come and be there to acquire the knowledge, so when most of these people were killed and those ceremonial baskets were burnt down, it has an impact. Automatically after the war most of those traditions have faded. (INT30)

The destruction of the traditional practice and its effect on the community was mentioned in almost all the interviews. Although the excerpt below is from an interview with three women, as we were sitting on a veranda a larger group of people was listening in. Clearly emotional about the topic, one of the women spoke out:

When the rebels came, they destroyed the shrines and now [we] are getting the bad effect of it. At first, we were productive in terms of agriculture, and also it was easy to make money. This is how they destroyed all the traditions during the war. Even in this village we used to be happy here before the war. We had the bush, we used to go and perform ceremonies, and then the tribal heads used to go there and perform ceremonies. As a result of the war they were killed. (FG13)

Her short outburst was followed by clapping and loud sounds of approval of the larger group of women listening in. According to the women it was necessary to

"make sure that the spirits are appeased, and if you appease them they will listen to you and they will help you for sure. If you fail to appease the spirits, you'll never be successful no matter how hard you try." Thus far the spirits had not been appeased, consequently there was a strong belief that this had led to bad fortune – poor harvest and health – and that spirits were still haunting the village and its people. Because of the poor agricultural production mothers felt they were forced to give their daughters to marry at a too early age. The elders believed likewise that the absence of the ceremonies had a bad influence:

We could not offer any sacrifice up to this day as we don't have enough to eat. We believe that bad luck will be after us until we can make this sacrifice. We just manage our lives and don't have enough to offer. The reason why our farms are not producing sufficiently is because of this bad luck (FG12).

The elders told me how *"those spirits appear to us, scare us when we sleep, appear when you work alone on the road or bush"* (FG12). One of the women claimed that she was attacked by a spirit while planting cassava on her farm. (FG13)

A particular point that was made in the interview with the women was that before the war, they *"used to have white people in the village who stayed with us here"*. The destruction of the sacred bushes around the village by the rebels and especially the destruction of baskets, bowls and clay pots with sacred items belonging to the societies was seen as a reason that "white men" had not been seen again (FG13).

Nonetheless, small gathering and sacrifice was organised at the end of the war to remember those that had been killed: *"because it was a tradition that if a person dies you should offer a sacrifice. But now many people were killed from the village. Some were killed in the town, some were around the town so it was a collective not individual sacrifice. All the people came together for prayers"* (INT30).

But contrary to all the other villages, the Paramount Chief and the elders claimed that it was not an option to perform an incomplete ceremony. If it was not possible to perform it according to the tradition, they thought that it was better to leave it undone:

Money is not sufficient to perform the required sacrifices. Not much has been performed, nothing at all in fact. It is better to do nothing than to do it half-

heartedly. (FG12)

As part of the nation-wide symbolic reparation programme administered by National Commission for Social Action (NaCSA), a ceremony had taken place in the village a few months before my visit. The secret societies' and religious heads had each received a set sum of money (Le100.000 ca. EUR 20) to perform their individual ceremonies, which would be followed by the community-wide sacrifice of a cow. For the society ceremonies the men collected an additional bag of rice and the Paramount Chief contributed a goat. But in spite of that, it was not possible to perform all necessary sacrifices according to the tradition: *We should have observed five nights of drumming and dancing, we could only drum for a few hours. It was not performed according to traditions.* (FG12)

Neither the women were pleased with the way the symbolic reparations programme was performed. As described above, the local tradition requires that part of the sacrificed cow is shared among the people to eat and part is left in the bush for the ancestors. However, people recalled that the meat of the cow that was used for the 'NaCSA ceremony' was taken back to Port Loko where the organisers had come from. Lacking the element of a joint meal, the ceremony lost an essential part of its purpose in the eyes of the villagers. As the women said:

The [symbolic] reparation exercise could not help us perform the required rituals. It didn't make any sense to us. (FG13)

8.3 Discussion and analysis

In what follows, I will tease out and discuss the ways in which the ceremonies and other local practices contributed to reconciliation. Specifically, the themes of restoration of the relationships with the spiritual world, community cohesion/reconciliation; reintegration of perpetrators and symbolic closure will be analysed.

Restoration of the relationships with the spiritual world

One of the main reasons for communities to organise ceremonies in the direct aftermath of the war was to restore relationships not only among the living but between the living and the ancestral spirits who have a critical role in the daily lives of individuals and communities. Most communities had not been able to

worship their ancestors while being on the run during the conflict, and wanted to pay their respect and announce their return through offering a sacrifice. My informants spoke in terms of offering the ancestors an apology or at least an explanation for their long absence.

It emerged from the interviews that at least a minimal sacrifice had been made in all villages when people had returned. The *"feeding of the ancestors to show that they have not been forgotten"* (INT5) was common in communities across the country.

Not only had the absence of sacrifices affected the relationship with the ancestors. During the war many moral codes and taboos – such as committing incest, having intercourse in the bush, killing etc - had been broken. Sarpong (1989) suggests that since in much of Africa moral/social codes including taboos come from God and the ancestors, breaking them offends God and destroys peace. It follows from this that "restoring peace in society is to find out what has gone wrong spiritually, and through special rituals to restore the state of equilibrium" (p. 360 cited in Cutter 2009:45). This also holds true for Sierra Leone as evident in the above stories from the four villages. Combey writes about the village of Ngiema in Kailahun: "Particular taboos were broken during the war, and unless special rituals are performed, and the forests and bush around Ngiema purified, according to the instructions of the ancestors, *hei*[33] will never be effective enough" (Combey 2010:334-5).

According to the women in Konga village:

Because the bush has not been cleansed after people having intercourse there, this has lead to bad harvest and to the youth dropping out of school. (FG13)

All communities that I visited had made some kind of initial offering to their ancestors, however, cleansing the communities of broken taboos such as rape and murder often require more elaborate ceremonies including the offering of larger animals such as cows or goats. Some of the villages had managed to do this directly after the war had ended, while others had to wait for several years to do so. In other cases, such as in the above Konga village, the loss of knowledge and artefacts made it impossible to perform these ceremonies. In those communities that had still not performed a cleansing ceremony, many of

[33] *Hei* is a complex concept related to the presence of the highest deity and influences the fortune of the community, for an elaborate discussion see Combey 2010: 90-118.

my informants expressed the intention that this would still be done. We have seen that in Bahun, villagers had started making offerings as they returned, and once more people had returned, a bull was sacrificed. But more ceremonies were deemed necessary to address the pollution of the bush. The need to address these outstanding rituals was frequently reiterated as their absence was felt in everyday misfortunes. Indeed, the power of these sacrifices and ceremonies comes from the strong belief in their benefits. As Marcel Mauss (1972) argues in his classical work on magic: "a group's beliefs and faith are the result of everyone's needs and unanimous desires" (p. 154). The relationship between cause (sacrifice) and effect (better harvest, health etc) "only occurs in the public opinion. If magic is not conceived in this way it will only be seen as a chain of absurdities and errors" (ibid.:155). A very strong shared belief in the relationship between the sacrifice and the improved conditions emerged from the interviews as the following example illustrates:

Immediately after the war, when we were doing farming, we were not getting good yields. Until we performed the ceremony – but the year that we performed that ceremony, up to now there is rice. We are still harvesting. Some people have even abandoned the rice. We have good yield. (FG23)

Once ceremonies are performed there is no expectation of immediate relief or improvement. However, any positive development that does take place is perceived as a result of performing them, as the above examples from Bahun and Konga suggest. The belief that the community will reap the fruits of its efforts results in the courage and motivation to undertake activities such as farming. In this way, performing the right ceremonies can also have a critical impact on post-war reconstruction in the villages.

When accidents and bad fortune are perceived as being the result of the absence of proper sacrifices, it can have a negative impact on local development. In a village in Moyamba District, I spoke to a young man with a seriously injured arm. He had hurt himself by falling from a palm tree while harvesting it. And he was not the first one to get injured in this way; local women pointed out that *"because we have not visited the shrine, another three [people] fell when climbing palm trees"* (FG23). Because of these accidents, the chief had introduced a law banning all climbing of palm trees until a proper ceremony for the ancestors had been performed.

The post-war upsurge of NGO-led development initiatives created widespread expectations in communities across Sierra Leone. In spite of a lot of reconstruction in the villages happening by means of collaborative work and self-help, 'NGO projects' were often seen by the villagers as a panacea for the many problems their village was facing, in many ways attesting to a lack of trust in the state's ability to attend to the development needs of the communities. Being able to attract an NGO was therefore of great concern to the villagers. And a perception that the ancestors played a crucial role in attracting assistance was wide spread. According to the chief in a village in Port Loko District:

What we did when we met is to ask the ancestors [...] when they speak to people from outside, like NGOs and others, to assist us so that we can rebuild our homes and get proper settings and make unity in the home. (INT28)

Women in a village in Koinadugu District on the other hand attributed the lack of attention from the international relief and development industry to the ancestral wrath:

The neglect of ancestors created poverty, worse than before. It has left us with bad fortune, the NGOs always pass by our village. We assume that is because of that. (INT18)

In similar way, Honwana (1998) writes about Mozambique: "Development was expected to arrive through NGOs, however, also results of self-help were considered as being enabled by sacral approval" (p.17). The belief in their benefits and their necessity to achieve success makes the ceremonies an essential part in rebuilding and developing the communities and hence an important 'resource' the NGOs can work with.

Community cohesion

Apart from mending the relationship between the people in the village and their ancestors, the ceremonies also served to restore the relationships among the living and foster community cohesion in many ways. As these ceremonies are based on practices that have often taken place in the villages for generations and are familiar and significant events to all participants, they serve to re-establish people's bond to the locality and foster feelings of belonging and confirm the

'familiar' values of the community. By practising these ceremonies, the communities "create their social and moral world anew as they re-member it through ritual" (Shaw 2002:268). As women in a village in Kailahun District put it:

It makes us remember that we did this, when our grandmothers and grandfathers usually worked with the tradition. So if we are doing the same thing we just remember our forefathers, our parents who have been doing that tradition, so […] that's why we like it. [It is a] common understanding. (FG25)

The youth in Moyamba District spoke in a similar vein about the function of these ceremonies, and emphasised how it tied generations in the community together:

As a young man you work for your father and your father is an old man practising this tradition, then if you say you condemn his tradition then there will be no reconciliation, unless we go to worship in our own way and then join our father in his worship (FG24).

Second, they help strengthen the relationships among the individuals and families in the community. Building on Durkheim, Richards (2006) writes that "rites, as collective actions without practical purpose, generate social solidarity through emotional entrainment" (p. 652). This is illustrated in the following account of the local ceremony by a young man in Kailahun:

During the dancing, if somebody has hurt you before, during that time you hug yourselves, you eat together and then the person that have done wrong will feel happy – that the brothers that I hurt still love me, I should come back and live with them. (FG15)

The ceremonies are also particularly powerful events that bring people together to share experience and initiate a process of social recovery. Schirch believes that "doing something together helps them [people doing it] feel as one" (Schirch, 2005:139 in Sentama: 52-3). That the 'doing something together' was an important aspect of the ceremonies is also clear from the way they were organised. As evident from some of the descriptions of village ceremonies above, most of them relied on contributions of food stuffs from community members: men often set out to hunt for bush meat and women arranged other food stuffs:

We said every household should prepare a meal, so that we could bring the food together, so that everybody could come around and lay their hands on this food. Men went out to hunt and women collected palm oil.[…] we gathered and all the village people came together, and we decided that we should cook a very big meal to pass the ceremony for the war that had happened. We didn't do it individually; we performed a collective ceremony in the village. Women, men, everybody went into the bush to hunt animals for that occasion. People came with rice, animals, so we prepared the food for the ceremony, after which everybody observed and there was a happy mood. (FG3)

The contribution of food stuffs (and cooperation to catch or produce it) required for the ceremony relates to community cohesion in the sense of creating community spirit through a joint effort. It also has the integrative aspect, often involving the settled inhabitants as well as new strangers (often fighters that had stayed behind in their former stronghold). The importance of the ceremony is underlined by the emphasis put on communal work in the Sierra Leonean understanding of reconciliation. By accomplishing to organise a ceremony the community had proven to itself that it was capable of achieving something through cooperation.

Also on a more symbolic level, the actual sharing of food is in itself understood as a gesture of reconciliation (cf. Stark 2006). "*Dipping your hands into the same bowl*" symbolises "*togetherness*" (FG27). This seems to be a common understanding across the country. Discussing the ceremony with two women in Bahun, they told me that "*the eating together created unity and oneness*" (INT16), while a chief in a village in Bo District said: "*How can we show that it is finished? When we all sit down and eat together. That eating shows that the ex-combatants have been forgiven*" (INT3). The importance of the shared meal is also illustrated by the negative perception of the externally driven ceremony in the above Konga village after which the offered cow was taken back by the NGO rather than shared among the community which in their view rendered the whole programme meaningless.

Ex-combatant reintegration

The ceremonies were also important avenues for reintegration and acceptance of former fighters. In one village in Kailahun District where villagers who fled

during the war found upon their return ex-RUF fighters living in their village, a group of elders explained at some length how the ceremony had been a symbolic expression of both groups that they were ready to live in peace together:

We did it because we felt that even those that remained here (ex-combatants) *and those who came* (the original inhabitants that had fled)*, if we don't do it we would just be sitting and nobody would care for each other. That procedure was taken because it is a form that we can show that there is a reconciliation process: by revoking the ancestors, by trying to revive some of these traditions that used to take place in the community here. By doing so we wanted to abandon all those petty grievances, those that remained here, those that came, so that if we do that it is an appreciation for each other to please come. If we had failed, those that had come want to revive the ceremonies and the ones that remained would have said no, it would show that there was not going to be any peace. But when we came we told them, we don't know exactly what happened, is it that our ancestors were mad over us, is that why these things were happening? When we came we had to do it. And when we did it, those that remained here and those that came, we were together. And the ancestors after we had done it, it was good for them. But if we had just sat down and nothing like that would happen our conscience would not be clear each time something would happen in this community. But because we are reviving these things we feel that we should live by them and we believe that when we do it there is reconciliation taking place in the community.* (FG27)

Publicly confessing or explaining oneself does not seem to have been part of the local ceremonies as discussed in chapter 7.3.[34] There is some evidence in the interviews suggesting that the returning ex-combatants 'confessed' in the secret society bushes but more commonly returning ex-combatants first turned to the chief and the elders to gain permission to re-settle in the community. Indeed, the example of Moa above also indicates that sometimes the chief would plead for acceptance by the community on the ex-combatants' behalf during a ceremony and the acceptance would be sealed by asking the ancestors for forgiveness for all the bad that was done. This was confirmed elsewhere:

We called them [ex-combatants], we went to the shrine, we poured libation for them that these are our children, they have done some many deeds, bad deeds

[34]As I did not really witness the ceremonies and their dynamics, it was impossible to establish whether there was any dissent at the time to organising these ceremonies.

but then they have come, now accept them. The ancestral spirits accept them, so let them be with us. (FG21)

As such the coming together to perform the ceremony was an expression of desired reconciliation by all participants. The fact in itself that a ceremony was organised and the community participated showed an intention, a desire for a peaceful and better future. It provided a platform to express the acknowledgement of the wrongs committed and of acceptance of the ex-combatants without explicitly referring to their deeds. Discussing ceremonial cleansing of girl child soldiers in northern Sierra Leone, Stark (2006) points to the 'symbolic gesture' that a ceremony is in itself: all community members play their prescribed role and by participating demonstrate their will willingness to reconcile. Similarly, Honwana (2006) remarks on Mozambique: "Without directly addressing the issues, the rituals are also moments of family and community reconciliation and forgiveness from the wrong doings of the past" (p.9). According to an NGO worker that I interviewed, being an active part of ceremonies by contributing or undergoing cleansings that the community is expecting go a long way in showing that you want to fit back in:

If you want to stay in the community you have to go through those rituals. You see out there, they have no other alternative. All have committed a lot of atrocities in the community, if people say this is what you have to do to stay with us in our community, they have no way out, but to go through it or live on their own. It is a demand from the community. (E13)

Understandably, many villagers shared a feeling of discomfort and fear of the ex-combatants. But also the hesitation on the side of the ex-combatants to approach fellow community members with requests for forgiveness may have often been caused by fear of being rebutted. By taking part in the ceremony they could show that they were also longing for peace. One RUF fighter in that same community in Kailahun told me:

[..] of course, it was good. Before the ceremony we had the fear people would point fingers at us and say that we are not part of the community. But after the ceremony they saw that we are really seeking for peace and after the ceremony it was good and nobody pointed a finger at me. And there was peace after this time. (INT41)

Ex-combatants that I spoke to stated their appreciation of the way in which this

happened as it made it easier for them to approach other community members.

This is not to say that a ceremony as a stroke of a magic wand can bring about reconciliation. Understandably, the acceptance and reintegration of combatants (and especially adult ones) is a much more complex and delicate process as discussed in chapter 7, in which a ceremony can only play a part.

The ceremony was not only aimed at those that were physically present at the ceremony but was also a plea to the ancestors to encourage the return of those community members that were still away.

In his research into the healing of rape victims, Mats Utas (2009) observed in one village in the Kono District the elders asked the ancestors for forgiveness of the ex-combatants even before these had returned to the village. They also asked the ancestors to "*invite the lost boys and girls of the community to come home.*" Such a ceremony would show the relatives of the combatants that whatever atrocities their family members had committed they have been forgiven (p. 42-3).

Closure

A lot has been written about Sierra Leonean communities preferring to leave the past behind and to 'forgive and forget' (see chapter 7, cf. Shaw 2005, 2007; Kellsall 2005; Stovel 2008) rather than to publicly recounting the war violence. The ceremonies assisted in the process of social forgetting by symbolically drawing a line in the sand. The following statement is illustrative:

So if we have come and we have performed the ceremony like that, to say let us experience reconciliation among ourselves. So that one is over and we do not see the need to accuse anyone and say 'you did this, you did this'. (FG28)

Sometimes it was during the ceremony that closure was formalised by banning the war from the public conversation, by installing bylaws that would forbid 'finger-pointing' or 'name-calling' as discussed above. Performing the ceremony could thus be seen as representing a symbolic break with the past. The war was to be left behind and the focus should be on making a better future.

8.4 Reconciliation and secret societies

As it was close to impossible for me as a non-initiate to find out into great detail what had taken place in the secret society bushes in relation to reconciliation after the conflict, what follows are a few observations and glimpses into why certain things were performed there and how they assisted the local reconciliation process. While people did not reveal anything specific about what exactly was going on in the secret society bush, it was evident from the interviews that they had an important role to play in reconciliation and that their destruction affected people's lives.

As mentioned earlier, the reestablishment of the social and political order based on chiefly authority and secret societies seems to have been one of the priorities for many Sierra Leoneans living in the rural areas. Arguably, after the profound breakdown of established norms and the trauma caused by violence and displacement, the return to the familiar social order represented an attractive choice for many of the people who suffered during the war (cf. Fanthorpe 2007). It provided a source of stability in the uncertain post-war times, and contributed to restoring community cohesion. A woman in a village in Koinadugu District emphasised: *"[the bondo society] keeps us together"* (INT18). However, due to more urgent priorities such as housing and daily subsistence, the communities could not afford the costs and efforts associated with restoring secret society bushes, replacing lost artefacts and finding new initiators. The comments in the Moa village above about these conflicting priorities (INT48, INT49) were echoed in many other villages such as by these elders in Koinadugu District:

When the war came the sacred bushes were demolished or spoiled, like some of the women were taken by the rebels and raped or wounded in their bush. When those things happen we have to 'pull Sara', make sacrifice. We want to do our sacrifices, we intend to, but our first concern is to make a living and find something to eat. (INT17)

In spite of the damage, the secret societies seem to have served an important role in restoring community life back to normal. Firstly, the secret societies and their secluded bushes had offered a space for people to voice grievances and settle grievances or confess crimes (cf. above INT47, INT49, or FG18). As these interviews suggest, it was not uncommon for 'confessions' to take place in the secret society bush: *Some of us confessed. Especially if you are a member of a society - if you have not confessed, as a member of a society, there are certain boundaries that you cannot cross, it will tell on you. So some of us confessed,*

we poured libation for them, then we rub it on the ground, on their forehead and their chest. (FG22)

The initiation into the secret societies of the ex-combatants may have also served as one of the means of their reintegration. In a village in Moyamba District, the RUF captured many children from a local school. Those boys that returned had to undergo cleansing and initiation in the society bush upon their return. They spent a week there before returning to the village (FG24). A head of a child reintegration organization similarly confirmed to Stovel (2007) that initiation into the society can be seen as an important expression of community acceptance (p. 185). In a village in Kailahun, the initiation of ex-combatants that hailed from elsewhere into the local Poro society was seen by the 'stranger' as well as the local community as a strong indication of their successful local integration (INT41, INT42). While young men in a village in Moyamba District told me that they were glad to have been initiated in the society because 'culture' was really important for them (FG24), in a nearby village I was also told of involuntary initiation into the secret societies (FG21).

In many places that I visited the war had left an entire generation uninitiated. "For many Sierra Leoneans, both rural and urban dwelling, resuming initiations represents a major step towards post-war recovery" (Fanthorpe 2007). According to Coulter, "the ceremony is not only a social event but has become a key event in reconfiguring social relations after a decade of civil war" (Coulter 2008 quoted in Leigh: 29). Re-starting Bondo initiation was considered an important indicator of the success of restoration of the secret society life (and implicitly also the village life). Indeed, as women in Bahun proudly emphasised, the fact that they had recently been able to initiate new girls into Bondo again was a "proof that the ancestor spirit is present with us" (INT16). Richards (2004) also points out the importance of the secret societies in returning back village life to normality especially in relation to marriage, "[t]he initiation of boys can wait, but girls [...] are considered un-marriageable until initiated, and so parents will prioritize resources for a girl's initiation as soon as household income rises above the threshold of bare subsistence" (p. 9).

8.5 Individual sacrifice and cleansing

The data suggests that washing or cleansing of individuals exists in many

communities across the country and that they come in different forms and have quite distinct purposes. The focus here is on rituals performed for individuals for the benefit of their reintegration into their community.[35] One informant at a child reintegration agency estimated that cleansings of returning child ex-combatants took place in about 40% of the cases, without a distinct geographical pattern (E9).

Traditionally the washing of individuals relates to the restoration of the relationship with the spiritual world and is based on the belief that the bad fortune or bad deeds of one individual – if not addressed through cleansing – can affect the entire community (Combey 2009:153). Many of the atrocities committed or suffered during the war – especially rape or intercourse in the bush, but also violence – could pollute the community. Many of those associated with the fighting forces underwent cleansings upon their return. An NGO worker, part of a focus group in Kailahun, remarked:

[…] the ex-combatants who have not taken part in those traditional ceremonies are still believed to be those that are far away from us and still have the curse and don't have our blessings to be with us in the communities. So some because of these reasons don't have the mind, they are not open enough to come and join us, because they have not taken part in the ceremonies. (E19)

One of his colleagues added:

[…] if those cleansings were not performed before they came to resettle, then the citizens might think if anything evil befalls them, this is happening because we have not done the ceremonies.(E19)

Most of the cleansing rituals took place on family level or in the secret society bush. The elders in the village of Senehun described how the returning child soldiers were taken to secluded place:

Immediately when we returned from the war –some of our children had been abducted, they had been carried away –when they had returned we gathered everybody. Those that returned, we took them to a camp and we hired these Muslim men to perform rituals to cleanse them, because some of them were behaving abnormally. We performed rituals with herbs, leaves and other rituals to help them regain their status. (FG22)

[35] The ceremonies performed upon the return of these girls are distinct from the treatment that some of them have gone through later, such as visiting herbalists etc. (cf. Utas 2009, Stark 2006)

The ceremonies took various forms in the different communities. Gbla (2003) describes a cleansing ceremony carried out for a 15 year old ex-RUF returnee in northern Sierra Leone, "the elders in his family... took the boy to the bush where a hut had been built using grass... On entering the hut, Amadu [the ex-combatant] was asked to undress himself, that is, to take off the clothes he used to put on while with the RUF. The hut and the clothes were then set alight while an adult relative helped out the boy quickly. The burning of the hut and the clothes and everything else that the boy brought from the war symbolically represents his sudden break from an evil past. Immediately thereafter, a chicken was sacrificed to the spirits of the dead and the blood smeared around the ritual place" (p. 188).

During my stay in Kabala, I worked with a translator/assistant that had been involved in the return and reintegration of children associated with the fighting forces. Through him I was able to interview seven informants (six women and one man) that had been abducted by the RUF and who underwent cleansing ceremonies upon their return home.[36]

My parents made a sacrifice in the form of cooked rice and cold water in a pan with a number of kola nuts in it. You put your hands over the water and say your desires and express happiness over what has been received. And after that everyone will come and dip their hands into the water and take out a kola nut until all nuts are gone. Some of the water will be drunk and some sprinkled at the doorstep as a sign of happiness that the ordeal is over and also that no further disaster or bad omen should happen to the family again. (INT8)

When I came, my big sister washed my feet and drank the water and my elder brother brought other family members and they all came and washed my face and hands, the whole body and drank the water. And another man came and offered prayers in the Muslim way. (INT10)

They later described the effect of these different ceremonies:

I felt happy after it was done. That sacrifice is very important for everybody. When you do it, it helps a lot, it goes a long way. It gives you an amount of protection and an amount of peace of mind. (INT8)

Because of my experience in the bush, it was only constant prayer and sacrifices

[36] These girls did not receive any assistance upon their return home, however some of their stories resemble those described by Stark (2006) of girls that were in program of the Christian Children's Fund.

that cooled down my mind. There is nothing like an impression of people reminding me of the past and the sacrifices offered helped me. (INT10)

The ceremonies first had an impact on the women as individuals. They made them feel better about themselves and more accepted and welcome. However, when I asked them about what they thought has helped them most in leaving the past behind, none of them immediately referred to the ceremonies but rather to the material assistance that they have received:

My sister's husband helped me in getting into petty trading – and so I could sell and have some small source of living. (INT10)

Not just the spiritual transformation provided by the ceremonies, prayer and sacrifice but also this work was an opportunity for her to feel worthwhile and move on with her life as well as reintegrate into the community. It allowed her to 'fit in' which is a vital component of successful reintegration and reconciliation as discussed in chapter 6.

The cleansing also symbolised acceptance of the girls by their families and well as by the wider community. Because *"for the people to be able to receive the children wholeheartedly... acts like washing feet, joint dancing, drumming... shows that people forgave and are willing to accept those kids"* (E24, cf. Stark 2006, Williamson et al. 2002). Furthermore, part of these rituals served to "thank the ancestors and God" for the safe return of the child (Shaw 2002:6-7). Shaw describes how parents drink the water used to wash their children's feet as a way to create "a new physical bond between parent and child" (ibid.). At least in some cases, parents were also honouring an oath they have taken as described above in the case of Bahun. Uncertain about the fate and whereabouts of their children parents would take an oath promising to perform - upon the safe return of their children - a humbling task, such as drinking the mentioned water or scraping their head (INT16). Similarly, among the Kpaa Mende in Moyamba District, parents of returned children would dress up in rags (Alie 2008:142).

Traditional cleansing ceremonies were also widely used across the country as part of the reintegration programmes for child ex-combatants carried out by national and international agencies and NGOs like UNICEF, International Rescue Committee, Caritas Makeni, Children Associated with War and others.[37]

[37] These programmes included many other aspects too like community sensitization, Interim Care Centres, school or skills training, counselling etc. See Williamson (2006).

Although many cleansing ceremonies were part of larger externally-driven interventions, which may raise suspicion that a demand for them may be outside-driven, much evidence confirms that it is not the case. The communities where Caritas Makeni worked themselves requested the rituals to be part of the reintegration programmes (E25). Similarly, Stark's study found that carrying out the cleansing ceremonies for the girls was either desired by the girls themselves or by their families, with the decision mostly supported by both parties. (Stark 2006:213). Also another study confirms that the rituals and ceremonies were in some cases arranged by the families and communities themselves with the NGOs only helping them to obtain the items needed for such ceremonies (Williamson 2006:196).

8.6 Fambul Tok

Although my research focuses on community ceremonies that took place without major external support, I found it necessary to take a closer look into the ceremonies supported by the local NGO Fambul Tok. After shortly describing the ceremonies that I have witnessed I will move on to discuss how participants felt it had contributed to local reconciliation. I will particularly focus on the three pillars of the programme; confessions/truth-telling, the restoration of traditions and development.

'Fambul Tok' means 'family talk' in Krio and represents a symbolic expression of the effort to involve all the members of the local communities across the country - victims, perpetrators or witnesses - to participate in rebuilding mutual trust and respect and draw everyone "back into the Sierra Leone family" (Fambul Tok 2008). This is to be achieved through traditional ceremonies that the communities themselves will identify as appropriate. Groups of villages in each chiefdom set up reconciliation committees - in which not only elders and religious leaders but also women and youth have a representative. These design and prepare the reconciliation ceremony based of their specific local practice. According to its founder John Caulker, the programme was created in response to the limited ability of the national top-down initiatives like the Truth and Reconciliation Commission to reach the communities outside the major district centres (E22).

Fambul Tok launched its work in Kailahun District in 2008. In the village in Kissy-Kama chiefdom that I visited back then, the ceremony started with a joint meal of traditional rice and cassava leaf for everyone. A bonfire was then lit and the chiefs started the ceremony. This was followed by the truth-telling event - a young man told a story of the death of his family members after they had been discovered in their hide-out in the bush. He then pointed at another man who he knew had been responsible for committing these murders. The perpetrator then came forward to face the victim and the community. He admitted to the killings, apologized and asked for forgiveness, which he was given and the men shook hands. Other victims and perpetrators shared their story that evening. After that, a possessed diviner spoke to the ancestral spirits about sacrifices they needed to be appeased. The next morning, people were singing and dancing accompanied by drummers, awaiting in a celebratory atmosphere the elders, chiefs and the Paramount Chief who slowly gathered in the village to take a goat and kola nuts to a sacred place to offer them to the ancestors (to where no women or children were allowed to follow them). The ceremony was then concluded with another joint meal.

The second ceremony which I witnessed during my second visit in 2010 in Upper Bambara chiefdom, also in Kailahun District, started with a speech by the Paramount Chief who came along with Fambul Tok. He explained the gathered audience that “if a perpetrator has not confessed he will fear to join in communal work. By encouraging confession, this project will bring development”. The truth-telling part was moderated by a local man that had been a Kamajor during the war. In total 14 people ‘confessed’ during the evening. The grievances recounted included murder, rape, theft, arson, abduction and forced labour and all crimes were equally committed by SLA, RUF and Kamajors. The truth-telling session was at times interrupted by a performance of a mask-devil which continued until the early hours of the morning. The devil – supported by a group of drummers – was recounting stories, making jokes and singing. In the morning the community was entertained by the masked-devil. A masked Bondo dancer was going from door to door asking for small gifts. She was followed by a score of women that were clapping, singing and dancing around her.

Truth-telling

While the particularities of each ceremony were determined locally, each had a 'truth-telling' element. As presented in the above chapter, nowhere in my interviews in other villages was a need for such a truth-telling event expressed. The returning combatants had 'confessed' to the chiefs who in turn had encouraged the community to forgive the returning 'brothers'.

Most of the voluntary 'confessions' during the ceremonies that I witnessed came from victims rather than from perpetrators. If the accused perpetrators were present they were then expected to apologise by kneeling in front of the victim. Many of them came forward hesitantly. Most peculiar was the recounting by one victim of how she was gang raped by a number of Kamajors in the village. She said some of the Kamajors were still living there, and accused the moderator, who had been standing next to her, as being one of them. Much to the awe of the gathered crowd, he hesitantly admitted to the crime, apologised and knelt down to be forgiven. A few days later I spoke to him about this episode:

Me: During the ceremony, you were identified as perpetrator, right?

Man: Yes, you can be a wrong-doer and forget, but of course the person you harm does not forget so easily. I could not recall that I did that. But somebody reminded me. (INT54)

Those perpetrators that did come forward voluntarily mostly faced the chiefs, or specifically the Paramount Chief when confessing to their abuses in spite of being reminded by some of the Fambul Tok staff to address the whole community. Subsequently the chief would urge the victim and the community at large to accept the apology. From my interviews it emerges that personal forgiving was still strongly encouraged by the elders, one of the victims that was appealed to forgive said:

Since I have known the person [that hurt me] and I have been told by the elders to forgive, we have forgiven. We can start a fresh page so we can work as one. (INT50)

The statements of victims who accepted apologies – or were asked by the chief to do so – resembled narratives of consenting acceptance discussed in chapter 7. A woman whose father was killed and had identified the killers on the night of the ceremony later told me:

In the case of my father being shot dead, a confession does not bring him back

[…] whether I accept it or not, it has been done, so what is my choice? What has been done cannot been undone, we have no option, nowhere to go, we need to live with them. If I would refuse to talk to those perpetrators it would not heal the wound. We are accepting it. (INT51)

The town speaker, whose house had been burnt, had a similar attitude although he hoped that his willingness to forgive would encourage the culprit to assist him:

Now it has happened, and I know the person [that did it]. My house has been burned, I don't feel too good. Now that I was appealed to, there is nothing I can do. That man cannot rebuild my house, there is nothing I can do. It is just a matter of forgiving him. Maybe one day the man will assist me in a job. (INT50)

It seems, however, the some of the perpetrators who 'confessed' experienced a feeling of relief. The hesitant confessor told me a few days later:

[…] *here you have the situation that you have wronged somebody and although some people have forgotten some have not. But when you speak about [it] publicly and apologise people will forgive, god himself will forgive. Now I am free from sins.* (INT54)

The same feelings resonated in the other villages that organised a Fambul Tok ceremony before my arrival. In a village in Moyamba District, I asked one informant that confessed during a Fambul Tok ceremony, why he had not done so during a previous ceremony that had taken place in the village directly after the war:

I did not do it at first during our own celebration because everybody was having hot temper, so if I did there would be another problem. Therefore I kept to myself. And this Fambul Tok gave me the feeling of security – to explain all that I did. (FG22)

After observing the TRC hearings in Bombali, Shaw (2010) noted that offenders often did not take any personal responsibility for their actions. This was also the case in the two Fambul Tok ceremonies. The Kamajor who 'confessed' to the community apologized:

[…] once you handle a gun, you don't know your father, you don't know your mother, so forgive me.

Similarly, three young boys that had been abducted by the RUF and had returned

to burn the village school and mosque narrated their abduction and how they were forced by a commander to destroy their village.

Arguably, the Fambul Tok ceremony 'confessions' very much resemble those at the TRC as described in the ethnographic accounts of the hearings (cf. Shaw 2010; Kelsall 2005). As Kelsall concluded after visiting the Tonkolili TRC hearings: "truth, of the forensic, legal-positivist, or cathartic, emotional-confessional variety, is not easy to elicit, especially in the context where such practices are not part of the cultural mainstream" (Kelsall 2005:390). Rather they are a display of the change of the speakers' hearts (Shaw 2010:129). Similarly, Stovel commenting on a Fambul Tok ceremony in a village in Kailahun District pointed out the 'theatrical' element of the 'confessions', which barely went beyond the most basic facts (cited in Park 2010b:114).

Restoration of traditions

As discussed above, the war did a lot of damage to the local traditional practice. In many places a whole generation grew up away from their ancestral lands, missing out on annual sacrifices and initiations. On return, there was often little money to restore shrines or buy animals for sacrifice. Fambul Tok states that many of these practices "have not been employed by local communities since before the war" (Fambul Tok 2009). But despite these challenges and limitations, the present study found abundant evidence that many communities managed to organise some kind of ceremony or sacrifice, even if only minimal.

Fambul Tok seems to have given some of the villages an opportunity to make the 'proper' sacrifice. The elders in a village in Kailahun District spoke about the revival of their traditions:

*When we came back from the war, we cooked chicken and spoke to the ancestors at the village shrine as was our custom. We also cleansed the bushes to ask for forgiveness of the ancestors. We started with restoring ourselves, but later Fambul Tok helped to restore our tradition. (*INT37)

Elsewhere in the country the story was similar. In a village in Moyamba District, people recalled: *Before Fambul Tok we […] talked to the ancestors, later we offered bread, pound bread, we offered that and told the ancestors that we should have done something more than that, but the chance is not there, so*

let them hold on to that and when the means come we do it properly. (FG22)

Later, when Fambul Tok came, "*we repeated the same thing but it was done properly that time. The first time was on a small scale just to satisfy [the ancestors]. But when Fambul Tok came we had to satisfy everybody. […] We bought two goats, men one goat, women one goat, satin one piece for the men, one piece for the women, we bought so many things. We danced throughout the night. We bought drinks. And all the time people were dancing. It was the same day that the women went to their shrine, the men also went to their shrine, we returned with a dance and then we went to the tomb"* (FG24).

The support that Fambul Tok has provided has given communities an impulse to revive yet larger parts of their traditional practice than they achieved on their own previously.

Development

Local development is one of the outcomes by which Fambul Tok measures the success of its programme. The programme helps communities establish community farms - "an old tradition, but one that has been dormant since before the war" (Fambul Tok 2009). In several places, people indeed confirmed that Fambul Tok had encouraged them to take up communal projects again. *A* group of women readily related the recent development and the cooperation that had helped bring about the reconciliation to the Fambul Tok ceremony that had taken place:

Me: How did the Fambul Tok ceremony help to bring you together?

Woman: It helped bringing peace and unity and made us farm and build together. (…) Before the Fambul Tok ceremony, poverty, hunger, and lack of houses made people hostile, which resulted in finger-pointing to perpetrators: 'you came from Liberia, you brought the war', and so on.

Me: But how did the ceremony contribute to the fact that there are houses and less hunger now?

Woman: Our unity is bringing progress. We can work together now. (FG26)

From her statement, it seems that stimulating communal projects went a long way in both bringing people closer together and bringing development. Indeed, Fambul Tok annual report is abound with similar and more detailed stories of

people setting up farms together and reconstructing communal building (Fambul Tok International 2010).

Discussion and analysis

Most of the nation-wide reconciliation and reintegration initiatives – including the symbolic reparations programme rolled out by NaCSA in 2009 - failed to reach out to the most remote communities and failed to help communities address many of their conciliatory needs:

When we returned from Guinea the DDR programme started but didn't reach us. Fambul Tok reached here and explained us how reconciliation and forgiveness would bring progress. Although this is where the war started, only Fambul Tok reached this end; NaCSA and the DDR programme never reached us here. (INT37)

Indeed, in many communities throughout the country I encountered a bitter disappointment about national programmes such as the TRC, SCSL, DDR and NaCSA not delivering any assistance to people to rebuild their lives. People placed their hopes on external assistance in one way or another, but had mixed experiences with NGOs, which often came to sensitise them about issues such as governance, human rights or female genital mutilation rather than bringing 'development' of the kind they were hoping for. The genuine attention from Fambul Tok was an exception both in terms of the sustainable development it aimed to bring and its sensitivity to the local culture. For Caulker, it is the fact that the ceremonies are "locally determined and organised" that lies behind their success (quoted in Graybill 2010:46).

On the basis of suggestions by the local NGO Manifesto '99 (2002) to include traditional aspects in the TRC hearings it was hoped that "*some indigenous mechanisms or processes [would be] set in place in communities that could continue the healing process. Sadly, that did not happen*" (E2). The TRC only made use of rituals in the closing ceremonies of its district hearings. While Kelsall (2005) noted the tangible effect of the ritual closing of the Tonkolili TRC hearings, he also acknowledges that "in time, […], the reconciliation spell woven by the hearings may unravel" (p.391). Similar doubts could be cast on the long term effects of the Fambul Tok ceremonies. In an ethnographic study into the reintegration of an RUF ex-combatant after a ceremony, Taylor-Smith

Larsen (2011) noted that victims often expect that the 'confessor' will visit them afterwards "to peacefully settle whatever scores they have" (p.45). When I returned a few days later to the village where I witnessed a ceremony, it seemed some victims and perpetrators had already made an effort:

Kamajor: Last night [the victim] cooked for me and gave it to me, which was a symbol of reconciliation that the past was forgotten.

Me: Should not you be the one to compensate?

Kamajor: I have the intention but I want to surprise the lady later. I have the intention to do it later on when I have the means in the form of a goose, or cassava or a pineapple. (INT52)

Although this is expected, it is probably beyond the power of an external party to influence that interpersonal reconciliation like that will actually happen. This being said, Fambul Tok aims to positively influence the community beyond the evening of the ceremony by supporting communal projects that bring both development and opportunities for ex-combatants to show that they are actively contributing to rebuilding the community.

In most cases, the crimes of the 'confessors' were already known to the community, making the confessions somewhat redundant in the narrow sense of truth-telling. Rather than publicly narrating details of their crimes and taking responsibility for them, the ex-combatants told stories that resembled 'confessions' discussed above, recounting being forced, drugged or abducted. But taking part in the ceremony signalled that the perpetrators were changed people. The public acknowledgement of the crime and a plea for forgiveness asked directly from the victims may be at least in some cases finally bringing the apology that so many people claimed was necessary for reconciliation but was never really pronounced.

9. Conclusion

Reconciliation is a long and complex process. It is not automatic or straightforward. There is also not just one single way of bringing communities back together after violent conflict. Some strategies succeed in one community while they run into difficulties in others, even if the circumstances may on the surface appear similar. Over the past years, there has been growing evidence that the tools designed by the international community and the national elite to bring or to facilitate accountability and reconciliation often have very little impact on the local communities. Focusing their efforts and funds on the SCSL and the TRC, the parallel operations of which earned Sierra Leone the label of a 'transitional justice laboratory', the international community paid little attention to exploring and supporting processes that would reflect local priorities and conciliatory needs. Outside the official mechanisms, people in the villages across the country employed a wealth of local practices of reintegration, reconciliation and healing, including ceremonies and other forms of ritual. These responses were often improvised and adapted versions of established ceremonies, the meanings of which were familiar to those participating in them. They were performed to invite villagers, including ex-combatants, back into the community, restore relationships with the ancestors and foster coexistence and 'unity'. These different traditional practices have been an important resource for the people in their efforts to remake social relationships and restore community cohesion in the direct aftermath of the war.

This present thesis explored these very efforts and experiences. It studied the reconciliation and restoration of relationships at village level in Sierra Leone through the perspectives of those who live them. The dynamics between the perpetrators, victims, chiefs and other bystanders varied from village to village, and it is not possible to draw any broad conclusions from the brief encounters that I had with them. As one of my informants remarked: "*Human beings are very complex machines; we are dynamic, and sometimes we can be happy, sometimes we cannot be happy. When you are happy you can forget about it, when you are in distress you cannot. God created human beings and through our complexity we can sometimes forget about it"* (INT55). People in the village are bound to look differently at the past, feel differently about accepting the ex-combatants, or deal differently with their own wounds, losses and memories. Talking about community reconciliation will always obscure some of these

individual experiences. It also must be noted that with 18 villages, the sample is limited. Nonetheless, with these acknowledged limitations the research allows to come to several wider observations and to give preliminary answers to the questions posed in the introduction.

Giving any final answers to the question of local understanding of reconciliation is particularly complicated. Individually, reconciliation is usually expressed as having '*kol at*', while '*wan word*' connotes a collective '*kol at*'. Both notions refer to functioning social relationships in the community. The expressions of reconciliation are predominantly situated at the level of the community rather than resting with the individual. It is the capability for collective action, often referred to as 'unity' that is decisive for local assessment of whether reconciliation has been successful or not.

The apparent harmony of this widely declared 'unity' in the villages is of a specific nature. Rather than a result of joint decisions, or a consonance of opinions, it is an expression of the fact that the social order, upon which the village is organized, has been restored. It suggests that everybody accepted their place back in the social hierarchy of the community. It is also in this light, that the seemingly easy reintegration of the ex-combatants in the villages must be understood. Supporting the findings of Shaw (2007, 2010), Stovel (2006), Boersch-Supan (2009), Coulter (2009) and others, this research found that the ex-combatants were mainly judged on their present behaviour in the society rather than on giving explicit apologies or narrating a full account of their crimes. The latter indeed very rarely happened. People often mentioned that 'their' perpetrators were now reformed, meaning they participated in the community activities and performed their social roles. When they expressed distrust, it was towards those ex-combatants who did not 'come back home' – those were viewed with suspicion, as unable or unwilling to 'change their heart' and respect the accepted social norms.

The research also confirms that chiefly authorities played a critical role in both the reintegration and reconciliation processes as well as in the local cultural practices that often facilitated them. Chiefs often acted as 'gatekeepers' for the returning combatants, appealed to the communities to 'forgive and forget' and commonly enacted these appeals through bylaws banning any further labelling of the ex-combatants. While their prominent role in these processes may be viewed as problematic given these local leaders were implicated in causing the

war in the first place, it is dubious that the internationally sanctioned efforts have avoided this pitfall. Shaw's (2010) account of the TRC reconciliation ceremony in Bombali District Hearings presents a story not unlike to what was happening in the villages. She observed that during the closing ceremony, the ex-combatants performed an act of submission to senior elite men: "...the TRC reconciliation ceremony ritualized ex-combatants submission to chiefs, district officers, and religious leaders. (...) this effectively meant reintegration into the very structures of power and exclusion that contributed to the war in the first place" (ibid.:130).

Social structures and structures of power are usually resistant to fundamental and radical changes. Indeed, after the prolonged period of violence and upheaval, the return to the familiar social order seems to have been one of the greatest priorities and the restoration of the chiefly structures found support in the population. But while the chiefly structures have been restored and with them many of the injustices, exclusions and marginalization, this is not to say that everything just returned to its pre-war state. In a number of villages, the youth often navigated the conversation about the post-war conditions to the question of human rights and usually confirmed there had been improvements in their relationship with the chiefs and in the youth's chances to make themselves heard. It seemed that it was rather the chiefs who bemoaned the post-war order in which fining and control of youth had become harder.

Beyond the dynamics of reintegration and of (re)making of community cohesion and 'unity', the research also looked at the key aspects of achieving 'kol at' as they emerged from the narrative accounts. Forgiving (and forgetting) featured dominantly in the reconciliation discourse. But far from being expressions of inherent African characteristics and forgiving nature, it is better seen as a mixture of pragmatism and religious belief. Coming together, accepting the former combatants into the community's midst was for many simply the best and often the only available option to secure peace. A strong religious belief inspired both the mercy for the ex-combatants as well as the hope for the divine justice to make the final judgement on those who committed the atrocities. Rather than just an expression of fatalism, this reliance of deferred justice might be attributed the prolonged history of accumulated injustices and to a higher priority given to more immediate daily concerns (cf. Shaw 2009, Boersch-Supan 2009).

Lastly, to achieve 'kol at' or forgetting, one must be able to rebuild his or her life. But the reparations programme has arguably been a failure. According to official numbers, 20.000 people received a reparations payment by April 2010. While the TRC planned to do more, there were no funds available (VOA News, April 23, 2010). Indeed, people in the villages bemoaned the serious flaws and corruption in the registration process and the one-off payments of the reparations that hardly improved their situation. Many people thus located the persisting gaps in their own and their communities' ability to truly move on and to 'forget the war' in the material hardship they still are facing as a consequence of the war. This has important implications for the way people reflect on the work of the transitional justice institutions, as will be discussed below.

As to the second question, the research confirmed that local ceremonies and other ritual expressions of reconciliation and healing played an important role in the communities' efforts to address their conciliatory needs in the aftermath of the war. First, they served the aim of facilitating community cohesion and ex-combatant reintegration. Second, just as they are supporting togetherness among the living, they also foster restoration of the relationships with the spiritual world and thus ensure the support of the ancestors. It is through this symbolic reconnection with the ancestral spirits that the past and present are re-linked after the war destruction and a better future is envisaged. This makes the ceremonies an important part of post-war reconciliation effort. Last, ceremonies were sometimes perceived as a particular moment in time that reconciliation had been declared and jointly endorsed. While representing the beginning of a long process rather than an achieved end state of reconciliation, they provided a symbolic closure, a break with the past. Indeed, as *"The ceremonies and sacrifice we performed have gone a long way in assisting us and in ensuring us that something like that war was not going to happen again... It is not automatic. Not that after a ceremony all is done. It will come over time and we have patience. But when we see the result we believe that it comes because we performed all this."* (INT16)

The major obstacles for the communities to perform the ceremonies seemed to have been of practical nature. In most communities, usually people blamed lack of money but others pointed to the permanent loss of the unique knowledge that disappeared with the death of the specialists in the war. The war has caused major damage to many sacred places, including ancestral shrines. But there

certainly seem to be more factors at play that explain why in some communities ceremonies took place and in others people only lamented their absence and loss. There seems to be a relationship between the declared unity in the village and performing ceremonies. As we have seen in the Moa village, people proudly stated that despite the lack of money and food, everyone was encouraged to contribute at least a cup of rice and young men were sent to hunt for animals to carry out the sacrifice and cook a joint meal: "*We have done a small ceremony but we have a plan to do the proper one, and whatever happens we must do it, so that we can continue to experience peace and unity among us*" (INT48). On the contrary, in Konga, the chief told me: "*Money is not sufficient to perform the required sacrifices. Not much has been performed, nothing at all in fact. It is better to do nothing than to do it half-heartedly*" (FG12). In the latter, my field notes also describe a prevailing heavy atmosphere of frustration and anger combined with despair and general destitution much unlike any other community I visited during my fieldwork. This suggests that the ability to perform any of the traditional ceremonies, instead of just bringing about unity and reconciliation could in fact already be an expression of the capacity of the community to come together for a joint goal. Given the prominent role the traditional chiefly authorities and elders play in most of the established processes of dispute resolution and reconciliation, the quality of leadership in adapting these mechanisms to dealing with the post-war challenges seems critical.

Concerning the last question, the research examined the experience and reflection of the nationally-driven initiatives in the villages and their meaningfulness for the conciliatory and justice needs of their populations. It specifically focused on the trial of Charles Taylor, the only ongoing case of the SCSL at the time of the research. The SCSL has received a lot of attention from international donors, much in line with the contemporary preference for international criminal justice in post-war countries. But the research shows a visible disconnection between the transitional justice aims and the priorities and needs of the local communities. On the surface, it seems that there is certain degree of consonance between the both. Indeed, there were very few people who would want Charles Taylor to walk free. But justice featured scarcely in responses to the question of the purpose of the SCSL and the Taylor trial. Given the general awareness of Taylor's part in the conflict, people feared his return.

Their answers showed that much more than need for accountability, they had security concerns. People's bad experience with the state institutions and the security apparatus means that their trust in its ability to prevent another war and provide their protection is very low. With Charles Taylor held far away, Sierra Leone is for them a safer place. But it did not bring the victims much justice as the SCSL claimed. Its narrow focus on criminal prosecution does not satisfy the justice needs that most people declare. Mani's (2002) distributive justice resonates much deeper among the local priorities. The structural injustices, economic and political disempowerment of much of the population and deep inequalities of distribution are still present, just as they were before the war. And as discussed above, the inability to achieve '*kol at*' attributed to the material hardship makes proclamations of justice and restoring dignity to the victims a very distant song. As the chief summarized it: "*A goat here is different than a white man's goat"* (INT17).

Final remarks

It makes sense to the local communities to use what they 'know' to face the challenges presented by the need to foster coexistence after the war. The communities have shown strong resilience and the ability to restore relationships and reintegrate those who have harmed them, among others through means of local traditional practice. Often, it had to be adjusted – such as substituting the more expensive animals such as cows or goats for cheaper fowls or white flour - in order to satisfy the need for performing a ceremony for the restoration of the broken relationship with the ancestors and among each other. That said, in most of the villages, people felt that more should be done and that lacking money to buy the necessary foodstuffs and replace missing artefacts could mean that some of this practice could be permanently 'lost'. It also often meant, that this reconciliation happened on 'old terms' – with the pre-war social order with its injustices and marginalization of certain groups largely restored. In this respect, there is a space here where the outside assistance could be fruitfully used. But this can hardly be done without increased sensitivity and understanding of the local conciliatory needs and preferences.

It also needs to be emphasised, that the ceremonies and other local practices of social recovery are not an easily transferable, universal formula for assisting the

achievement of reconciliation in all the communities across the country. The situation in the villages that were the focus of my research is very different from the towns for example. Some of the most affected groups such as the amputees and war wounded, many of whom stay in specially constructed settlements usually outside major towns, are disconnected from their home communities but also from their social and spiritual networks that provide the background for the traditional practice. In my conversations in the amputee and war wounded settlement outside Port Loko, people saw little value in performing any ceremonies to help them deal with their ordeals.

It would therefore be a mistake to present the traditional reconciliation and cleansing ceremonies as a panacea for fostering a successful reconciliation process. They after all are also part of the damaged social fabric and not a static tool ready to be used in mending the broken relationships and safeguarding unity and social renewal. But they are also rooted in the local communities' history as well as understandings of what reconciliation means and have shown a high degree of adaptability to the contemporary needs of combatant reintegration and rebuilding relationships after the war. Overlooking them or barely instrumentalising them to turn them into an accessory of the externally-driven peacebuilding processes would therefore be just as flawed.

ANNEX 1 – Research sites

ANNEX 2 – List of Interviews

Code	Participants	Region	Location	Description
INT1	1	South	Bo	Male/Kamajor
INT2	2	South	Valunia chiefdom, village 1	Male + Female, local advocacy group members
INT3	1	South	Sowa chiefdom	Male/Village chief
INT4	2	South	Sowa chiefdom	Male/Kamajor
INT5	1	South	Valunia chiefdom, village 2	Female
INT6	1	South	Valunia chiefdom, village 2	Male
INT7	1	South	Valunia chiefdom, village 2	Male/Kamajor
INT8	1	North	Kabala	Female/RUF abductee
INT9	1	North	Kabala	Female/RUF abductee
INT10	1	North	Kabala	Female/RUF abductee
INT11	1	North	Kabala	Female/RUF abductee
INT12	1	North	Kabala	Female/RUF abductee
INT13	1	North	Kabala	Female/RUF abductee
INT14	1	North	Kabala	Male/RUF abductee
INT15	2	North	Sengbe chiefdom, village 1	Male/Elders
INT16	2	North	Sengbe chiefdom, village 1	Female
INT17	2	North	Sengbe chiefdom, village 2	Male/Elders
INT18	2	North	Sengbe chiefdom, village 2	Female
INT19	1	North	Sengbe chiefdom, village 2	Male/Traditional healer
INT20	1	North	Port Loko	Male/Elder
INT21	2	North	Port Loko	Male/Elders
INT22	1	North	Port Loko	Female
INT23	1	North	Port Loko	Female

INT24	2	North	Port Loko	Female
INT25	1	North	Port Loko	Male
INT26	1	North	Port Loko	Male
INT27	1	North	Maforki chiefdom	Male/Elder
INT28	1	North	Maforki chiefdom	Male/Chief
INT29	2	North	Maforki chiefdom	Male/Youth
INT30	1	North	Sanda Magbolontor chiefdom	Male/Youth
INT31	1	North	Sanda Magbolontor chiefdom	Male
INT32	1	South	Kaiyamba chiefdom	Male/Chief
INT33	1	South	Kaiyamba chiefdom	Male/Kamajor
INT34	1	South	Kaiyamba chiefdom	Female/Elder
INT35	1	South	Fakunya chiefdom	Male/Chief
INT36	1	East	Kissi Teng chiefdom	Male/Youth
INT37	2	East	Kissi Teng chiefdom	Male/Elders
INT38	1	East	Luawa chiefdom, village 1	Male/Youth
INT39	1	East	Luawa chiefdom, village 1	Male/RUF
INT40	1	East	Luawa chiefdom, village 2	Male/RUF
INT41	1	East	Luawa chiefdom, village 2	Male/RUF
INT42	1	East	Luawa chiefdom, village 2	Male/Chief
INT43	1	East	Luawa chiefdom, village 2	Male
INT44	1	East	Luawa chiefdom, village 2	Female
INT45	1	East	Luawa chiefdom, village 2	Male/Elder
INT46	1	East	Luawa chiefdom, village 3	Male/Imam
INT47	1	East	Luawa chiefdom, village 3	Female/Youth
INT48	1	East	Luawa chiefdom, village 3	Female/Elder
INT49	1	East	Luawa chiefdom, village 3	Male/Kamajor
INT50	1	East	Upper Bambara chiefdom	Male/Town speaker

INT51	1	East	Upper Bambara chiefdom	Female
INT52	1	East	Upper Bambara chiefdom	Male
INT53	1	East	Upper Bambara chiefdom	Male/RUF abductee
INT54	1	East	Upper Bambara chiefdom	Male
INT55	1	East	Upper Bambara chiefdom	Female

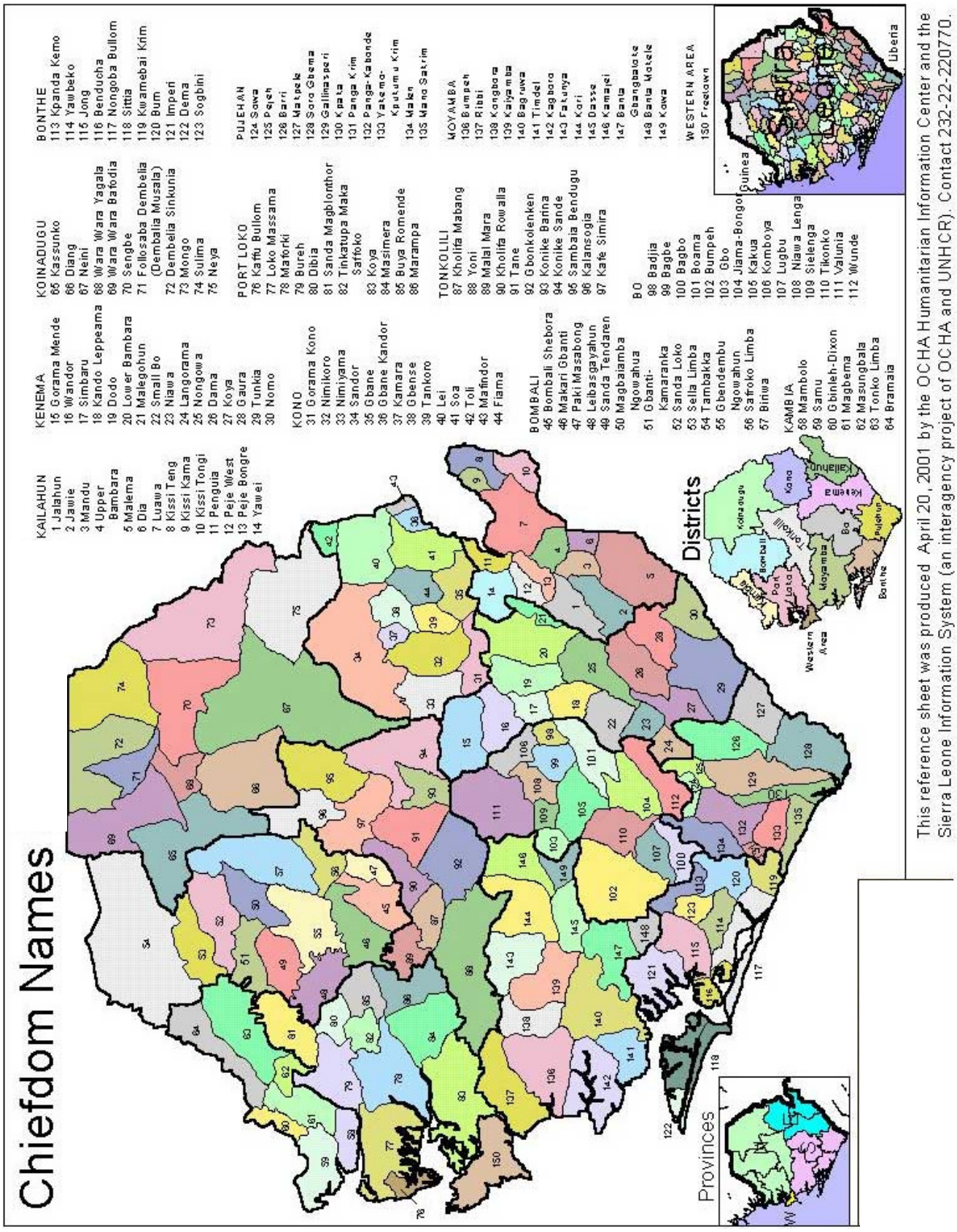
Code	**Participants**	**Region**	**Location**	**Description**
FG1	10	South	Valunia chiefdom, village 1	Women
FG2	8	South	Valunia chiefdom, village 1	Men
FG3	3	South	Sowa chiefdom	Women
FG4	4	South	Sowa chiefdom	Young men
FG5	5	North	Sengbe, village 1	Young men
FG6	6	North	Sengbe, village 2	Young men
FG7	5	North	Wara-Wara Yagala, village 1	Men
FG8	6	North	Wara-Wara Yagala, village 1	Women
FG9	12	North	Port Loko	Young men
FG10	5	North	Maforki chiefdom	Men/Elders
FG11	8	North	Maforki chiefdom	Women
FG12	6	North	Sanda Magbolontor chiefdom	Men/Elders
FG13	3	North	Sanda Magbolontor chiefdom	Women
FG14	4	South	Kaiyamba chiefdom	Men/Elders
FG15	5	South	Kaiyamba chiefdom	Young men
FG16	6	South	Kaiyamba chiefdom	Women
FG17	7	South	Kongbora chiefdom	Women
FG18	4	South	Kongbora chiefdom	Men/Elders
FG19	5	South	Kongbora chiefdom	Young men
FG20	5	South	Fakunya chiefdom	Women

FG21	6	South	Fakunya chiefdom	Young men
FG22	3	South	Kamajei chiefdom	Men/Elders
FG23	5	South	Kamajei chiefdom	Women
FG24	4	South	Kamajei chiefdom	Young men
FG25	5	East	Kailahun	Women
FG26	5	East	Kissi Teng chiefdom	Women
FG27	4	East	Luawa chiefdom, village 1	Men
FG28	4	East	Luawa chiefdom, village 1	Women
FG29	4	East	Luawa chiefdom, village 3	Men/Elders
FG30	10	North	Port Loko	Amputee Focus Group

Code	**Participants**	**Province**	**Location**	**Description**
E1	1	South	Bo	Head of local peacebuilding NGO
E2	1	West	Freetown	Academic at Fourah Bay College
E3	2	West	Freetown	Leaders of local youth association
E4	1	West	Freetown	Head of local peacebuilding NGO
E5	1	West	Freetown	Reverent
E6	1	West	Freetown	Local head of an international developmental NGO
E7	1	West	Freetown	Head of a local peacebuilding NGO
E8	1	West	Freetown	Head of women's NGO
E9	1	West	Freetown	Child Care officer International NGO
E10	1	West	Freetown	Head of local human rights advocacy group
E11	1	West	Freetown	Head of local peacebuilding NGO
E12	1	West	Freetown	Head of local

				peacebuilding NGO
E13	1	West	Freetown	Head of local child care NGO
E14	1	North	Port Loko	District head of a governmental organization
E15	1	North	Port Loko	Social worker at an international NGO
E16	1	South	Moyamba	CDF Defence Lawyer
E17	1	East	Kailahun	Reverent
E18	1	East	Kailahun	Officer at a local peacebuilding NGO
E19	10	East	Kailahun	Focus Group of officers of an international NGO
E20	1	East	Daru	Local town councilor
Expert Interviews 2008				
E21	1	West	Freetown	Head of local peacebuilding NGO, 2008
E22	1	West	Freetown	Head of local human rights advocacy group, 2008
E23	1	West	Freetown	Academic at Fourah Bay College, 2008
E24	1	West	Freetown	Head of international developmental NGO, 2008
E25	1	West	Freetown	Officer at local peacebuilding NGO, 2008
E26	1	West	Freetown	Laura Stovel, 2008
E27	1	West	Freetown	Academic at Fourah Bay College, 2008
E28	1	West	Freetown	Local head of international developmental NGO, 2008

ANNEX 3 – Chiefdom map



ANNEX 4 – Community shrine in Moa

ANNEX 5 – Fambul Tok ceremony

ANNEX 6 – SCSL Outreach posters


GREATEST RESPONSIBILITY
Simeon Sesay 2004
Those alleged to bear the greatest responsibility will be brought to justice by the Special Court.
PRODUCED BY THE OUTREACH SECTION OF THE SPECIAL COURT FOR SIERRA LEONE
EXERCISE

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