

MCMASTER UNIVERSITY

HISTORY 4RR3: TRUTH AND
RECONCILIATION AFTER ATROCITY

THE TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION OF SIERRA LEONE

Backgrounder

Koidu after the war. Source: <https://sierraleonewar.com/uncategorized/what-caused-the-sierra-leone-civil-war/>

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INTRODUCTION

SETTING THE STAGE

Introduction

For nearly a decade, a country in Western Africa, known as Sierra Leone, was devastated by civil war. From the years 1991 to 2002, the country saw some of the most horrific and cruel atrocities committed; including, but not limited to, amputations, massacres, child soldiers, sexual abuse, slavery, and forced cannibalism ("Witness to Truth," 2004). Therefore, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in Sierra Leone became a necessary development of the Lomé Peace Agreement on July 7th, 1999, in order to investigate and document the human rights violations and atrocities committed throughout the conflict, in addition to promoting national healing and reconciliation. Thus, the TRC report titled, *Witness to Truth: Report of The Sierra Leone Truth And Reconciliation Commission*, aims to provide an impartial account of the main events and causes of the conflict, while debunking popular myths.

The Myth of Diamonds

One commonly held myth, both in Sierra Leone and Western society, is that the war was fought over diamonds. However, the Commission suggests that this belief functions to simplify the complex causes of the war which would have taken place regardless of the existence of diamonds in the country ("Witness to Truth," 2004, p.12). In turn, the TRC does not consider diamonds to be a direct cause of the conflict, but rather, an element that indirectly exacerbated the conflict. This is primarily due to the misapplication of diamond resources in the country, resulting in huge economic disparities, and the use of diamonds for financing armed factions, enabling them to acquire arms and ammunition in order to control large areas of the country ("Witness to Truth," 2004, p.264). In order to stray away from inaccurate narratives, this backgrounder will utilize the historical account developed by the TRC in Sierra Leone. Therefore, this backgrounder will address the complex combination of political, economic, ethnic, and social factors that led to the conflict.



Sierra Leone Truth Commission Symbol. Source: <https://sierraleonetr.com/index.php/video-photos/sierraleone-trc-image-gallery>

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

THE CAUSES

Early Time Frames

According to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Sierra Leone, historical antecedents to the conflict can be traced back to both the colonial period and the post-independence period preceding the outbreak of violence in 1991.

The Colonial Period

The commission notes that the colonial power deliberately created two nations in the same land—one in the colony and the other in the protectorate ("Witness to Truth," 2004, p.280). This resulted in separate development policies, in terms of access to education, resources, and infrastructure, which favored the colony at the expense of the protectorate (280). Consequently, this marginalization resulted in deep-seated resentment and animosity among certain ethnic and regional groups, which contributed to the tensions that arose during the post-independence period (761).

The Post-Independence Period

The commission found that Sierra Leone struggled to establish stable governance and economic growth after gaining independence from Britain in 1961 ("Witness to Truth," 2004, p.772). Thus, greed, corruption, and bad governance led to institutional collapse by the early 1990s (280). This involved the weakening of the army, the police, the judiciary, and the civil service (280). In addition, the entire economy was undermined by gross mismanagement. Therefore, despite the country's wealth in diamonds and other minerals, most of the population remained in poverty with limited access to crucial services.

These issues were exacerbated by the system of government adopted by President Siaka Stevens during his leadership of the All People's Congress (APC) from the years 1969 to 1985 ("Witness to Truth," 2004, p.281). The APC was characterized by a one-party state that monopolized decision-making, placing their personal and political interests above those of the nation. Nothing was done to encourage critical thinking or open debate within the country, and the struggle for civil opposition to the APC was especially present among students and youths (281). Due to a complete loss of faith in the political system, Sierra Leoneans turned to armed rebellion as a means of addressing their grievances.



President Siaka Stevens. Source: <https://prabook.com/web/siaka.stevens/1344078>

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

THE CAUSES

Immediate Antecedents

The commission states that the Liberian conflict and its spillover effects were a significant factor in the escalation of the Sierra Leone conflict. In the 1980s and 1990s, Liberia faced a civil war characterized by widespread violence, economic devastation, and ethnic divisions. When combining the circumstances in Liberia with the circumstances in the neighboring country of Sierra Leone, conflict and collaboration became inevitable. Especially considering the lack of opportunities for public expression of dissent and dissatisfaction with the APC government in Sierra Leone, creating conditions ripe for armed rebellion.

This was especially evident when a small group of soon-to-be revolutionaries formed an initial program for change by administering 'self-defense' training in Libya ("Witness to Truth," 2004, p.260). However, the original plans of the program were supplanted by a deviant militant agenda led by Foday Sankoh. This new leader was able to gain support from foreign contacts such as Charles Taylor, leader of a faction known as the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) (260). According to the commission's testimonies, both Taylor and Sankoh had met in Libya in the year 1988 to make a deal between Sierra Leonean and Liberian revolutionaries in order to mutually support each other in their respective plans (848).

Through this collaboration, Sankoh was able to assemble and train a force comprising 385 commandos in Liberia, who would become the 'vanguards' of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) ("Witness to Truth," 2004, p.383). In addition, Taylor supplied 2,000 of his own men from the NPFL to become 'special forces' that would help with the RUF in Sierra Leone (260). Shortly after Dawn on March 23rd, 1991, 40 to 60 commandos belonging to Taylor's NPFL, committed an attack in the town of Bomaru, Kailahun District (260), resulting in thirteen fatalities; eleven civilians and two soldiers of the Sierra Leone Army (863). This event marked the beginning of an unprecedented and brutal conflict in Sierra Leone.



Foday Sankoh. Source:
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Foday_Sankoh



Charles Taylor. Source:
<https://fortune.com/2014/11/19/doing-business-with-warlords/>

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

PHASES OF CONFLICT

Phases of Conflict

The Truth Commission divides the conflict into three phases; the 'Conventional Target Warfare phase', the 'Guerrilla Warfare phase', and the 'Power Struggles and Peace Efforts phase' ("Witness to Truth," 2004, p.151). The first phase outlines the period from the outbreak of the conflict until November 13th, 1993, the second phase outlines the period from November 13th, 1993 until March 2nd, 1997, and the final phase outlines the period from March 2nd, 1977, until the end of the conflict on January 18th, 2002.

Phase I

This phase is characterized by the involvement of two rebel groups, the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) and the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), in attacks against both the Sierra Leone military as well as civilians. In turn, this phase highlights the APC Government's failure to properly supply the Sierra Leone Army (SLA) at the onset of the conflict ("Witness to Truth," 2004, p.260). This failure resulted in the formation of the National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC), which was a military junta that took control over the government of Sierra Leone in April 1992. Eventually, through the expansion of the SLA, the army managed to gain an upper hand over the RUF in 1993 (260). This reduced the control of RUF to a small area of forest on the Liberian border, yet, there remained to be no push from pro-government forces to end the conflict.

Phase II

This phase is characterized by increased violence, a breakdown of trust between civilians and the military, as well as failed peace processes. It began when the RUF transitioned from the use of conventional military tactics to the use of 'guerrilla' strategies. This made them less visible and predictable, allowing for the expansion of their operations into every region of Sierra Leone ("Witness to Truth," 2004, p.260). For example, one strategy used by the RUF is known as 'false flag' attacks, which is when the RUF would dress in full SLA uniforms as a form of deception (260). The SLA's reputation was already damaged due to increased human rights violations against their own people, and therefore, this tactic further eroded the trust between Sierra Leoneans and the military.

During this phase, the NPRC also transitioned to democratic elections in 1996 allowing for a palace coup to take place. These elections were colored by violence, however, they resulted in a new government known as the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP), led by President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah ("Witness to Truth," 2004, p.260). Subsequently, the SLPP government endorsed the Civil Defense Forces (CDF), which was a group primarily comprised of the 'Mende' ethnic group from the southern and eastern regions of Sierra Leone. Although, the SLPP's endorsement of the CDF posed a threat to the SLA. Due to resentment, the SLA began to "...exploit the volatile security situation in the country" (261), making it more difficult to end the war through diplomatic means.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

PHASES OF CONFLICT

Phases of Conflict Continued

Phase III

This phase began with the violent military coup in May 1997, which led to the appointment of Major Johnny Paul Koroma as Head of State, and a shift away from loyalty toward the SLA ("Witness to Truth," 2004, p.261). A new fighting force developed, known as the "Armed Forces Revolutionary Council" (AFRC), which created an alliance with the RUF. The two groups combined into the "People's Army" and became known for its brutal and systemic violation of human rights (261).

In order to oppose the AFRC, President Kabbah, who was overthrown in the coup, established a group of trusted advisors and military commanders in Guinea ("Witness to Truth," 2004, p.261). In addition, Samuel Hinga Norman, the Deputy Minister of Defence, mobilized the Kamajors who were a vast but untrained military force (261).

Furthermore, in February 1998, a West African peacekeeping troop under the name of "Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group" (ECOMOG), made an intervention in order to try to restore Sierra Leone. However, their defense proved to be weak, and thus, Sierra Leone remained unstable ("Witness to Truth," 2004, p.261).

Eventually, the SLPP declared a "State of Public Emergency" that resulted in four years of numerous illegal acts committed by the government in the name of 'justice' ("Witness to Truth," 2004, p.261). During this period, 24 SLA soldiers were executed by the state and the AFRC committed a wave of atrocities against civilians in the northern part of Sierra Leone (261). Despite these human rights violations, the government did not do anything to put a stop to the violence. The most severe part of this phase was in the year 1999 when the AFRC carried out a brutal attack on Freetown, the capital city of Sierra Leone, which has left impacts that are felt throughout the country to this day (261).

The Lomé Peace Agreement

On July 7th, 1999, a peace agreement was signed between the government of Sierra Leone and the Revolutionary United Front, which was intended to resolve the conflict through two components; military resolution by disarming combatants, and political settlement by implementing a power-sharing agreement ("Witness to Truth," 2004, p.261). However, the RUF indicated that they were not committed to peace by unjustifiably holding several hundred United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) peacekeepers hostage (261).

In May 2000, the government carried out a 'Peace Task Force' which detained anyone associated with the RUF. According to the Truth Commission, the individuals rounded up during that time, remain in prison to this day. In summary, the Lomé Peace Agreement has not been fully implemented by either one of the parties involved. In addition, the continued detention of individuals associated with the RUF has reinforced the struggle for national reconciliation ("Witness to Truth," 2004, p.261).

NATURE OF CONFLICT

TRENDS OF VIOLATIONS

Nature of Conflict

The commission used both quantitative and qualitative techniques to identify patterns and trends in the conflict such as the "...frequencies of violations committed, the profiles of perpetrators, the identities and demographics of their victims, and any evidence of targeting" ("Witness to Truth," 2004, p.261). Furthermore, the commission examined 16 specific categories of violations across various contexts; including killings, forced recruitment, physical torture, amputations, arbitrary detention, rape, destruction of property, looting, and cannibalism (261). Many of these violations were divided into three overarching categories; violations perpetrated in the context of abduction and outside the context of abduction, mistreatment violations, and economic violations (262).

The commission particularly notes that "Certain groups like property owners, chiefs, figures of traditional authority and representatives of government institutions were targeted on the basis of revenge, economic appropriation and because of their ethnicity" ("Witness to Truth," 2004, p.262). In fact, many factions turned ethnicity into an instrument of prejudice and violence against those who were perceived as the 'other'. For example, in the latter part of the war, Southern and Eastern regions heavily targeted those belonging to the Northern regions of Sierra Leone. These ethnic violations were predominantly committed by the Kamajors against groups such as the Temne, Koranko, Loko, Limba, and Yalunka (262).

The Kamajors were responsible for the majority of violations reported after 1996, on behalf of the CDF, including physical and psychological torture as well as many other cases of abuse (262). In addition, a group known as the AFRC committed large-scale atrocities across the Northern region and the Kono District, most notably, amputations during the years 1998-1999 (262). However, most of the violations and abuses committed during the conflict were carried out by those affiliated with the Revolutionary United Front which primarily used forced recruitment to enlist child combatants (262).



Women Protesting. Source:

<https://www.kekemagazine.com/2019/02/20/sierra-leone-president-declares-rape-a-problem-now-what/>

THE VICTIMS

YOUTH AND WOMEN

Youth

During the onset of the APC one-party rule, youths were considered the main opposition to the marginalizing government. Many students attending Fourah Bay College in 1985 displayed early acts of dissent and disobedience, playing a key role in fuelling the conflict ("Witness to Truth," 2004, p.267). Later on in the rebellion, Sierra Leonean youths were recruited by force or persuasion from Liberia, the Ivory Coast, and parts of Sierra Leone during the year 1991 (268). However, the youth involved in the fighting forces, such as RUF, CDF, and the expanded SLA, were typically 'marginalized', 'less educated', and 'less ideologically conscious' in comparison to the student revolutionary groups in the 1980s (268).

While some youths saw the RUF as a viable alternative to their current situations of unemployment and poverty, many youths were forcibly abducted into the ranks of the armed group through death threats or forced consumption of drugs ("Witness to Truth," 2004, p.268). Youths were considered both victims and perpetrators due to being both forced to engage in violence and also carrying out human rights violations against civilians. In either case, youths were alienated from their communities and support systems, stripped of their childhood, and psychologically scarred from their experiences (268, 345).

Women

Women and girls bear the scars from the horrific experiences during the Sierra Leone conflict ("Witness to Truth," 2004, p.266). The main armed groups responsible for perpetrating sexual violence against women and girls were the RUF, the AFRC, the CDF, the Westside Boys, and the SLA (266). However, women and girls were systematically targeted by every group during the war; this was done through rape, slavery, mutilations, torture, displacement, amputations, forced pregnancy, sterilization, and death among many other human rights violations. In addition, women and girls as young as 12 years old were forced to pay for aid with sex, in order for their families to receive assistance from the humanitarian workers who were meant to protect them (265).

Due to these circumstances, women often took on the role of the perpetrator as a means to survive (266). In turn, the commission suggests that these women face double victimization; first being forced against their will to join the factions, then being stigmatized by society for taking on that role. On top of that, many women in Sierra Leone have children that were born out of rape and sexual slavery. These mothers continue to face residual oppression from the war by being shunned from society for giving birth to so-called 'rebel' children (266).

THE VICTIMS

CHILDREN

Children

The Sierra Leone conflict is known for the armed factions' deliberate strategy of forcing children into combat ("Witness to Truth," 2004, p.346). Children were considered both victims and perpetrators of unspeakable violations; they were abducted and forcibly recruited to fight and kill for the faction that took them (346). In their roles as perpetrators, many children became conditioned to accept violence as the norm. To this day, they have entered adulthood deeply scarred by their traumatic experiences, and filled with feelings of guilt (346).

Children, especially girls between the ages of 10 to 14, were tortured, injured, forced into slave labor and sexual slavery, raped, and experienced other forms of sexual abuse ("Witness to Truth," 2004, p.352). Many of these girls are now HIV positive, in addition to suffering other sexually transmitted infections (349). The commission also found that many children abducted during the conflict have not been able to return home, and thus, live on the streets either begging or selling themselves for sex to survive (349).

The commission holds the leadership of RUF, CDF, AFRC, and SLA, accountable for these human rights violations.



Child Soldiers. Source: <https://leaglesamiksha.com/2020/08/18/innocent-combatants-child-soldiers-of-sierra-leone/>



Women and girls. Source: <https://www.kekemagazine.com/2019/02/20/sierra-leone-president-declares-rape-a-problem-now-what/>

EMERGENCE OF TRUTH COMMISSION

CONTEXT AND LIMITATIONS

Lomé Peace Agreement

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission was a product of the Lomé Peace Agreement adopted on July 7th, 1999 between the government of Sierra Leone and the Revolutionary United Front (RUF). This agreement began during the aftermath of the January 1999 invasion of Freetown mentioned in the third phase of the conflict. President Kabbah proposed that the Abidjan Peace Accord should serve as the basis for negotiations ("Witness to Truth," 2004, p.35). However, the Human Rights Committee questioned this approach, due to Article 14, which granted blanket immunity to perpetrators of human rights violations in Sierra Leone (35). At the same time, the committee was aware that if there was any threat of legal action taken against RUF members, they would have likely refused to sign the agreement. The Human Rights Committee, therefore, proposed the creation of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Sierra Leone which was developed and financed by the government in May 2002 (37). The primary role of the commission would be to establish accountability for the atrocities that have been committed during the conflict and restore the dignity of victims by way of truth-telling rather than trials and prosecutions (37).

Breach of Amnesty

Despite the amnesty, the Lomé Agreement was somewhat modified in the year 2000, when the government of Sierra Leone called upon the United Nations to establish a tribunal, known as a special court ("Witness to Truth," 2004, p.37). This court was meant to prosecute members of the RUF who committed the most extreme crimes and those who held the United Nations peacekeepers hostage. The agreement became endorsed by the Parliament in March 2002 by means of the 'Special Court Agreement', 2002, and the 'Ratification Act', 2002 (37). Although, the commission believes that breaching the amnesty clause has undermined the legitimacy of national and regional peace initiatives, which can have consequences for potential wars in the future (269).

Limitation of Two Bodies

The unique relationship between the Commission and the Special Court was mostly cordial. However, because a criminal justice body is largely punitive, while a truth and reconciliation body is largely restorative, clashing of objectives and public confusion became inevitable ("Witness to Truth," 2004, p.269). The commission suggests that the United Nations and the Government of Sierra Leone, both of which were responsible for the development of these bodies, failed to provide guidelines for how they should go about working with one another (359). This especially became problematic when the Special Court refused to permit the Commission from holding public hearings with the detainees held in its custody (269). In addition, the commission found that many Sierra Leoneans who may have wished to participate in the hearings did not do so, due to the fear that their information would be used in the Special Court (171).

EMERGENCE OF TRUTH COMMISSION

MANDATE AND KEY PERSONALITIES

Mandate

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of Sierra Leone was mandated to ("Witness to Truth," 2004, pp.31-34):

1) **Create an impartial historical record of violations and abuses of human rights and international humanitarian law related to the armed conflict from the years 1991 to 2002.** In doing so, the Commission must investigate and report the causes, nature, and extent of the violations and abuses—including internal and external factors—as well as address the question of whether they were the result of deliberate planning, policy, or authorization by a government, group, or individual.

2) **Address impunity** by providing a space for truth-telling in order to hold the perpetrators accountable for their actions.

3) **Respond to the needs of victims** by providing them with the opportunities to give an account of their experiences and create an environment that fosters constructive communication between victims and perpetrators. This includes implementing special procedures for particular victims such as children who have suffered from sexual abuse.

4) **Promote healing and reconciliation** with the assistance of traditional and religious leaders to facilitate public sessions and help resolve conflicts arising from past violations.

5) **Prevent the recurrence of the violations and abuses suffered** by making legal, political, administrative, or other recommendations to ensure this objective.

Key Personalities

("Witness to Truth," 2004, p.13)

Chairperson of Sierra Leone TRC

Bishop Joseph C. Humper

Deputy Chairperson of Sierra Leone TRC

Hon Justice Laura Marcus-Jones

Commissioners

- Professor William Schabas
- Ms Yasmin Louise Sooka
- Mr. Sylvanus Torto
- Madam Ajaratu Satang Jow
- Professor John Kamara

Key personalities also include the victims, witnesses, and perpetrators who participated in the commission's hearings.



Truth Commission. Source: <https://sierraleonetr.com/index.php/video-photos/sierra-leone-trc-image-gallery>

THE TRUTH COMMISSION

OUTCOMES & LEGACIES

The Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission published its final report in October 2004, which provided a comprehensive account of the atrocities committed throughout the civil war as well as the causes and nature of the conflict. The report also made recommendations to prevent future conflicts and aims to promote national reconciliation.

Truth-telling: Through the participation of victims and perpetrators, the Commission was able to provide a space for the sharing of stories and experiences. In turn, this helped develop a greater understanding with respect to the causes and effects of the conflict.

Reparations: The commission recommended a reparation program to ensure that war victims received support from the government. This includes free education, medical care, housing, pension plans, and trauma counseling for specific victims. In addition, the commission recommended symbolic reparations such as war memorials that should be placed in key locations around the country ("Witness to Truth," 2004, pp.441-444).

Institutional Reform: The commission recommended a range of reforms with respect to the police and military, the judiciary, and the electoral system ("Witness to Truth," 2004, pp.399-406).

Amnesty: The commission found that the withdrawal of amnesty following the breach of the Lomé Peace Accord undermined the legitimacy of future peace agreements. Therefore, the commission recommended that future agreements should include a clause that clarifies that breaching an agreement can result in revoking the protection of amnesty ("Witness to Truth," 2004, p.440).

Persecutions: The commission found that during the conflict, certain regimes victimized a large number of individuals who were suspected to be associated with rebel groups. However, there are many instances where certain individuals were unlawfully dismissed or detained. Therefore, the commission recommended that the HRC investigate each case of political persecution and restore the lost benefits associated with their persecution ("Witness to Truth," 2004, p.306).

Reconciliation: The commission offered guidelines in order to facilitate and promote reconciliation with the inclusion of victims in the process. In the long term, the commission recommends the improvement of "...socioeconomic living conditions of the people; good governance; strong and functional oversight institutions; the creation of a respected and professional security force; and the implementation of a reparations program that takes into account the needs of the victims of the conflict" ("Witness to Truth," 2004, p.447). In the short term, the commission recommends, "apologies by all actors involved in the conflict, a national peace day, dissemination of the TRC report, traditional and religious activities, social and recreational activities, trauma counseling, and Government support for the continuation of activities of the District Reconciliation and Support Committees set up by the TRC and the Inter-Religious Council" (447).

ASSESSMENT OF TRUTH COMMISSION

FROM SCHOLARS AND PUBLIC COMMENTATORS

Public Hearings

In an article titled, *Searching for Answers: Sierra Leone's Truth and Reconciliation Commission*, author Beth K. Dougherty, provides an extensive critique of the Sierra Leone Truth Commission (SLTRC). According to Dougherty, not many Truth Commissions utilize public hearings, however, this was an essential component of the SLTRC. This is due to the many benefits that come from public hearings, such as the potential for "formal acknowledgment, public support and understanding of the victims and the commission, and TRC press coverage" (Dougherty, 2004). In addition, she notes that they allow for higher rates of public access to information on the TRC, especially in a largely illiterate society. However, Dougherty also notes that public hearings have limitations with respect to their inability to constitute a full and objective record of the conflict. In turn, the statements do not always align with the outcome of the ongoing research and investigations of the conflict. As a result, public testimony only represented 4% of the SLTRC statements within the report (Dougherty, 2004).

Differing Perspectives

In an article titled, *Assessing Local Experiences of Truth-Telling in Sierra Leone: Getting to 'Why' Through a Qualitative Case Study Analysis*, author Gearoid Millar discusses the various attitudes towards the SLTRC between the members of the elite and non-elite. Through this case study, he found that members of the elite typically expressed positive experiences with public hearings, suggesting that the TRC contributed to their healing process by allowing them to talk about their hardships. However, the study found that non-elite interviewees presented overwhelmingly negative attitudes toward the TRC, essentially due to the lack of tangible benefits for victims and those who shared their stories. In fact, one interviewee related the TRC hearings to 'pouring hot water over your head', which was echoed by other interviewees (Millar, 2010). Evidently, there were drastically different perspectives on the TRC depending on one's status. In order to accurately measure the successes and failures of the TRC, the article concludes by emphasizing the need for more ethnographic studies that highlight local experiences with such processes.

Women Post-Conflict

In an article titled, *Justice Mirage? Sierra Leone's Truth and Reconciliation Commission and Local Women's Experiences*, author E. Christabel Unobe, examines the experiences of women in Sierra Leone during and after the implementation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Specifically, the author argues that the SLTRC fails to carefully address the gendered limitations of its mechanisms. Unlike the common assumption that sharing one's story results in healing, Unobe suggests that many women find silence as a form of power in order to protect themselves from reliving trauma or from being shamed by their perpetrators (Unobe, 2022). This is especially true for women in a society that is deeply patriarchal, and thus, are stigmatized for being rape victims. For example, the author states that "some women and girls were scared to inform the SLTRC of their experiences for fear that they may face harm in the hands of the perpetrator", and "there was the report of a woman being abandoned by her husband following her decision to testify at the SLTRC" (Unobe, 2022). In addition, the author states that the SLTRC oversimplified women's harm to sexual violence, preventing them from participating and benefitting from the security sector reforms (Unobe, 2022).

ASSESSMENT OF TRUTH COMMISSION

PERSONAL ANALYSIS

In the chapter titled, *The Madres de Plaza de Mayo and the Resistance against the Irreversible Time of History*, in the book titled, *History, Memory, and State*, Berber Beverage examines the role of a protest group that came about during the 'Dirty War' in Argentina, 1977. They called themselves the 'Madres' because their members consisted of mothers searching for their sons and daughters who were abducted during the war. What was notable about this group, was their denial of death as a form of resistance. For this reason, the military often referred to the group of mothers as 'the mad women of the square'. No one could understand why the mothers were insisting on the idea of their children being alive if they knew that they were dead.

The article states that many scholars have tried to grasp the Madres' denial of death in terms of psychopathology related to the idea of 'mourning without a body', however, the author argues that this perspective fails to understand the deeper reasons behind their resistance. Instead, Beverage suggests that the Madres' refusal to mourn represents an attack on the concepts of time and history. In this case, denying death is actually synonymous with the SLTRC's slogan 'never forget'.

In the context of the Sierra Leone conflict, it is clear that the same tactics used by the Madres, have become foundational to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission; however, under the guise of 'remembrance' and 'truth-telling'. In doing so, the TRC was able to use diverse perspectives in order to develop a complex picture of what happened during the conflict and name those responsible.

Not only does remembering the past act as a means for perpetrator accountability, victim reparation, and prevention of future conflict, but the act of remembering is an end itself. It allows society to honor the memories of victims and ensure their experiences are never forgotten, which is an essential component of healing and closure. Therefore, despite the potential limitations of Sierra Leone's TRC, it is no small accomplishment that when discussing the conflict, citizens have a clear understanding of what happened.

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