

What the Communities Say The Crossroads Between Integration and Reconciliation: What Can Be Learned from the Sierra Leonean Experience?

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CRISE WORKING PAPER No. 63
January 2009



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DFID Department for International Development The UK Department of International Development (DFID) supports policies, programmes and projects to promote international development. DFID provided funds for this study as part of that objective, but the views and opinions expressed are those of the author(s) alone.

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Abstract

This paper analyses the micro-determinants of social integration of former combatants into civilian life by exploring popular perceptions of integration and reconciliation at the community level. Presenting “What the Communities Say”, the status of integration of former RUF fighters in Sierra Leone and their coexistence and reconciliation with their community of residence is examined. I establish, first, that on the surface of day-to-day interactions Sierra Leoneans have achieved a state of peaceful coexistence amongst each other, successfully integrating the majority of former RUF rebels. This positive account leads me to two questions, namely, which factors on the micro-level are responsible for this success and, secondly, how deeply rooted this success is. Regarding the former, I come to the conclusion that integration and coexistence in Sierra Leone are based on a collective effort driven by pragmatic rather than emotional motives, as the fastest way of establishing a state of non-violence. With regard to the second question, my interviews show that peace in Sierra Leone relies on a number of conditions. I then turn to the level of emotions, exploring notions of forgiveness, revenge, and reconciliation. Deep-seated rejection and frustration with the current situation is revealed. Next, I discuss the actual interactions within the communities I studied. A picture of systematic discrimination against ex-combatants emerges. This discloses overall – and not surprisingly – the complexity of the process of integration and reconciliation in a war-torn society. The final section points to policies needed to stabilise relations in Sierra Leone, showing the importance of economic development as well as long-term social interventions.

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List of Acronyms

APC	All People's Congress
CDF	Civil Defense Forces
CTSCDU	Calaba Town Social, Cultural and Development Union
DDR	Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
MYDO	Mayemie Village Development Organisation
RUF	Revolutionary United Front
SCSL	Special Court for Sierra Leone
SLA	Sierra Leone Army
SLPP	Sierra Leone People's Party
TRC	Truth and Reconciliation Commission
UNAMSIL	United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone

What the Communities Say The Crossroads Between Integration and Reconciliation: What Can Be Learned from the Sierra Leonean Experience?

By Johanna Boersch-Supan

1 Introduction¹

Six years after the end of the civil war, integrating ex-combatants into civilian society is still a challenge confronting Sierra Leone. Integration is a multidimensional process, commonly broken down into economic, political, and social integration. In reality these processes are interdependent. For instance, economic contributions of ex-fighters may foster social acceptance, whereas social discrimination may also lead to discrimination on the job market and hence stall economic integration. While *economic* integration in Sierra Leone is impeded by the fact that, despite massive amounts of external aid, the country is by the UNDP's measure the least developed in the world (UNDP 2007), with little employment opportunities outside the agrarian and mining sector, *social* integration is a special challenge due to the widespread atrocities committed against civilians during the 10-year conflict. This paper focuses on *social* integration, broadly understood as a state of reconciliation between ex-combatants and integrating communities. Exploring the *micro*-determinants of integration by focusing on popular perceptions of integration and reconciliation at the community level, I pose the following question: in what ways do notions of reconciliation, forgiveness, justice, revenge, and punishment intersect with the integration process at the community level?

Social integration may be viewed as a two-sided process, encompassing those to be integrated – the ex-combatants – and those accepting integration – the non-combatant community. While much of the literature has focused on either of these groups covering such diverse topics as disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) (Humphreys and Weinstein 2007; McMullin 2004), the socio-economic standing of post-conflict households (Brück 2004a; 2004b), the reintegration of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees (Chimni 2002), collective trauma and social healing (Pouligny 2002; 2005; Pouligny et al 2006; Gbegba and Koroma 2006), transitional justice (Shaw 2005b; 2007; Kelsall 2006; Sawyer and Kelsall 2007), and post-conflict collective action (Bellows and Miguel

¹ Funding for this research was provided by the Center for Research on Inequality, Human Security and Ethnicity (CRISE), the Oxford Research Network on Government in Africa (OReNGA), the Haniel Foundation and the Cusanuswerk. I would like to thank Yvan Guichaoua for comments on drafts of this paper.

2006), few attempts have been made to research the dynamics between ex-combatants and receiving communities during the post-conflict phase. Given the fact that in many recent civil wars rebel and army forces have strategically targeted the civilian population through maiming, (mass-)rape and murder, interaction in the post-conflict situation is likely to be a highly sensitive topic. Understanding the determinants of successful long-term integration from the perspective of the ex-combatants and the determinants of receptivity by the host communities as well as the dynamics between these two groups is, therefore, vital to understanding the prospects for recovery and peace.

Sierra Leone has not only experienced one of the fiercest recent civil wars but is also considered to be one of the most successful examples of peacebuilding and integration. Sierra Leone's ex-combatants are a heterogeneous group and, hence, are confronted with different challenges regarding their integration into civilian life. Importantly, Humphreys and Weinstein (2005; 2007) show that the abusiveness of the armed unit towards civilians affects the ability of ex-combatants to re-enter civilian life as well as the willingness of (victimised) communities to engage with possible former perpetrators. This study, therefore, analyzes the dynamics between former fighters of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) and the communities they have chosen to settle in, as these rebels committed the majority of crimes during the war. Thus, I assume that this faction has had the most difficulties integrating. Interviewing community members, defined as those who were not active in any fighting force during the war, and former RUF combatants, I explored mutual *perceptions* and *expectations* of community members and ex-combatants, their actual *interaction* as well as local notions of *reconciliation*.² It is important to keep in mind that many Sierra Leoneans straddled different identities during the war. While some only fought for a very brief time, now classified as ex-combatants, others, regarded as community members, collaborated fruitfully with one or more of the fighting forces. Therefore, categories are not always clear-cut. However, for the most part ex-combatants and non-combatant community members still form sufficiently distinct groups within Sierra Leone and, thus, a simplified two-sided approach is justified.

² To gain access to communities and acquire broader information regarding integration and reconciliation, I interviewed "opinion leaders" (donors/NGOs, traditional authorities, security forces, clergy, and youth organisations).

The overall aim of the work at hand is to present the status of social integration and reconciliation in Sierra Leone five years after the official end of the civil war in the words of those who live and experience these processes daily – ex-combatants and non-combatant community members. After giving a brief historical overview and literature review on the case, the paper presents a narrative of “what the communities say” regarding the crossroads between integration and reconciliation. Seven major themes, which emerged from my interviews, will structure the two empirical sections, portraying the complexity of post-conflict peacebuilding at the micro-level. I conclude by tying my own findings to the wider research on the case of Sierra Leone.

2 Historical Overview and Literature Review

After a smooth transition to independence in 1961, followed by a brief period of democratic competition, Sierra Leone effectively became a one-party state under the African People’s Congress (APC) from 1973 until the coup of 1992. Political repression, increasingly executed through systematic use of political violence, and socio-economic decline, resulting in growing grievances among a politically, socially, and economically marginalised population, marked the APC’s rule, paving the way for the civil war.

Following the tradition of indirect rule, the British reshaped the chieftaincy system in Sierra Leone in such a way that “chiefs, headmen and elders [were allowed] to define customary law that asserted and legitimated their power and control over the allocation of resources against the interests of juniors, women and migrants” (Berman 1998: 321). The high economic rewards of the chieftaincy led not only to intense competition for the posts but also created considerable opportunities for abuse (Barrows 1976). The pattern of marginalisation and violence for many, while some were part of patron-client relationships receiving privileges and resources as rewards for loyalty, was mirrored on the national level by a patrimonial state increasingly lacking a political equilibrium.

The exercise of political power on the national level was closely linked with (the threat of) violence. In some cases, violence was extreme, not simply intimidating but representing public humiliation and a public demonstration of superiority of the attackers over the victim (Keen 2005:18). This created a public familiarity with political violence associated with party politics and elections still today. Moreover, it set a dangerous example for youths, who would utilise violence in a similar way

during the war. The use of the “stick” of political violence was complemented by a calculated distribution of “carrots”. Keen (2005:16) writes that “[President] Stevens’ political system was based on extending patronage to a relatively small but shifting group of ‘insiders’, whilst intimidating any ‘outsiders’ who expressed their dissatisfaction.” Within this “shadow state”, in which politicians and entrepreneurs colluded to hijack the state for private gain (Reno 1995), the actual state and its bureaucracy were weak, unable to suppress illegal economic activities and accrue resources for development. By 1985/86, domestic revenue collection was at just 18% of its 1977/78 level while spending on development continued to fall, reaching a mere 3% of the overall budget in 1984 (Keen 2005: 23; 25).

With consumer prices skyrocketing due to population pressures, falling food production, currency devaluation, and a system of monopolistic profits benefiting the elite, the importance of being “inside” or “outside” the system was for many a matter of covering even basic needs (Keen 2005: 24). The situation worsened during Momoh’s presidency as he embarked on austerity programmes to win sympathy from the IMF and World Bank. Declining educational standards led to corruption among teachers and mass drop-outs of students, which would soon come to haunt the country as young males with incomplete education formed “the single largest group of irregular combatants” (Richards et al. 1996, quoted in Keen 2005: 28). The importance of belonging to a patronage network to achieve a certain standard of living during this time was epitomised by President Momoh, who stated that education was a “privilege, not a right” (Richards 1996: 36).

The massive resource crisis of the state diminished its ability to secure the loyalty of peripheral populations, regions, and its own officials, including the military. When the army was deployed to enforce a presidential decree against smuggling, stretching the limits of Momoh’s measures became a significant new source of revenue for the armed forces (Zack-Williams and Riley 1993), fostering the development of economic agendas within the military, which would prove significant in driving and prolonging the civil war.

At the local level, a “crisis of youth” (Peters 2006) had emerged. The failing patrimonial system had led to an increasingly large proportion of young men (women in general had little chances of ascending), who were barred from vertical mobility, and, therefore, unable to acquire the position of an adult or elder within the community with its corresponding assets and entitlements (Hardin 1993: 68/9).

Rather, youth was only of concern when authorities wanted to use them for their political and economic gains. Exclusion from education, employment, and positions of influence created widespread anger among youths unable to advance or fulfill a meaningful role in society. The RUF articulated young people's grievances when it declared that: "a society has already collapsed when the majority of its youth can wake up in the morning with nothing to look up for" (RUF 1995:19).

When in 1991 a small group of Sierra Leonean and Liberian fighters, led by former army corporal Fodah Sankoh, entered from Liberia into Kailahun and Pujehun District, their talk of a rebellion against the corrupt political system resonated with a large part of the population and especially marginalised youths. The rebels easily recruited this group, as "deceived by diamonds, bored by agriculture, and powerless against corrupt politicians and lack of opportunities" (Skelt 1997:21) joining the RUF not only provided the satisfaction of bonding with a set of comrades (Bangura 2004), but also proved exciting and, more importantly, lucrative and empowering. Increasing levels of brutality against civilians, however, alienated the population, making the RUF dependent on forced abductions of children and youths during the war. What started as a small rebellion, evolved into a civil war that lasted 11 years and was characterised by horrific levels of violence, mainly directed against the civilian population, causing tens of thousands of deaths, the displacements of half the population and leaving tens of thousands maimed, raped, and severely traumatised.

Two academic debates surround the analysis of the Sierra Leonean war. First the background of the fighters and their motivations for fighting are disputed, and, secondly, the rationality and explicability of violence in the light of the horrific brutality of the conflict is debated. Competing theories discuss whether the core of the RUF is to be found in undisciplined, uneducated urban "lumpen" youths (Abdullah 2004) or ideologically driven, disciplined cadres with a large backing from marginalised rural youths (Richards 1996; Peters 2006) and whether the movement was driven by political goals or mere greed (Collier and Hoeffler 2000). Relying on a large-scale survey among ex-combatants from all factions, Humphreys and Weinstein (2004; 2006) present "What the Fighters Say", finding support for all of the competing theories, suggesting that the rivalry between them is artificial. Their data suggests that across factions, greed and grievances – political and material motivations – mattered for recruitment. While RUF fighters claimed to have fought to bring down the existing corrupt regime, combatants of the Civil Defense Forces (CDF), vigilante groups, argued that they had defended their communities. Material incentives

operated as well. RUF combatants were promised jobs, money, and women; they received women, drugs, and sometimes more valuable goods. The CDF helped to meet the basic needs of its members and provided increased security for their families. As most rank-and-file were not directly engaged in the lucrative natural resource trade, these profits do not help to explain the motivations of the vast majority of combatants. Rather, throughout the conflict, most fighters remained focused on basic needs. Importantly, both Humphreys and Weinstein (2004; 2006) and Peters and Richards (1998) find that recruitment strategies and the composition of the fighting forces were different for different groups and changed over time as the conflict progressed. Thus, while the RUF was a group of mutual strangers, largely recruited by force, the CDF originated from tight family and community networks enabling it to rely much more on voluntary recruitment. However, the researchers found a striking consistency in the demographic profiles of the different warring factions. No large differences along ethnic, regional, or religious lines emerged across factions and the vast majority of fighters were uneducated and poor, with the average level of education of fighters continuously declining throughout the course of the conflict.

While for some observers the violent excesses amounted to a war “randomly” fought by “mindless” combatants (Kaplan 1994), Richards (1996) stresses that the RUF’s violence was actually a quite “rational” attempt to articulate and dramatise the grievances of those floating at the margins of an exploitative patrimonial state. Violence here is conceptualised as a plea for attention from those who felt they had been forgotten. Richards’ rationalisation of the RUF was seen by many as dangerously close to a justification of the horrors committed. Keen (2005) provides a nuanced view of how grievances were not only the root cause of the conflict, but also how they shaped the extreme violence pursued by the rebels and other fighting forces. In economic terms (Keen 2005: 48-55), the war provided its fighters with the ability to loot, thus escaping poverty. More importantly, economic factors were crucial for the duration of the conflict as the leaders of all fighting forces developed strong economic agendas geared towards the exploitation of Sierra Leone’s natural resources. Significantly, the diamond-mining regions were the sites of some of the fiercest battles in a war otherwise characterised by low-tech weaponry, hit-and-run-attacks, and jungle ambushes. Keen (2003: 68) rejects, however, the idea that the conflict was “all about diamonds”, rather, he locates the source of “greed” in grievances. As described above, Sierra Leone’s society was marked by enormous inequality in access to power, education, employment, and wealth, with youths being

the losers within the patrimonial system. The war involved the direct and immediate transfer of power from the “haves” to the “have-nots” and from the old to the young, turning previous roles on their head. In many cases, violence was directed against chiefs and elders. More generally, violence was often conducted in such a way that it would force “respect” and “recognition” for the perpetrator. This constituted a cruel game, where those turned rebel, reacted to previous humiliation and oppression by inflicting even greater humiliation on their current victims (Keen 2005: 59-75). Keen (2005: 75-81) portrays extreme violence as taking place in a world of shamelessness, which had removed all “normal moral constraints” among the rebels. Shamelessness in committing heinous crimes was based on a belief in killing and harming those “causing the war”, i.e. the corrupt elite and whoever was perceived as supporting them. Violence was, thus, seen as justified. At the same time, the constant “threat of shame” inflicted upon the rebels by alienated civilians risked shattering the twisted logic of this enclosed world, leading to a high propensity to attack anyone arousing a sense of shame, be it within the rebel group or from the outside. This led to a vicious circle of violence met by resentment feeding even more extreme violence. Moreover, drug use, an externalisation of violence to other forces (i.e. the belief of being possessed during battle), and the more general climate of impunity provided a context conducive to extreme violence.

The war in Sierra Leone was fought by a multitude of actors in various coalitions, defying clear dichotomies of “the good” vs. “the bad” or a formulation of who was whose enemy. Crudely put, at the beginning of the war, the RUF fought against the weak Sierra Leonean Army. The rebels received arms and supplies through Charles Taylor in Liberia, while mercenaries from South Africa and regional troops from Guinea and Nigeria assisted the government’s troops. The army’s fighting, however, was characterised by an incapability and increasingly unwillingness to actually defeat the rebels. Instead, covert collusion of the two groups, which recruited youths in the thousands from the same marginalised background, led to the phenomenon of “sobels”: soldiers at day, rebels at night. The unreliability of the army led to the rise of Civil Defence Forces built around groups of traditional hunters called “kamajors”. Finally, the end stages of the war also saw international military interventions by the British army and UN peacekeepers. It is important to note regarding the different fighting forces is that all *local* fighting forces engaged in the recruitment of minors and committed large-scale atrocities against civilians. Similarly, all local and regional forces followed economic agendas during the war considerably, and possibly knowingly, prolonging the conflict. Thus, the RUF has been described as “an

environment” capitalised on by a variety of groups to pursue their own goals (Keen 2005: 267).

President Kabbah declared the end of the war on 18 January 2002. He and his Sierra Leone People’s Party (SLPP) easily won the May 2002 presidential and parliamentary elections. The RUF party only received 2.3% of the votes and was dissolved in 2007. Two failed rounds of peace negotiations (Abidjan 1996; Lomé 1999) and DDR efforts preceded the final end of the war. After the signing of Abuja I/II (November 2000/May 2001), which determined the creation of a war-crimes tribunal and the largest UN Peacekeeping mission to that date (UNAMSIL), peace and stability progressed fast. By January 2002, almost 72,500 fighters, including 24,000 RUF and 37,000 kamajors, had demobilised (ICG 2002: 13). The reasons for this sudden, relatively smooth transition can be found in several external and internal factors, which decreased the incentives to go on fighting and increased a favourable view of peace. First, the rebels took a heavy beating under rigorous measures from regional and international troops, while international sanctions cut off Liberian support. Second, now a high-profile conflict, international attention shifted to the fight against Sierra Leonean “blood diamonds”, curtailing the benefits of the war economy. Third, enhanced DDR programmes increased the attractiveness of peace. Internally, the RUF tone of command shifted as more moderate leaders, like Issa Sesay, took control, while the hardliners were in prison (notably Sankoh). Finally, the rank and file had grown war-weary and were keen to demobilise (Keen 2005: 274).

Sierra Leone has been peaceful since 2002 with a relatively low crime rate. The country shows a promising development towards a competitive democratic system, reflected in multiple peaceful elections on the national and local level, which even saw a change of government in 2007. However, the 2007/08 Human Development Report places Sierra Leone last among 177 ranked countries. While a host of interventions by the government and the international community are promoting various strands of post-conflict reconstruction, an important question is which kind of reconstruction Sierra Leone needs. As has been shown above, the roots of the war can be found in the pre-war political, social, and economic system. Reconstructing, therefore, would be highly undesirable. Other authors have analysed post-conflict reconstruction efforts (cf. ICG 2004; Reno 2004; Humphreys and Richards 2005; Thomson 2007); here, it is important to mention that a number of grievances have outlasted the war. Unemployment is extremely high among youths in general and ex-combatants in particular. Patronage politics are “very much alive”, shaping access to

resources and opportunities (Keen 2005: 219). Corruption at all levels is still the order of the day, although general awareness is growing. The chieftaincy system, even after the 2000-2002 reform, looks much the same as before the war (Fanthorpe 2004a; 2004b; 2005). To be sure, the war has also brought enormous changes; most important to mention here is a change in the attitude among youths in general and women in particular, who demonstrate a new unwillingness to submit to abuses by chiefs and other authorities (Keen 2003; Richards 2004; Peters 2006).

The term *re*integration is as problematic as *re*construction, as it assumes not only that the physical and social structures of communities exist, but also that former fighters will return to some kind of *status quo ante*. This assumption is neither realistic, as war deeply changes communities, nor desirable in a situation in which factors embedded in the pre-war society provoked conflict (Peters 2006: 135). Here, post-conflict integration is conceptualised as a process of contestation and negotiation between different societal groups to determine the shape of social structures. Ex-combatants are one of these groups in Sierra Leone today.

DDR was the first formal effort to transform combatants into civilians. Funded by the international community, demobilisation efforts began in 1996 but went through multiple stop-and-go phases due to renewed cycles of violence (Fitz-Gerald 2005). The final phase of DDR, which offered cash payment, various trainings and tool-kits to ex-combatants, achieved “a moderate level of success” (Fitz-Gerald 2005: 66/67). It failed, however, in two important ways: first, training and tool-kits were not oriented towards actual demand in the economy leading to considerable unemployment at the end of the training programmes, while a number of other desperately needed skills stayed untapped. Second, a short-sighted agenda on the part of the international community led to a lack of longer-term projects monitoring and fostering integration into the economy and communities. To the deep frustration of many local NGOs, “reintegration [was treated] as a project, not a process” (INT4).

Little research has been done on the determinants of integration at the micro-level. A notable exception is the research of Humphreys and Weinstein (2004; 2005; 2007) based on a survey conducted in 2003 among 1,043 ex-combatants. They find that individual-level rather than faction-level features strongly determinate reintegration success. The survey’s most notable result is the strong connection between past experiences of violence and integration success: past participation in an abusive military faction is statistically the strongest predictor of difficulty in achieving *social*

reintegration, i.e. acceptance from family and neighbours. Weak evidence was found that individuals who settle in communities that suffered high levels of abuse during the war encounter more difficulty in gaining acceptance from family and friends. Further results include that social reintegration was found to be easier for CDF fighters, of whom close to 75% returned to the communities in which they had lived before the war began, while only 34% of RUF combatants returned home. Overall, Humphreys and Weinstein find evidence for integration success, as the vast majority of ex-fighters reported high levels of acceptance. However, 6% reported difficulties in social reintegration at the time of the survey. This estimated pool of 5,000³ struggling fighters is nevertheless a cause of concern in a country in which a mere 200 initiated a civil war. Major concerns of ex-combatants were access to education and the availability of jobs. Importantly, however, most believed access to education and health care were better than before the conflict began. This suggests that some of the conditions identified by combatants as the root causes of the conflict have improved. Finally, the survey shows that most ex-combatants rejected violence as an instrument for political change. Instead, they expressed tentative confidence in Sierra Leone's new democracy.

Reconciliation is neither a word nor a concept native to Sierra Leone, although its use has spread in the post-war period mainly because of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). To understand Sierra Leonean notions of reconciliation at the grassroots level, four interlinked terms are important: "kol hart"/"warm hart" (cool heart/warm heart), "wan word" (one word)⁴, "forgetting", and economic status. Rosalind Shaw (2002; 2005a; 2005b; 2006; 2007) has done extensive research on these notions during fieldwork in the last three decades. "Kol hart" is a personal condition necessary for proper social relationships with others. It forms the basis for life in a community. When the heart, the center of feelings, thoughts, and intentions, is "kol", it is not angry or resentful as it would be if it was "warm". "Won word" is a much stronger term than "kol hart" and it is used less often. It refers not only to mutual "kol hart" in a collective, like a family or community, but also suggests that these people can speak and act in unity; they literally have "one word". Different from "reconciliation", which suggests a relationship between individuals and has a strong connotation of a redemptive Christian forgiveness as well as the restoration of a former state, "kol hart" and "won word" imply a capacity

³ Extrapolated from the estimated total number of combatants (Humphreys and Weinstein 2005: 5)

⁴ Equivalents to these Krio terms exist in Temne: "ka-buth ke-thofel" (cool/settled heart) (Shaw 2005a: 1) and Mende: "ndi lei" (cold heart), "ndi nyamui"/"ndi nohui" (hot, warm, dirty, bad heart) (INT38).

for group cohesion and collective action. Most people express the achievement of “kol hart” in terms of “forgetting”, i.e. containing painful memories, rather than erasing them from memory. “Remembering”, on the other hand, is an emotional process, which returns a person to a state of “warm hart” arousing pain, anger, revenge, etc. The process of “forgetting” and hence achieving “kol hart”, is closely tied with the economic status of a person. Employment or material wealth enables a person to build a new life and, hence, let go of the event or period, which brought the “warm hart”. I will return to Shaw’s findings regarding integration and reconciliation in the final section, comparing her results to mine.

“[T]o promote healing and reconciliation” (TRC 2004), the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was put in place from 2000-2004. Truth commissions work on the assumption that verbally recounting personal memories of violence promotes healing, reconciliation, and peace (Shaw 2005b:7). Within the Sierra Leonean notion of “forgetting”, however, verbal recollection of violent events (especially in public) is undesirable as it makes that violence present, hindering the achievement of a “kol hart”. Shaw (2007:15) writes that most of those who gave statements viewed this practice of textualising their violent memories as part of an exchange that would bring them material benefit, thus enabling “forgetting”. Not receiving any compensation left the majority deeply disappointed, seeing the TRC as providing an incomplete reconciliation mechanism. Similarly, Kelsall (2005) observed in 2003 that the process of “truth-telling” sat uneasily with Sierra Leoneans. However, what validated the TRC for him were the ceremonial and ritualistic moments, which created an emotional atmosphere among all participants leading to genuine – even if momentary – relief. Both authors conclude that the TRC was not so much culturally misplaced but that it could have played a greater role in bringing about reconciliation if it had encompassed more local features, such as non-verbal rituals, a focus on apologies, or compensation.

While the TRC was set up to create restorative justice, focused on war victims, the Special Court (SCSL) is supposed to bring about retributive justice. Sierra Leone was the first country where such a two-pronged approach was initiated. The SCSL’s mandate is to try *“those who bear the greatest responsibility”* for serious violations of international humanitarian law. Ten persons associated with the various domestic fighting forces as well as former Liberian president Charles Taylor stand indicted by

the Special Court. Five cases have been closed, with the accused sentenced to prison terms of 15 to 50 years. The other five cases are still in session.⁵

Sawyer and Kelsall (2007) conducted an opinion survey into transitional justice in three districts of Sierra Leone in 2005. They found widespread 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/do and at times confusion between the two. The authors' ultimate conclusion therefore is that, if such institutions are to be successful in their goal, namely *national* reconciliation and feelings of justice, then a sound understanding of their work rather than broad uninformed support is vital. This criticism is widespread, with many accounts observing fear of the TRC and SCSL among ex-combatants and civilians due to ignorance about their mandates (Richards et al. 2003; Shaw 2005b).

While the TRC and SCSL are the high-profile institutions mandated with dealing with the violent past of the country and fostering justice, reconciliation and peace, a host of interventions by NGOs, donors, and the government provided projects at the local, regional, and national level to deal with integration and reconciliation. Overall, these efforts have been described as successful in so far as they have created an "awareness" of the complexity of integration and "sensitised" people against rejection and revenge. However, an often-heard criticism is that they were too short-term in their design and did not take into account local mechanisms geared towards integration and reconciliation (Shaw 2005a).

3 What the Communities Say I: The Surface of Peaceful Coexistence

The following two sections constitute the core of my research, presenting in detail the data collected in the field.⁶ In line with the spirit of the first part of the title of this work, namely "What the Communities Say", the following sections offer a narrative. Structured by seven larger themes, which emerged as focal points from the overwhelming majority of my interviews, excerpts from my data will bring together a picture of the status of integration of former RUF fighters and coexistence in the community, in the words of those Sierra Leoneans I interviewed. The main goal then is to let my respondents speak as much as possible, while a minimum of interpretation and analysis from the author's side provides a red thread through the

⁵ All relevant documents pertaining to the cases can be found at <http://www.sc-sl.org>.

⁶ A detailed research appendix discussing the research design and the process of data collection and analysis can be obtained from the author upon request.

narrative. The final section will draw conclusions from these accounts and tie them to the literature presented above.

First, I establish that on the surface of day-to-day interactions, Sierra Leoneans have achieved a state of peaceful coexistence amongst each other, successfully integrating the majority of former RUF rebels. This positive account leads me to two questions, namely, which factors on the micro-level are responsible for this success and, secondly, how deeply rooted this success is. Regarding the former, I come to the conclusion that integration and coexistence in Sierra Leone are based on a collective effort driven by pragmatic rather than emotional motives, as the fastest way of establishing a state of non-violence. Further, I explore broader factors, in which, according to my respondents, this decision was embedded. With regard to the second question, my interviews show that peace in Sierra Leone relies on a number of conditions, which will be explored as the fourth theme. I then turn to the level of emotions, exploring notions of forgiveness, revenge, and reconciliation. In the sixth theme, I discuss the actual interactions within the communities I studied. A picture of systematic discrimination against ex-combatants emerges. This reveals overall – and not surprisingly – the complexity of the process of integration and reconciliation in a war-torn society. The final section presents the future peace needs for Sierra Leone as stated by my informants.

Before proceeding to the narrative, I will lay out the setting of my fieldwork. I held interviews in three regions of Sierra Leone to reflect a relatively even national geography and to capture regional variations regarding experiences of the war (see map below). This selection factor was based on the results from Humphreys and Weinstein's (2005; 2007) survey, which found that violence committed as well as experienced is a strong determinant for successful integration. While my data confirms a link between violence and integration on the individual level, no regional pattern emerged. This is likely due to the non-representativeness of my sample. The data is, therefore, presented as one larger sample, rather than with reference to the three regions.

I conducted a total of 71 interviews during my nine-week stay, 56 of which were individual interviews, six tandem interviews, in which I questioned two respondents, and nine focus-group discussions. The smallest group comprised three people, the largest 12. I recorded the answers of a total of 119 respondents. Thirty-two interviews and six focus-group discussions with a total of 67 respondents were held in

Freetown. This focus on the capital was less intentional than dictated by the security situation surrounding the presidential and parliamentary elections. Further, as I was unable to travel to Kailahun, due to security and heavy rains, I held a few interviews in Kenema (10 interviews; nine respondents), a former stronghold of the CDF, and the diamond fields of Tongo (two interviews, five respondents), which the RUF only relinquished in 2002. The last two weeks I spent, as planned, in the northern cities of Makeni and Magburaka. I conducted nine interviews and two focus groups (15 respondents) in Makeni and nine interviews and one focus group (23 respondents) in Magburaka.

Figure 1: Map of Actual and Planned Fieldwork Locations

*Int = Interviews / Res = Respondents



3.1 Peaceful Coexistence

According to my informants, peace in Sierra Leone is, first and foremost, associated with the absence of war, i.e. the cessation of violence, insecurity, and destruction. The primary connotation of peace then is non-violence. Against the backdrop of this conceptualisation of peace, the first picture emerging from a look at day-to-day communal relations, informed by both participant observation as well as the views provided by informants, shows exactly this situation of non-violence, while the specific relationship between the wider community and former fighters can be described as a state of mutual toleration or peaceful coexistence. In Tongo, a chief described the current situation in the mining town: those who are just coming along (*points with his head towards two men*), they are ex-combatants. One is a teacher now. They are all here. They are in good condition, talking nicely, cracking jokes. Since disarmament, there has been no problem in this town, in this section. Too many are here but they do not have done anything bad to us yet. Perhaps, this relationship will continue. (...) [People here] trust them, according to my view. [INT47_OL]⁷ The chief and an elder in Magburaka went further, terming communal relations as “cordial” due to the ex-fighters’ economic engagement in the town and intermarriage.

Elder3: It is difficult to distinguish between ex-combatants and citizens in Magburaka. After DDR, almost every one of them engaged in doing things: tailoring, mechanics,...

Regent Paramount Chief: ...driving.

Elder3: So the relationship is actually a cordial relationship. (...)

Regent Paramount Chief: Some (...) married women from this town, now they have one, two, three children. [INT64_OL]

In focus-group discussions and interviews with a wider range of community people as well as ex-combatants, the positive outlook on coexistence was confirmed. The perception is that the former fighters have changed and are no longer dangerous or harmful to the community. A group from Mayemie Village reports:

Q. How do ex-combatants and community members live together in this community?

⁷ Each quote is tagged with the number of the interview and the acronym OL, EX or COMM, signifying whether the interview was held with an opinion leader, an ex-combatant or a community member. It should be kept in mind that these are not analytical categories, but merely facilitate the organisation of the data. As some interviews were held with more than one person or conducted as a focus-group discussion, excerpts may quote multiple persons. To guarantee confidentiality for those who wished to remain anonymous, pseudonyms are used.

mRes14: There is no error with the ex-combatants. Some have their family here. (...) We are living cool and calm. (...)

mRes16: We are working hand in hand. Sometimes there are quarrels. But with the help of other youths, they are put in place. We live in peace. We cope without outside help. We do it ourselves. (...)

mRes14: (...) We meet to drink, we share ideas. I can go to their house, I eat with them. I share ideas with them. (...)

mRes18: (...) They are no problems. Some have businesses. Some are drivers.

fRes3: (...) [There is n]o problem. [We t]alk fine. [We s]hare things together.

[INT27_COMM]

This positive view is confirmed by multiple ex-combatants, who state that they feel they are a member of the community like anybody else (INT24;13;29). A former female fighter explains: We decided to stay here because it is peaceful for us here. (...) I experienced peace here and stayed. [INT72_EX] Moreover, former combatants socialise with a mixed group of friends, i.e. former combatants and other youths in the community (INT22;29;66), while non-combatant youths claimed to have friends among the former fighters (INT62). Furthermore, many married after the war and were, thus, accepted into their wife's family (INT13;24;52). Respondents also pointed to the fact that several ex-fighters are employed in their places of residence and, hence, are peacefully integrated (INT60;38). The test really is this, the chairman of one of the youth organisations in Calaba Town explained, it is difficult for us now to differentiate them from others. Their behavior does not stand out anymore. [INT18_OL]

Given that Sierra Leone had an exceptionally gruesome civil war, which allows the assumption that the integration of perpetrators would be particularly difficult, two questions are worth asking. Namely, which factors at the micro-level are responsible for this integration success at the surface? And what are the characteristics of the state of integration that has been achieved, i.e. how deeply rooted is this success? I claim that the previous section has shown the surface of day-to-day life in my fieldwork places. Diving below this surface reveals – not surprisingly – more complex realities, which show that integration and reconciliation are far from complete. Rather than invalidating the above-shown success that has been achieved on the surface of every day life, however, this more comprehensive view points to the fragility of peace, and assesses how Sierra Leoneans deal with the memories of the war and shape paths of reconciliation, forgiveness, justice, revenge, and punishment.

3.2 *The Price We Pay for Peace*

Which micro-level factors, then, are responsible for the integration success at the surface? My data suggests that integration was first and foremost made possible by a desperate longing for an end to violence. Sierra Leoneans, therefore, accepted a trade-off between coexistence with former perpetrators and peace. Drawing on observations made directly after the war, Peters (2006:145) writes: “It is through the general desire for peace that ex-combatants are forgiven.” The war, understandably, is a powerful memory to Sierra Leoneans. None of my respondents, ex-combatant or non-combatant, expressed any wish, whatsoever, for a resumption of violence. Indeed, the upcoming election caused considerable tensions, as many were outright terrified that there would be violent disruptions. In Togo, I was told by one of the Section Chiefs that: As long as Kabbah has stopped the sound of the barrel, we are happy for that. When the barrel was active, there was nothing to do but to save your life. [INT47_OL] A woman from Makeni seconds this:

fRes15: After the war, I was very happy. There was finally peace.

Q. What was your feeling after the war, when the rebels decided to live here?

fRes15: They told us, we have to forgive and forget. (...)

Q. And you just accepted it?

fRes15: Yes. As true Christians, you have to forgive.

Q. Was that difficult?

fRes15: Yes! But there were no alternatives. [INT57_COMM]

Integration, then, is couched in terms of there being no alternative. Coexistence is the trade-off for peace. A man from Magburaka explains that the deal of peace against integration is in no way easy to accept: I am speaking generally, if someone has committed an atrocity, at any time, when you see that person. At any time, you will remember what they have done. At any time you set eyes on them, it does not feel good. But we are doing that for peace. [INT70_COMM].

The peace deal was put forth by the Kabbah administration. Kabbah strongly relied on his prestige and influence to literally prescribe the nation to “forgive and forget”. The Paramount Chief in Kenema explained the initiative of the former government, which had a considerable effect on preventing a post-war cycle of revenge despite ill feelings from the population towards the general amnesty: Solo B. and Kabbah begged the community to accept these people back. They brought together all stakeholders and community people and preached to them: “We want you to allow your children, nephews, wives, who were fighting, to be accepted. Do not point

fingers at any of them. Do not abuse them. Do not revenge. If that happens, the peace will not be sustainable.” [INT42_OL]

Kabbah’s “presidential urging to forgive”, as long-term expatriate Peter Anderson calls it, has gone a long way to stabilise relations between former fighters and their host communities. However, it is questionable if this automatically paints a rosy picture of coexistence as Anderson observes: Sierra Leone looks pretty good because there was high pressure to reconcile. For example, there was a presidential urging to forgive. So many did. Said they did at least. But they keep them at arm’s length. There is no welcoming but also no revenge. The war is over. [INT3_OL]

In light of these statements, reintegration seems to rest on a pragmatic decision rather than an emotional one. Sierra Leoneans accept the fighters within their communities, as this enabled a swift transition to the long-sought peace. Paying this price for peace, however, was not an easy decision for most to make. Respondents did admit that for the sake of peace and stability they accepted that they must forgo revenge and suppress feelings of rejection and vengeance. Women in particular admitted that they would like to see former perpetrators punished or held accountable. Even more people expressed distaste for living together with former combatants in the same community. All respondents were aware of the fact that revenge and rejection of ex-fighters would cause new tensions and potential violence and this is a strong incentive not to air their disagreement publicly. It is difficult and hard but also easier to forgive than to forget. If we would not have forgiven, the war would have gone on. [INT64_OL], the regent paramount chief of Magburaka stated matter-of-factly. But many also express a lack of empowerment to take steps towards revenge or rejection.

Reintegration, then, is not a choice: We are just coping with this behavior, there is no way to get rid of them [INT35_COMM], a woman in Calaba Town explains. Bishop Biguzzi qualifies the coexistence, which is the result of “the price we had to pay for peace”: [T]hey have been accepted here. They are here and the people know they are here. So superficially, there are no tensions. The motto is “live and let live”. (...) Nobody wants to go back to that nonsense [i.e. the war]. It was so bad and everybody knows that. So it is an unspoken agreement. To not dig up old skeletons. Let them live. [INT55_OL]

3.3 Components of Peace

Sierra Leoneans have accepted former fighters back into their communities for the sake of peace. But integration and peace rest on a host of factors, which came together in the post-conflict period enabling the country to move forward. Each individual experienced these components differently. Nevertheless, from my interviews, four factors emerged, which intersected with the integration and peacebuilding process in such a way that they were described as facilitating the handling of this difficult process on an individual level: social ties, religiosity, silence and suppression, and institutional interventions and local initiatives.

Social Ties

The fact that the war was not based on disputes between ethnic groups means that peacebuilding is not an exercise of reconciling two or more sections of society, which turned against each other. Rather, given that the patrimonial system created cleavages along gender and age lines within almost every community, integration and reconciliation are more individualistic processes. Two important facts flow from this: first, in several instances those victimised by rebels during the war direct their anger and revengeful thoughts against those rebels who harmed them, not against the rebel group as a whole, allowing for the integration of those who did not do them direct harm. Rather than condemning the fighters as a group, the amputees⁸ I interviewed, for instance, listed the names of those individuals who maimed them.

The second fact was pointed out by the APC parliamentary candidate, Abdul Karim Koroma: The war did not have an ethnic side. (...) This made it easier for people to come back out of the bush. They were basically their children. They had to take them back. [INT5_OL] A common saying in Sierra Leone is “*There is no bad bush to throw away a bad child*”, meaning that if it is your child, you cope with any kind of misbehavior [INT35_COMM], a woman from Calaba Town explained. Arguably, the war in Sierra Leone put family bonds to an extreme test. Many recruits were forced to commit atrocities against their family members precisely to invoke feelings of shame and fear of return. The saying is nevertheless reflected by my interviews. A former rebel in Mayemie Village explained: Because I am from this soil, my people have to encourage me; because I am a family member. Family plays the greater role. Whatever bad you do, the community will accept you. You are part of the soil. [INT27_EX].

⁸ Maiming was used as a deliberate strategy especially by the RUF and in later stages by the army, to terrorise civilians. Amputees are, therefore, a large group of war victims in Sierra Leone, many of whom live in special amputee settlements today.

Religiosity

Respondents stated that religiosity eased dealing with reintegration. The belief or hope is that god will settle the injustice people themselves are unable to rectify. The chief of an amputee settlement outside Freetown believes that one day, we will all have to stand in front of the maker and will have to account for all our actions. He goes on to explain that while the SCSL has decided to try only those with the greatest responsibility there will be god's court for everybody. [INT20_OL] Taking personal refuge in their belief in a Last Judgment Day indicates that many do harbour feelings of injustice and longing for redress. At the same time, turning to god for a solution is an expression of the individual's lack of empowerment to change this situation and act out their actual feelings of revenge and pain: At the initial stage, I was highly angry to see these people. But there is no way to revenge. We must forget. We are looking up to god to do justice now. [INT47_OL] Others see it not so much as disempowerment but, more pragmatically, as a path that will provide Sierra Leone with peace now, while justice, that would cause renewed trouble, will be provided later on: Let them just leave these people. Punishment will create another problem. They all belong to a family and if you punish them, the family will react against that. We are looking out for continuity. (...) All those who committed atrocities, they believe in god. Let god take his course on them. [INT70_COMM]

Suppression and Resilience

I was frequently pointed to a societal habit of silencing and suppressing grievances. Applied to the conflict this means the suppression of anger, revenge, and pain, enabling peace and integration. The Chairman of the Youth Organisation in Mayemie explained "forgetting" the following way: It is difficult to forget, because the signs of the war are all around (...). It is not a day's work. (...) As long as remembering is not backed up with violence, people forget step by step. ***Forgetting is when even if they think of the war there are no emotions.*** [INT14_OL; my emphasis] "Forgetting", then, is justified by the argument that "remembering" is a highly emotional process, potentially leading to renewed violence. While Shaw (2007) describes "forgetting" as a strategy to overcome a violent past, for many the suppression of memories is simply not a choice: we cannot forget what has happened, as we are constantly reminded of it by the lack of our hands [INT20_OL], is the powerful statement of the chief of an amputee settlement.

Some regard “forgetting” positively, as an expression of a high willingness of Sierra Leoneans to forgive (INT4;15; 41; 55). [T]he Sierra Leonean mind is very forgiving. It is different from the neighboring countries, like Guinea and Nigeria where vengeance is a big part of the culture. But here not. (...) This was also a key to reintegration. [INT5_OL], APC-candidate Koroma stated. However, others also see a danger in the tendency to suppress emotions, as another “Sierra Leonean characteristic” is impulsiveness: So they have very sudden moods. Sudden bursts of anger but also sudden happiness. (...) The people here, they are very emotional. Sometimes they do things so quickly, later they regret it. [INT56_OL], says Father Victor, an Italian priest who has lived in Sierra Leone for over 30 years. Regarding this, Keen (2005: 68) writes: “Strongly ingrained habits of deference and silence in Sierra Leone may eventually have added vehemence to the violence. [...The Mende would rather] harbour a dark heart of hatred than protest. (...) Hardin (1993:109) said of the Kono people (...) when emotions do break out, they are often uncontrollable, testimony to the fact that people spent a great deal of energy trying to contain them (...).”

Institutional Interventions and Local Initiatives

Respondents put forth institutionalised efforts as another factor interacting with the integration and peacebuilding process. Initiatives on the national level mentioned most often were DDR programs, the TRC, the SCSL, and the huge range of projects brought in by NGOs/donors and religious institutions. My own interviews did not include specific questions regarding these institutions; rather they included terms like “punishment”, “justice”, “revenge”, “forgiveness”, or “reconciliation”. It is interesting to note that few respondents made a direct link to the TRC or SCSL, when talking about these topics. This allows for two tentative observations: First, most of my respondents did not see the SCSL as a *sufficient* answer to their desire for punishment of perpetrators. Second, a majority of respondents expressed discontent with the lack of apologies from ex-combatants and formalised events bringing together victims and perpetrators to forge reconciliation, the task of the TRC. In this sense, my limited data questions the effectiveness of these institutions while affirming that the purpose they were set up for initially – retributive and restorative justice, respectively – is what people had expected and still demand.

Today, initiatives fostering integration and peace are mostly located at the community level as most NGOs/donors have moved on to intervention areas other than integration. An interesting case is youth organisations, representing and organising youth (including ex-combatants) at the local level. In Mayemie Village and Calaba

Town I observed the important role these organisations play in mediating disputes between youths and older community people, negotiating petty crimes with the police, and bringing together non-combatant and ex-combatant youth.

Mayemie Village

Section Chief1: The goodwill of organisations has played a great role for this kind of peace at this time. (...) The community people themselves started an organisation. It was started to discuss past grievances when the ex-combatants moved here to be able to forge ahead. [INT15_OL]

The chairman of the Mayemie Development Organisation (MYDO) explains how he first got the idea to form the organisation: When I arrived in this village four years ago, I observed that the people were using youths to settle their disputes. (...) So I saw those odd things going on and decided to assist the youths. So I started with a football organisation to mobilise the people together. I thought it fit to transform it into a proper youth organisation, so I went to the chief first, because I believe that the chief holds rights to bring together the community. (...) That is how it started [in 2003]. After that, I engaged in mobilisation and sensitisation. I talked with youths to abstain from violence and work for development. He elaborates: We had two workshops and a football gala [competition]. At that time, I would campaign to them. Talk to them to stop fighting, refrain from violence. **Q. When you talk about youths, do you talk about all young people or ex-combatants?** This organisation does not segregate. We do not differentiate. He goes on to explain how the organisation mediates within the community and with the police: [W]hen [...the community] wants to complain, they come to me and complain to me. (...) They tell me of abusive language or provocation. I am a member of the Community Policing Board. We deal with such things like the use of insulting language, whereas only stabbing incidents or worse are dealt with by the public police. [INT14_OL] I was able to observe the chairman “in action” during one of my visits to Mayemie Village. I wrote the incident down afterwards: *“While we do interviews in Mayemie, a police officer comes by with two guys. They head for the poyohut⁹ where the chairman is. They are said to have stolen something from a market women. The chairman is doing his own investigation now, part of his duty as community police. He will then decide whether to pay for the damage and, thereby, solve the problem without arrest. I ask where he takes the money from. Lansana, my research assistant, explains: ‘Everybody who is in the*

⁹ A poyohut is a place where palmwine is sold and consumed. In Mayemie Village it was one of the hang-out places of youth.

organisation and earns something must pay a contribution, it is like a tax to the organisation.' I am doubtful: 'Why does that make sense, will they learn from this if they are just let off the hook?' My respondent points out: 'It makes sense because it keeps the peace. Otherwise, they are driven to do bad, they are vulnerable to crime. They need people to negotiate on their behalf.' Lansana adds: 'This is why the chairman plays a vital role to the fragile peace. Youth can encourage each other better than if it is done by elders.'"

Youth in the community observe the change of power-dynamics between the generations and appreciate the work the chairman does not only in bridging the generational gap but also in linking non-combatant and ex-combatant youths.

Q. How do ex-combatants and community members live together in this community? (...)

mRes16: We are working hand in hand. Sometimes, there are quarrels. But with the help of other youths they are put in place. We live in peace. We cope without outside help. We do it ourselves. (...)

mRes14: Through our chairman of the MYDO. He is with us. Some [ex-combatants] have families here and our enabled chairman decided to integrate them with the youth. Find out their skills, their tricks. Tries to understand them.

[INT27_COMM]

Calaba Town

The two youth organisations in Calaba Town have to deal more with issues of crime, as the busy junction town is a hot spot for drug-dealing and theft.

Q. Why is reintegration so important to you, even though these boys cause trouble?

Chairman Youth Organisation2: My main motive is that these people are my brothers, my sisters. There is no need for us to push them away. Moreover, if we push them away, there would be more problems. But they are difficult to handle. Some go out at night to steal or harass. So we formed an organisation, a self-defence organisation, not a registered one. The organisation works like this: We have five emergency phone numbers, which everybody in the community has. (...) So, when there is trouble, people call one or all of these numbers and then we go there. (...) 2005/6, we had a large stealing problem. Now, stealing has gone down, so the organisation is effective. (...) This all is an effort to make reintegration work (...). Even without them, there was of course crime, but some of these people are bold. They say things like: "I am capable of killing, of amputating. I have done it

before, don't get into my way." We will not sit and listen to those odd comments. (...) There is a test to positive change. Groups of youths are getting involved. They have changed, they help us arrest other youths and if youths arrest a colleague, then that has more influence on him. (...) 65% are normal, 35% cause trouble. The 65% have changed because of the community activities. We settle problems by paying the damages of their crime or if they quarrel about money, we pay the money. [INT18_OL]

While the above described informal youth organisation predominantly functions as a vigilante group, the Calaba Town Social, Cultural and Development Union (CTSCDU), concentrates on employment issues and negotiations with the police. The chairman and the auditor of CTSCDU explained:

Auditor: We, the youth, we unite.

Chairman: Any youth, who has a problem, comes to me. I solve the problem with the police or the court.

Auditor: Some get caught because of bad behaviour. We take them out of court, out of prison. We talk to them about proper behaviour. Then, we keep them busy. We have the car wash. We have the garage. [INT23_OL]

Two police officers from Calaba Town agreed:

Head of Police: (...) The chairman of the youth organisation is with them for sensitisation.

Officer: He often comes to the police when one of his boys is here and sorts things out.

Head of Police: There is good cooperation. [INT17_OL]

The importance of youth organisations like the ones in Mayemie Village and Calaba Town lies not only in their efforts to integrate former combatants, but also in the role they play in strengthening youth representation and participation. This is vital as the imbalance of power and opportunities was one of the underlying causes of the war and is still a problem in Sierra Leone today. The success of these organisations, however, will depend on how they situate themselves against processes of democratisation, accountability, and transparency. Today, informal dispute settlement and negotiations with the police help stabilise communal relations and the integration of youth in general and ex-combatants in particular. In the long run, however, this kind of impunity might undermine the police and justice system (Baker 2005).

4 What the Communities Say II: Incomplete Integration and Reconciliation

I now turn to the second of the questions posed at the beginning, namely, what are the characteristics of the state of integration that has been achieved, i.e. how deeply rooted is this success?

4.1 *Peace is conditional*

A closer look at communal relations and deeper probing of informants reveal that peaceful coexistence and tolerance of integration rests on a number of conditions. The three most prominent conditions, which emerged from my interviews, were (1) stable circumstances, (2) war experiences, and, closely connected to this, (3) the residence of former fighters in places other than those where they had committed atrocities.

Peace depends on daily circumstances. In the context of tension or instability, allegations against ex-combatants arise quickly. This is true on the mundane level of everyday interactions as well as events of larger scale. My fieldwork was conducted during the parliamentary and presidential elections, and there was considerable uncertainty about the course of the electoral process, especially party rallies in the run up to the actual vote. While political violence was limited to a very few occasions, the atmosphere of uncertainty and *potential* violence created rumours about former combatants returning to arms. Moreover, all parties deliberately employed former combatants as private security groups, which scared the population as well-remembered war nicknames like “Leatherboot” (ex-RUF) were connected to incidents of political violence by the press. This fear was translated by some into accusations against former combatants. The surface of not distinguishing and not recognising was broken and memories remobilised to identify ex-fighters and set them aside from the rest of the community, as the Local Unit Commander of Tonkolili District explained: Now, with the elections [...]hings were coming up from the past. People started identifying other people as ex-combatants, labelling them as troublemakers. [INT69_OL] Former combatants were aware of the fearful and hostile perception of the community, complaining about this abuse of ex-combatants by politicians: It looks as if the ex-combatants themselves are causing the trouble. Everybody will blame the ex-combatants. This gives *all* ex-combatants a bad image. [INT6_EX]

Two things follow from this. First, in a context of tension and insecurity, people remember those who used to create trouble and react with fear and hostility.

Secondly, if an ex-fighter (...) becomes prominent in some kind of trouble, they will remind him of his past. They pick them up if something adverse happens, a teacher from Makeni stated, [while] most people cannot distinguish [them], if they are peaceful [INT61_COMM]. A youth from Makeni seconded this: People do know them, but as long as they do not cause any trouble it is ok. [INT62_COMM] And the teacher added, if they are peaceful, nobody notices but if there is a quarrel, the most offensive thing to say is: I do not blame you, you are a rebel [INT61_COMM], implying that the bad thing caused now stems from bad things done in the past.

Civilians experienced the conflict differently and, hence, have a different memory of and attitude towards former fighters. This unfolds in two ways. Similarly to Humphreys and Weinstein's (2007) findings that those ex-combatants who fought in particularly violent units have greater problems integrating, it emerged from my selection of respondents that those who suffered most were most vocal against the integration of former combatants. A woman in Makeni stated: If I had the power to ask them [the ex-combatants] out, I would ask them out. (...) They have done bad, they caused all this suffering here. Killed my husband and my brother. (...) We are now living together. There is no other thinking. But, really, I do not want their talk, I do not want to live with them. [INT58_COMM] Respondents who claimed to have experienced minor or no violence, in contrast, expressed less radical rejection of former combatants or favored their integration.

Informants, however, showed a differentiated perception of fighters, which not only depended on their experience of violence. A strong theme which emerged from my interviews is the importance of the method of recruitment. Those who were forcibly recruited and abducted seem to receive the benefit of the doubt from much of the population. A teacher from Makeni expressed what many other respondents told me: [I]t is easier to accept those who were abducted. They were captured. It was how they survived. They did not plan to be rebels. We can sympathise with them. [INT61_COMM] Shaw (2005a:7/8) notes that it was not only pity that makes the integration of those abducted easier but that communities in many cases conceptualised individual fighters as mere vehicles for the agency of their commanders, thus shifting responsibility from them. Greater lenience towards those who were forced to fight has led to a strategy among ex-combatants of claiming that they were abducted, couching their history of fighting in terms of coercion.

Lastly, peaceful coexistence seems to be conditional in the sense that the population expects those who have committed larger atrocities to settle in places other than those where the crimes were committed. This links up to a point made above on the individualisation of anger and rejection. People seem to reject most strongly living together with *their* perpetrator, i.e. the very person who caused them harm, rather than a perpetrator, i.e. someone who was part of destruction and violence in other incidents. The fact that peace partly rests on the limited freedom of movement and choice of residence for ex-combatants cannot be stressed strongly enough. Statements like the two following were mentioned to me in virtually every interview: Those who did destruction here are not here. You cannot come back if you did destruction here. There is no one here who did destruction here. [INT43_OL] and The ones who are here, cannot go back [home] because of what they did. [INT48_OL]. An anecdote, recounted by Father Victor, describes, how strongly Sierra Leoneans feel about living apart from their personal perpetrators: A man, confronted in the cathedral with the question what he would do if he came to heaven and would meet an RUF rebel there who had done him bad during the war, replied: "I would ask for a transfer to hell!" [INT53_OL]

Given that many RUF recruits were forced to commit atrocities against their home communities or families, the rejection of those who committed crimes runs counter to the notion that children, brothers and sisters are accepted back as part of the family. Here, a more complex picture emerges with no clear-cut solutions but individually different paths of rejection, tolerance, or forgiveness.

While a small number of former fighters were killed upon their return, lynch-mob justice was not widely reported for the immediate post-conflict phase (pers. comm. K. Peters, 26.4.2008). However, the rumor mill was powerful enough for many not even to try to go near their home (Richards et al. 2003:6). This means "(...) many RUF ex-combatants from the north can be found stranded in the east and south of the country, while many from the east and the south have ended up in the north." (Peters 2006:141). A chiefdom official from Magburaka pointed out how this leads to an implicit deal within the country: communities integrate those who have not done bad in that particular place, while other communities integrate those who had to leave.

Q. Did anybody ever suggest that they should leave?

Treasurer: Yes, these suggestions came up. The authorities did not allow that. (...) If we would tend to do so [send them away], it would also happen in other parts of the country with people from this place. [INT63_OL]

The movement of former fighters – sons of the soil or strangers – due to the atrocities they had committed is mainly induced by the population as a youth from Makeni observed: There is cordiality between the ex-combatants and the civilians. After demobilisation, the majority of youths who were involved in the war became normal citizens. Those that have done too bad things have left, because people were pointing their fingers. [INT62_COMM] Thus, subtle forms of rejection are common and often induce a move of the former fighter. An ex-RUF-rebel said about his family: They accepted me back. They are not happy with what I did. (...) So, my family accepts me partially. They say you can live with us, but then they call you names, they reject you. [INT7_EX]

4.2 “Kol Hart” and “Warm Hart”

The majority of my respondents readily mentioned “forgiveness” and “forgetting” but only talked about apologies when I specifically asked. This is surprising, since when prompted, all stated that apologies were an important part of the process of forgiving. The excerpt from the interview with an elderly man in Mayemie summarises all connections:

Q. Why are people accepting the ex-combatants back?

mRes12: Naturally Sierra Leone is full of forgiveness. We easily forget. That is our culture. (...) The two main religions (...) encourage forgiveness. We Sierra Leoneans cannot hold a grudge. I tell on the spot that you have wronged me and then I forget.

Q. But do you just forgive any crime or does the other need to apologise?

mRes12: That is the most important part! Otherwise, I might actually not forgive you.

Q. Has this asking for forgiveness taken place from the side of the ex-combatants?

mRes12: That is not the case. [INT25_COMM]

Among my respondents many had expected apologies or displays of remorse, especially from the side of the former rebels. People were divided over the issue whether apologies of some could be representative for the larger group of

perpetrators. However, all seemed to agree that some form of apology was better than none.

Q. Do you expect anything from the ex-combatants?

fRes8: I expected for them to beg us but only the big ones did.

fRes11: I was expecting individuals to come and beg but it did not happen. I expected them to come and say: “forgive us, please”. I expected remorse. But only the big ones begged on their behalf at the TRC. [INT35_COMM]

Q. How can forgiveness be sped-up?

fRes7: It is difficult if someone has done bad; it might be hard for him to come and ask for forgiveness. So if someone came on his behalf [it would be ok]. It is difficult to come directly but you could pass it through others. [INT34_COMM]

None of the ex-combatants I interviewed showed remorse for the crimes they had committed. Most hid behind the argument of having been victims themselves, since they were forced to fight. Two, however, admitted to be ashamed for what they did: It is hard for me to go back since I was gone for a long time and I am embarrassed to go back because of the past. [INT10_EX]

Besides repentance, punishment of former perpetrators was something many of my respondents felt strongly about. Especially those more severely affected by the war and within this group, predominantly women, voiced extreme thoughts about punishment. A woman in Makeni expressed her desire for punishment in the spirit of an eye for an eye:

Q. If the government would say, let us have national trials against the junior commanders, what would you say?

fRes16: I would prefer if they were punished in the same way that I am suffering. They should be punished as they have punished me. [INT58_COMM]

Others asked for ex-combatants to be put in camps or other separate places, the main idea being for them to be out of their sight rather than to be punished there. While informants also readily connected the issue of punishment to the SCSL, they disagreed over whether enough perpetrators were punished in front of the court, i.e. if the representative punishment of ten ringleaders was sufficient to placate demands for punishment and retribution. Men from Calaba Town stated: The organisation of war is a collective responsibility. It is like with the body. If you cut off the head, the body does not function. Also this states that the law is not above anyone. It will deter

others. [INT21_COMM] The group of amputees, whom I interviewed, arguably those of my respondents victimised most severely, however, felt strongly that more perpetrators should face justice:

mRes2: The government and the SCSL have let them go free. They only took in the big fish. You, know, Charles Taylor did not cut off my arm. They are running free. Like me. I was amputated by the SLA, by... (*he names a name*). I pointed that man to the authorities. But that man is still walking freely. (...) It is not enough to punish the big fish, for us as the major victims. If you ask me for my personal view: There are more people who are more qualified.

Q. So, who should be punished in your view?

mRes2: They should indict the junior commanders, those who were at the front. I want the commander from the bush also to be tried. (...)

fRes1: (*lists names of people*) These are the ones that should be indicted. These people played a greater role than those who are in the SCSL now.

[INT16_COMM]

As mentioned above, reconciliation is a term that has been introduced to Sierra Leone by the work of multiple NGOs/donors and the TRC. A group of men in Mayemie explained the native equivalents, which have already been described above: “Forgive and forget” is a general feeling against nobody in particular. “Kol hart” is individual forgiveness. It means perfect peace, nothing disturbs my mind, no worries in the head and heart. “Won word” is when all agree, a collective “kol hart”. I can “forgive and forget” more generally but still have a “warm hart” against individuals. That only cools down if I get an apology. [INT27_COMM]

Not surprisingly – but rather consistently – in the discussion on “kol”/“warm” hart is that those who previously had expressed no need for apologies and punishment and voiced positive views on integration, are also those who state that they have a “kol hart” or even express notions of “won word”. In contrast, those most affected by the war and who had expressed feelings of revenge and demands for punishment, describe their heart as “warm”.

Q. What about your feelings? Do you have “kol hart” for them or is your “hart warm”?

fRes19: When I see them, my mind goes back to what that guy did to me at an early stage. Now, other people are rejecting me. Even my family. When I set eyes on them, I don't ever feel good within myself. (*She is crying*)

mRes31: I develop a “warm hart” when I see them. They have destroyed my property, burned down my house. Now, am attending school here and there is nobody to pay for me. I have to engage in dirty work to fund myself. Because I do not have the power to revenge, I am suppressing my anger, I am not happy with them.

fRes20: These questions have touched us. The rebels killed my husband and my son; I myself fell into a hole and broke my foot (*points to her slightly deformed foot*). Since we have no means to revenge, we are just suppressing our anger. I am not 100% pleased with them when I reflect back. (...)

mRes33: I am not happy living together with them. I no longer even want to stay with them. Let them put them all into a tight place, where I can never put eyes on them again. [INT70_COMM]

The above excerpts support the assumption that greater experience of violence leads to stronger rejection of integration. Those with “warm hart” call for more ex-combatants to be punished and express negative attitudes towards integration. Consistent with Shaw’s (2005a; 2005b) findings, most link the “cooling” of their heart not to actions of punishment but to material benefits which would enable them to rebuild their lives. I will explore this issue in more detail in Section 4.4.

4.3 Interaction between Ex-Combatants and the Community

What kind of interaction flows from the emotional state discussed above? My interviews revealed constraints to integration faced by former fighters on a day-to-day basis. These restrictions amount to economic, political, and social discrimination on multiple levels leading to heightened vulnerability and marginalisation of ex-combatants in general and ex-rebels in particular.

While employment is one of the most pressing needs for Sierra Leoneans in general, former combatants are portrayed as having relatively more problems finding a job than others. Bishop Biguzzi of Makeni observed: At a deeper level (...) there is no direct discrimination but distancing. For example, certain positions will not be given to former combatants in a business or office. So they have to be self-employed or ride the [motor]bikes. [INT55_OL] Several ex-combatants stated that for them “it is more difficult to find employment.” [INT66; 7]

A second line of enquiry surrounded the question of whether former combatants held any official posts within the community. I asked this to find out whether the

community at large trusts former fighters with communal responsibilities and power. In the six communities in which I conducted fieldwork, I only have clear evidence of one ex-combatant holding a position of authority. This was in Magburaka, where a former RUF fighter is the collector for market dues. A Section Chief in Tongo, vehemently rejected entrusting ex-rebels with governance posts: The only thing that will satisfy us is that, at no point in time, we will be ruled by them. [INT47_OL]

Finally, I enquired about social interaction. All former combatants I interviewed emphasised that they had a mixed group of friends, socialising with former comrades as well as youth who did not fight during the war. While men openly talked about interacting with those with whom they fought, the four female fighters I interviewed were adamant that they had broken with past affiliations:

Q. Are you still friends with some of the other women who experienced the war with you?

RUFfemale1: We are friends with community people. (...)

Q. Is it easier to be friends with those who have had similar experiences during the war?

RUFfemale1: I am not interested in friendship with these that were in the struggle with us. (...) I prefer to be friends with community people. [INT72_EX]

My own observations deviated somewhat from the accounts of the former combatants. I only experienced and observed true interaction and socialising between former-combatant youth and non-combatant youth in Mayemie Village. My assumption is that the youth organisation described above was bridging relations. Moreover, the chairman of the youth organisation explained, [t]his is a new community. 70% did not live here before the war. All come here. That is the reason why the interaction is peaceful. People came here and nobody knows about the history of the other. It is a new start for all. [INF27_COMM] In Calaba Town, the Youth Organisation was much more focused on keeping a check on former combatants, which can be explained by the higher crime rate in this part of Freetown. In Magburaka, ex-combatants kept more to themselves. They hung out in groups and lived together in larger compounds, rarely mixing with their neighbors. Listening to a group of three college students in Makeni, however, it becomes clear that interaction between former combatants and non-combatants in the younger generation comes down to individually different cases. There is no clear-cut rejection or acceptance of ex-combatants *per se*.

Q. When do you actually interact with former rebels?

mRes24: During youth activities, here at the sports field. We are friends. (...) they go to Northern Polytech with us.

fRes18: Some are friendly. When you come in contact with him or her, then we interact. Some are cruel. You can see it in their (...) rough behaviour. But some smile and you would never detect their past. Some cannot talk. They have seen things, done things.

mRes23: (...) I have a friend named Joseph. He was a rebel. We talk, we are friends. That is how life is. We need to accept it. They were very young. (...) Then, I also know this RUF guy, he gets annoyed so easily that I only greet him, but we do not laugh together. With the others, we meet, we laugh. Some take drugs. Some are crazy. But most join in the youth activities. Some do not even want to be identified as ex-combatants. They try to be sure that people do not detect this. But we eat together and then we do jokes, like some of them were promoted during the war, so I say, "Man, you are a colonel." [INT62_COMM]

Within the older generation, interaction seems less easy. For one thing, many adults have a more vivid memory of the war years. Moreover, ex-combatants are often seen as youth, a group that has not fully matured and, hence, cannot be interacted with on a par.

More subtle forms of discrimination are gossip and labelling. Gossip takes place especially among women targeted at former female combatants. The four female ex-RUF I interviewed spoke emotionally of rejection and humiliation within their neighbourhood: The people we are living with are provoking me. They say, "You have many children like a bush rat. You have been with the rebels for long years, but what is the profit. You only have many children." (...) A common provocation is like this: "Look the way they are dressed now. During the war they looted our things but now look at how they are dressed." [INT72_EX] Discrimination against former combatants, more generally, takes the form of people pointing fingers, setting them apart. Reintegration is still a problem, an ex-rebel stated. People point fingers. They make ex-combatants feel that they are not supposed to live here; e.g. a boy in my house calls me "rebel" all the time. There is no proper reintegration. Only lip service but they don't have it at mind or heart. [INT7_EX] His friend seconds this: The stigma is still in the minds of the people. (...) It's how they interact with you. They greet you. They do small talk. Then, when you turn around, they talk behind your back. You

cannot hear what they say, maybe you hear the first few words, like, “He did all these bad things. He is one of them.” [INT8_EX]

Discrimination leads to greater vulnerability of former fighters compared to other groups. While some vulnerability is tangible, in higher economic and political marginalisation, social stigmatisation is more difficult to measure and assess. In this situation, former fighters are vulnerable to abuse. A powerful example of this is the recruitment of former fighters as security personnel.

It is important, however, to note the agency of ex-combatants, rather than seeing them as mere victims of discrimination and marginalisation. Former fighters have devised strategies to deal with rejection. These include moving to a place where rejection is limited like the more anonymous towns and mining fields (Peters 2006: 160; 162) and lying about their personal history. Some also turn to more shady lives, becoming criminals (INT24; 52). Others consciously seek recognition and employment as bodyguards, as [t]his means not only employment for them doing what they are best at, but also is recognition of their abilities (and past) within a whole nation that does not want them. [INT40_OL] Peters (2006:162) and Richards (2004) describe a more positive approach of former combatants to counter (economic) discrimination: the creation of a new niche in the job market as motorbike-taxi riders. An interesting result of this initiative has been greater social acceptance of those who engage in this useful activity.

The most common strategy to divert attention from their past and, hence, avoid discrimination was lying about the past. Almost every ex-combatant I interviewed, concealed at least part of his/her identity, either throughout our whole encounter or at the beginning. The strategies included simply altering what happened during the war, downplaying responsibility for crimes (INT52). Many ex-combatants who used this strategy also lied to me about their relationship with their family, stating that they could and did return home after the war (INF52; 31). Another commonly used strategy was to claim to have been abducted to reject responsibility and evoke victimhood. One of the ex-combatants I interviewed posed as an ex-SLA fighter; I am assuming as the army has a better reputation than the RUF (INT67). Finally, many posed as non-combatants (INT22; 24; 29; 46; 65); some revealed their fighting past after more knowledge about my research (INT22; 24; 29), others gave their past away with very intimate knowledge of the war or tight friendships with other ex-fighters (INT65).

Women, especially, tried to conceal their past. Indeed, I had considerable trouble recruiting former female fighters for my interviews and once they volunteered, I had to meet them in a secluded place. These women lied about actively fighting as this stigmatised them even more than “only” being an abducted bush-wife. In all these encounters, only a detailed knowledge about the war allowed the observer read between the lines of the actual answers. In the case of the four women, I had learned that bush-wives who did not fight usually stayed in bush-camps away from the front lines, while female fighters would move around with their fighting husbands. All four women denied that they had fought actively; three, however, said that they followed their husband to the front line while one described the various bush camps away from the front line where she stayed (INT70; 72; 73).

The overwhelming majority of ex-combatants I interviewed contended that lying about the past or hiding their past identity was safer behaviour, avoiding discrimination.

RUF1: No one here knows that I am an ex-combatant. In other places, Kailahun, Kenema, Kono, they know, but here no.

Q: If they would know, do you think they would treat you differently?

RUF1: Yes. It is good that people do not know. [...People] will interact but if there is any problem they point their finger at you, they blame you. The result is that I am not in the habit of explaining myself. If you explain yourself, you are liable in three ways: If it is goodness for you, it is good because you are an ex-combatant, if it is bad for you, it is bad because you are an ex-combatant, if it kills you, it killed you because you are an ex-combatant. I even only joined this research because I overheard you were working on reintegration otherwise I would not out myself. (...)

Q. Would you like to be able to talk about the past?

RUF1: I would like to explain myself! [INT22_EX]

Q. Does everybody here know about your past with the RUF?

RUFfemale1: Some do not know. Some know. If they do not know, those that do will pass on the information. Those are also the ones with the provocations.

Q. If people do not know about your past, do they behave differently towards you?

RUFfemale1: Yes. Those that do not know are always friendly to us.

RUFfemale2: We laugh together.

RUFfemale1: They are always willing to assist us. [INT72_EX]

A last strategy pursued by ex-combatants is simply keeping to themselves. As mentioned above, former fighters usually still interact with former comrades and I observed multiple cases where ex-combatants shared compounds. The lack of trust of community people towards ex-combatants tightens networks between ex-combatants.

An interesting question is what purpose discrimination serves. The conclusion that is made here is that discrimination is a form of subtle punishment; mundane, local justice within a society that for the most part is overwhelmed by the request to “forgive and forget” and needs pathways for venting feelings about the past. In this interpretation, the reaction of former combatants who “just take” accusations and for the most part quietly accept discriminating acts [INT67;66;65;72;73] can be read as a subtle act of repentance and apology.

4.4 *Peace Needs*

Finally, I present local perceptions and opinions of what needs to be done to further foster peace and integration and stabilise communal relations. Notions of integration and reconciliation need to be seen within the greater context of post-conflict reconstruction. The main theme that emerged from my interviews was a nexus between integration and economic development. This is not surprising, given the fact that Sierra Leone is one of the least-developed countries worldwide; it makes sense then that food security, poverty reduction, and employment were the main concerns of the majority of my respondents.

In interviews, informants were very vocal about their material losses during the war. Respondents readily linked the provision of *material* assistance to a greater ability to forgive and “cool down their heart”. This confirms the findings of Shaw (2005a; 2005b; 2007) who links the ability to build a new life with the process of “forgetting” and achieving “kol hart”. The same pattern, as already mentioned above, emerged here that those most affected by war and women in general voiced louder calls for economic assistance, linking this to emotional stabilisation and reconciliation. Members of the focus group in Magburaka who described their “warm hart” explained:

fRes20: For me specifically, I say let them leave this people freely. Even if they kill them or punish them, that will not give us back our lost people or property. It will not give us personal benefit.

mRes31: My recommendation will be encouragement. With encouragement you ask them which trade they have learnt. Then you give them employment to practise that what they have learnt. Give the others a job. If they are satisfied they will not go on stealing at night or doing other crimes.

mRes32: Your questions are necessary. Let them just leave these people. Punishment will create another problem. (...) No punishment. We are not interested in creating further problems, just give us assistance. If they beg you or not, are humble, fail to be humble, we do not care. We only want provisions. (...)

mRes25: We will forgive but we will not forget. If they beg us on their knees we will just pretend to forget. That is the general opinion. [INT70_COMM]

Asked whether she thought that former rebels should stand trial for what they have done, a woman in Mayemie Village answered: For us, to totally forgive these people we need help. Asking for forgiveness is not enough, we need to be provided with opportunities, with chances, then we can totally forgive them. [INT34_COMM] Similarly, a woman from Makeni, who had vehemently called for punishment of former combatants and expressed her “warm hart”, stated that she would be somewhat appeased if she received assistance:

Q. What do you need to feel peace inside?

fRes16: I would like humanitarian workers to take care of my children. Give me a house; give them health care, an education. Then I will try and forget a little bit.

Q. Do you have warm hart against the rebels?

fRes16: Yes, warm hart! Not gladdy [happy] for them to be here. My hart will be a bit kol if I get assistance. [INT58_COMM]

Asked for the main need of the former combatants, my informants agreed that employment is the most important need of youth in general and ex-combatants in particular. The recommendation for training and employment provision to ex-combatants was seen as particularly important to stabilise the peace and reduce the crime rate, as members of both focus groups in Calaba Town stated:

mRes10: [We need to] strengthen their integration by offering occupation and training.

mRes11: Just basic training. What do they say: “The idle brain brings destruction”.

mRes8: I feel the same way. (...)

mRes7: Why we need to assist them is that they are disgruntled. They have done bad, did atrocities. Now they do not have the means to support their life. To keep the peace in the community, we must assist them. [INT21_COMM]

fRes13: It would “kol” down their temper and regulate their behaviour if they had something to do, something to earn money.

fRes11: Since the war has ended, they have had no opportunities and at the same time they threaten us. A job will eradicate thieving. Because now they are idle, that is why they do stealing and threatening. [INT35_COMM]

I recorded similar voices in Magburaka, Tongo and Mayemie Village (INT13; 48; 70).

Ex-Combatants themselves also listed unemployment as their most pressing concern. This is also reflected in the fact that half of the former combatants I talked to moved to their current place of residence for employment reasons (cf. INT13; 15; 22; 29; 37; 39; 47; 66; 69; 73). Like the community people, they linked idleness to crime and violence. When someone is not eating, there is no job, he will think differently. I don't blame the RUF for fighting back then. The idle mind is the devil's workshop. Most are idle now. They do nothing. Then, what they think about is causing trouble, stealing, fighting, doing drugs. [INT52_EX] More importantly, former rebel fighters saw employment as being potentially beneficial for the community. In this regard, some expressed shame for their lack of contribution and expressed the belief that their contribution to development would gain them trust and ultimately integration. An ex-RUF explained:

Foday: (...) After I have departed for a long time, my loved ones have built up good things in the community. So I did not contribute to this, so I feel ashamed sitting among them.

Q. When would you feel comfortable to go home?

Foday: A strong financial position would give me strength. If I could contribute. [...The stigma] will be wiped out if I get someone to engage me. If people know you are busy and are contributing, they will see that you are different. Now, I am not working, and because some brothers are thieves, some people think I am a thief. [INT10_EX]

Community people affirmed that contributions to the community could foster integration. The argument was especially made in Mayemie Village, where respondents confirmed that this had built appreciation for the ex-combatants, who had moved there (INT14; 27).

Beyond employment, respondents noted the importance of youth empowerment and inclusion in decision-making. A man from Makeni also suggested that politicians should cease to employ ex-fighters as bodyguards to break the link between their violent behaviour in the past and the use of violence today. Ex-rebels seconded this and called for patience from the side of the ex-combatants, while community people felt that they, too, should maintain a positive attitude towards ex-fighters and refrain from singling them out.

Importantly, several ex-combatants voiced a desire to talk about their past openly [INT13; 22; 24; 31; 52]. They also felt that events bringing ex-combatants and non-combatants together would be important in fostering integration and especially the return of ex-combatants, like themselves, to their home communities. Similarly, non-combatants expressed the importance of talking about the past right after the war as well as today (INT14; 23).

Finally, looking back, respondents observed that peaceful interaction over time had built confidence in former combatants: [F]irst after the DDR, we were a little bit afraid of them. We were sceptical that they would change with time. So, at first, we were afraid. Then, we realised when we interacted with them that they are no longer harmful to live with. So now we have a cordial relationship. [INT70_COMM] Time, then, is seen as a healer: [Building peace] will be a gradual process. Because the conflict took a long time, so peace will take a long time [INT38_OL].

5 What Can Be Learned from the Sierra Leonean Experience?

Given that Sierra Leone experienced one of the fiercest conflicts of the 1990s, the country has moved comparatively fast to stability and peace. In common with other researchers (Shaw 2005a; Stovel 2006; Humphreys and Weinstein 2005; 2007), I find that the majority of ex-fighters integrated swiftly into society. At first glance a picture of peaceful coexistence at the community level emerges – undoubtedly a considerable accomplishment. Exploring which factors on the micro-level are responsible for this achievement, I claim that integration and coexistence are grounded first and foremost in a collective effort based on pragmatic rather than emotional motives. Integration was the “price paid for peace”, the fastest way to establish a desperately sought state of non-violence. As Shaw (2005a: 3) was told: “the people were completely fed up with war, ready for reconciliation.” This trade-off was and is in no way easy to handle for most individuals. My informants pointed to several broader factors interacting with integration and peace-building, which were

perceived as facilitating the handling of these difficult processes on the individual level. In the absence of a larger ethnic component to the conflict, integration and reconciliation are more individualistic processes. Thus, anger is in many cases directed against specific perpetrators not the faction as a whole. Moreover, strong social ties mean that ex-rebels are often accepted back as “children, brothers and sisters”. Further, religious faith is used to channel feelings of disempowerment, revenge, and the perception of impunity. Moreover, resilience coupled with a high propensity to forgive were seen as internalised in people’s behaviour supporting the peace. Finally, credit was given to a multitude of institutional efforts. In this respect, initiatives on the local level are of great importance today. The example of youth organisations showed how actors within the community were not only working towards mending relations between ex-combatants and non-combatants, a consequence of the war, but also targeting one of the root causes of the war, the relationship and power-balance between youth and elders. What emerges then is a truly national effort on multiple levels to forge ahead.

Exploring the characteristics of the state of integration and reconciliation, a mixed picture emerges. A closer look at communal relations reveals that peaceful coexistence in Sierra Leone rests on three conditions. First, experiences of extreme violence undergone during the war led to greater rejection towards the integration of ex-combatants. Rejection is mitigated for those who were abducted or behaved positively during the war. While in line with Shaw’s (2005a) findings, my data differs from that of Humphreys and Weinstein (2005) who find that abductees have greater difficulties integrating. Second, as Shaw (2005a) and Peters (2006) find, freedom of movement and choice of residence is limited for ex-combatants in so far as they cannot reside in places where they have committed atrocities, even (or particularly) in their former home communities. Lastly, peaceful relations depend on stability. Within a tense context, like the 2007 elections, former fighters are singled out under high public scrutiny, demonstrating not only continued distrust but also fear of renewed violence. On a day-to-day basis the misconduct of ex-combatants is more severely sanctioned.

Shaw (2005a; 2005b; 2007) and Kelsall (2005) both emphasise the centrality of apologies by perpetrators at TRC hearings for the fostering of reconciliation. On the level of emotions, many of my respondents still perceived a gap between the request to “forgive and forget” and the absence of displays of repentance. Others exposed feelings of vengeance, asking for accountability or punishment of former

perpetrators. The levels of grievances pertaining from the war – violence and loss experienced as well as unresolved demands for apologies and punishment – guide the final assessment of emotions of “kol hart” and “warm hart”. Communal interactions between ex-combatants and the wider community reflect these grievances. My interviews revealed economic, political, and social constraints to integration faced by former fighters on a day-to-day basis, leading to heightened vulnerability and marginalisation of ex-RUF-rebels in particular. Former fighters are in many cases still not regarded as “normal” citizens and, hence, not treated like the mainstream. Strategies to deal with this rejection include moving to more anonymous places and manufacturing lies about their own identity. Subtle discrimination and rejection has been consistently reported in recent research (Shaw 2005a; Peters 2006; Stovel 2006; Humphreys and Weinstein 2005; 2007), showing only limited progress towards deeper notions of trust and reconciliation. However, the interpretation that is advanced here is that discrimination serves as a form of subtle punishment. It expresses mundane, local justice within a society that for the most part is overwhelmed by the request to “forgive and forget” and needs pathways for venting feelings about the past. In this interpretation, the reaction of former combatants who for the most part quietly accept discriminating acts is seen as a subtle form of repentance. Thus, peace-building and, within it, integration can be seen as a process of continuing contestation and negotiation between ex-combatants and the wider community.

My analysis reveals a link between violence and integration. As Humphreys and Weinstein (2005; 2007) found, social integration largely depends on the abusiveness of the unit in which a combatant fought. I find that the same holds for experience of violence. Those non-combatants who experienced higher levels of violence and loss expressed feelings of “warm hart”, voiced louder calls for punishment, and showed greater rejection towards integration. In this regard, my findings run contrary to those of Bellows and Miguel (2006) whose survey revealed that greater experience of violence leads to higher political activism and community engagement in the post-conflict phase.

What prospects are there, then, for the future? What still needs to be done in Sierra Leone? My respondents formulated their peace needs mainly around economic factors, employment, and material assistance. Employment for ex-combatants is crucial not only to reduce crime and prevent renewed marginalisation, but also to provide a future perspective and generate an acknowledgement of the usefulness of

these men and women for society. The latter has shown promising results in the cases of the motorbike-taxi associations (Fithen and Richards 2004). Similarly, those who suffered great losses during the war need building blocks for a new life. This makes sense especially in light of the connection presented between the ability to rebuild ones life, the process of “forgetting”, and the “cooling of the heart”. Here, my data lends support to Shaw’s (2005a; 2005b; 2007) findings and underlines the importance of analysing post-conflict situations in a holistic manner to understand local linkages, like the one between economic development, overcoming of traumatic experiences, and integration at the individual level. In line with other research (Humphreys and Weinstein 2005; 2007; Peters 2006; Shaw 2005a; 2007), my data, thus, shows the importance of economic interventions and, in the case of Sierra Leone, above all the provision of employment for ex-combatants in particular but also youth more generally. Adequate access to income generation is an important step to rectify the grievances that led up to the war. It is important to mention here that ex-combatants and opinion leaders pointed to the repercussions that the failures of DDR programmes have today. Many believed that the problem of current unemployment and related crime and frustration was linked to insufficient and uninformed training during DDR.

While economic development can presumably go a long way to stabilise integration and reconciliation, my findings also suggest the need for long-term interventions that focus on coming to terms with the past. Unlike Shaw (2005b; 2007) and Kelsall (2005), I find a demand for talking about the past and the need for interventions bringing together ex-combatants and non combatants to forge links and build trust. While in many cases this takes place in daily interactions and has supported the peace that exists today, the level of discrimination and rejection of ex-combatants as well as the grievances voiced by community members points to the fact that there is scope for more formalised interventions. Integration and reconciliation are thus not only multifaceted processes but, importantly, develop slowly, demanding long-term and focussed support.

The peace in Sierra Leone is sustained to a large extent by the rejection of a violent past. None of my respondents supported a return to conflict in any way. However, it is crucial that peace is further supported by a positive outlook into the future. This can only be generated by targeting those grievances which fed the conflict in the first place, as well as those which resulted from it.

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