What happened after we put our guns down: The reintegration experiences of former female combatants in post-conflict Sierra Leone.

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Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Politics and International Studies

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May 2023

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to both my gogos

Fenny Mabaya and Annalisa Cheve Dube,

whose lives continue to inspire me,

and

all the female comrades who were gandangas

in the chimurenga/ umvukela war.

Acknowledgements

In submitting this thesis, I wish to acknowledge the following whose support and assistance were invaluable to me in pursuing this dream of attaining a doctorate degree.

This research would not have been possible if the different women whose experiences are central to this thesis had not trusted me with their life stories. This work would not exist if it were not for you, so I am deeply indebted to you.

I would like to thank my supervisors, Professor Gabrielle Lynch, Dr Julia Welland and Dr Briony Jones, for providing me with intellectual guidance, creating a safe space where I could freely express myself, and always giving me their unwavering support. You helped me turn an idea into a proposal; now it's a thesis we can all be proud of. I feel very honoured and fortunate to have had the support of three strong women whose intellect, work and lives inspire me. In the same vein, I would also like to thank Is Andrews for being an eagle-eyed editor whose help was invaluable to my finalising this thesis.

I would also like to thank everyone that helped me establish contacts and travel to Sierra Leone; Dr Laura Martin, Professor Franklyn Lisk, Ms Isha Dyfan, Dr Lansana Gberie and Dr Tahir Bockarie. I would not have been able to travel across Sierra Leone and conduct all the interviews I did for this research, if I hadn't received support and guidance from Abubakarr Foday, Allieu Abu Sheriff, Jande Demby and Joseph Kargbo.

This research would also not have been possible if it had not been for the generosity of different organisations. I would therefore like to thank the Department of Politics and International Studies at the University of Warwick for awarding me a full scholarship, the British Institute of Eastern Africa (BIEA) for the research trip funding, and Funding for Women Graduates (FfWG) for their generous bursary.

Last but not least, I would like to thank my wonderful family; my Mum, Rob, Gamu, Kumbi, Dad, Fadzi, Shiloh and Jude. My friends Thelma, Lauretta, Kudzi, Friday, Olaolu, April and Cathryn. Thank you for all your love, support and patience these last few years; this degree is as much yours as it is mine. And to Ayo mi, thank you for all you have done and continue to do.

To all those mentioned and all those not mentioned, thank you again for your support. I am grateful for all you have done and continue to do, whether or not I expressed it at the time.

All glory, honour and praise to Yahweh.

Declaration

I declare that this thesis was composed by myself, that the work contained herein is my own except where explicitly stated otherwise in the text, and that this work has not been submitted for any other degree or qualification except as specified.

Gwendolene Cheve

Abstract

Histories of various post-conflict societies suggest that former combatants face challenges to reintegration that have a long-term impact on their lives. In turn, an area of focus for peacebuilding and post-conflict reconstruction has been to ensure former combatants receive support in rebuilding their socioeconomic lives, through interventions such as disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) and truth commissions under the umbrella term 'reintegration'. The plethora of literature on former combatants' post-conflict experiences has largely focused on the years immediately following a conflict and on official reintegration programmes. These programmes are predominantly used by male combatants, with limited engagement by female combatants. Accordingly, research on post-conflict experiences has paid relatively little attention to the experiences and relationships of former female combatants (FFCs) in the years after they 'put down their guns'. Recognising both this limitation in the literature, and shortcomings with DDR in Sierra Leone, this thesis develops a dynamic and nuanced understanding of the extent and ways in which FFC reintegration experience informed their post-conflict lives, using in-depth interviews with FFCs in Sierra Leone.

The thesis builds on work by feminists questioning how FFCs' experiences are conceptualised in conflict and peacebuilding theory and practice, and how traditional gender norms and values shape post-conflict environments. The thesis contributes to existing scholarship, arguing that economic and social reintegration programmes can allow FFCs to advance gender equality in their families, communities and work environments. More specifically, I argue that the inclusion of female combatant experiences/narratives in the design of programmes can facilitate how gender norms, values and dynamics are reshaped, reformed and practised in post-conflict environments. This must be done whilst paying careful attention to the nuanced roles of female combatants in a multiplicity of active or passive modes of supporting fighting groups, and their expectations for life afterwards. The thesis also reveals the importance of capturing FFC post-conflict experiences, demonstrating the role that reintegration programmes play, many years into the post-conflict environment.

List of Abbreviations

AFRC	Armed Forces Revolutionary Council
APC	All People's Congress
CDF	Civil Defence Forces
DDR	Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration
DFID	United Kingdom Department for International Development
ECOMOG	Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EO	Executive Outcomes
NaCSA	National Commission for Social Action
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organizations
NPRC	National Provisional Ruling Council
OAU	Organisation of African Unity
RSLAF	Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces
RUF	Revolutionary United Front
SCSL	Special court for Sierra Leone
SLA	Sierra Leone Army
SLPP	Sierra Leone People's Party

SLTRC	Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission
SSR	Security Sector Reform
TRC	Truth and Reconciliation Commission
ULIMO	United Liberation Movement for Democracy
UN	United Nations
UNAMSIL	United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

Introduction: Female combatants 18 years after the war

In 2000, the United Nations formally acknowledged that war is gendered by creating Resolution 1325, which addresses how women and girls are differentially impacted by conflict and recognises their critical role in peacebuilding efforts (UN Resolution 1325). The gender dimension of war is widely recognised in academic literature and beyond (Enloe, 1999, 2000; Goldstein, 2001; Steans, 2013 and Sharoni, Welland et al, 2016 to name a few). However, many post-conflict countries struggle to have inclusive participation of women (civilians and former combatants) in peace negotiations, policy development, and the design and implementation of post-conflict interventions – of which reintegration through disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) programmes and reconciliation efforts, for example, through truth and reconciliation commissions (TRCs), are a major part. Feminists within international relations and security studies attribute this lack of inclusion, in part, to the fact that narratives on women in conflict conceptualise their experiences through a 'victimhood lens' (inter alia Gentry and Sjoberg, 2007; Utas, 2005; Mazurana and Carlson, 2004). This is despite feminist research that has demonstrated how – whilst some female combatants perform supportive roles (Marks, 2013; Cohen, 2013; Coulter, 2008, 2009), and are victims of physical and sexual violence (Rehn and Sirleaf, 2002; Bazz and Stern, 2013; Leatherman, 2011; Marks, 2013; Cohen, 2013; Coulter 2008, 2009) – many perpetrate acts of violence (MacKenzie 2009, 2010, 2012; Sjoberg and Gentry, 2007). Feminist research has also demonstrated that FFCs practice agency in navigating and negotiating conflict zones (Utas, 2005), and develop new skills, knowledge, and gain opportunities, that challenge the traditional gender roles assigned to them (Yadav, 2016).

Feminists further argue that, in post-conflict environments, there is an implicit/subconscious prominence of a victimhood narrative, which has led to interventions that conceptualise and integrate female combatants in a problematic manner, thus rendering their social reintegration challenging in ways that are different to former male combatants (Cohen, 2013; Sadomba and

Dzinesa, 2004; MacKenzie, 2009; Weber, 2021). Despite this, research on former combatants' post-conflict experiences has continued to pay relatively little attention to the experiences and inter-personal and social relationships of former female combatants (FFCs) in the years after they 'put down their guns'. Recognising this gap in the scholarship and shortcomings with DDR in Sierra Leone, and using stories informed by different experiences, this thesis develops a more dynamic and nuanced understanding of how female combatants' reintegration has informed their post-conflict lives. This means that the thesis informs scholarship by contributing to the limited research on FFCs. More importantly, in unpacking the reintegration experiences of FFCs, 15 years after reintegration programmes through UN led DDR concluded, this research contributes new knowledge – as hitherto, this has not been done in Sierra Leone.

Following the work of McLeod (2015) and Martin (2021), this research adopts Sylvester's (2012) approach of conceptualising war as experience, by conceptualising *post-conflict life as experience* – insofar as 'experience' is the FFCs' lived history and events as they understand them. Moreover, the thesis is based on the understanding that experience is subjectively narrated – there is 'no inherent essential meaning, as experience is given meaning through particular ways of thinking, particular discourses, which constitute a specific sense of self' (McLeod 2015:53, citing Weedon 1997:32f).

In unpacking FFCs' experience of and with reintegration, it is important to state that the purpose of this thesis is not to offer a design of successful or unsuccessful reintegration. Instead, this thesis contextualises and adds to our understanding of FFCs' reintegration experiences, by interrogating the experiences of FFCs who engaged in the UN-led reintegration programmes in Sierra Leone, as well as those who didn't. Moreover, it seeks to develop our knowledge of FFCs' realities in rebuilding their social relations and the shaping of gender dynamics in post-conflict Sierra Leone. This is in contrast to the existing research on the reintegration experiences of former combatants in Sierra Leone, which tends to fall into one of three categories:

(i) **Experiences with UN led and/or community led social reintegration programmes or activities:** Some research interrogates former combatants' social reintegration experiences as part of broader research on their experiences with DDR interventions (see MacKenzie, 2009; Mazurana and Carlson, 2004; Humphreys and Weinstein, 2007). Whilst this reveals former combatants' experiences of DDR, by interrogating social reintegration in terms of its relationship to DDR (or the TRC), existing research on Sierra Leone consequently focuses on reintegration programmes linked to DDR or the TRC. This inadvertently fails to capture the experiences of former combatants who engaged in social reintegration activities run by their communities, especially when it comes to social reintegration. **In unpacking the reintegration experiences of former combatants who engaged with both UN led DDR and community based social reintegration activities, this thesis contributes new knowledge to research.**

(ii) Gender Disaggregation/Differentiation: Other research, more specifically studying former combatants' experiences with DDR or reintegration, either tends to focus on male combatants, or does not pinpoint the differences between male and female combatant experiences. For example, Özerdem (2012) and Shepler (2014) use the term 'child soldiers'; Özerdem and Podder (2012) use 'youth'; and Kilroy (2011) uses 'ex-combatants', whilst Peters and Roberts (1998) use 'young fighters' without any breakdown differentiating gender or the difference in gender experiences. At the same time, work by Humphreys and Weinstein, 2007 – whose research shares gender-disaggregated data – argues that female and male combatant reintegration experiences are the same. As such, **this thesis offers a counterbalance, and contributes to existing knowledge by focusing specifically on FFC reintegration experiences.**

(iii) Long-term research: Finally, research which is aimed specifically at the reintegration experiences of female combatants has either focused exclusively on girl soldiers (see McKay, 2004, Mazurana and McKay, 2004), or constituted a short-term analysis of DDR, whilst the

programmes were active, or within a few years of their conclusion in 2004 (see MacKenzie, 2009; Mazurana and Carlson, 2004; Humphreys and Weinstein, 2007). **This thesis, therefore, contributes to new knowledge by conceptualising the reintegration experiences of female combatants from the implementation of the UN-led DDR programme to 15 years after they concluded.**

Beyond contributing to research in line with the categories above, this thesis also contributes to broader knowledge on the reintegration experiences of former combatants in general. This is because, whilst some of the research focuses exclusively on capturing and analysing these experiences using qualitative data and analysis (see MacKenzie, 2009, 2012, 2019; Jennings, 2008); the often-cited research on DDR in Sierra Leone assessing former combatants' engagement is quantitative (see Humphreys and Weinstein, 2007). This is often problematic, as quantitative research focuses on the 'DD' aspects – as they are the processes that numerical data can be collected against – unlike the 'R'. When 'R' is interrogated in quantitative research, often there is then a tendency to focus on *economic reintegration* that can be analysed using quantitative data, unlike *social reintegration*, which requires qualitative analysis (Özerdem, A. (2012). **This thesis, therefore, contributes new knowledge on reintegration through qualitative data.**

The literature on gender dynamics and how they can be shaped in the post-conflict period (Pankhurst, 2003; Bardall, 2011) tends to focus on issues in the public sphere, such as access to education and employment, or women's participation in the political arena. It only interrogates private sphere issues in relation to post-conflict gender-based violence. Whilst this research captures some of the experiences of (some) women in Sierra Leonean society, they do not specifically discuss the experiences of FFCs. This is because there is no acknowledgement of the additional challenges FFCs face, nor that reintegration crosses the public/private divide. **Therefore, this research also contributes new knowledge by interrogating FFCs'**

reintegration within both the public and private sphere, interrogating their different social relationships.

1.1 Research questions and arguments

This thesis is informed by an overarching theoretically informed research question which is ***How far and in what ways does post-conflict reintegration (both economic and social programs) provide an opportunity to re-conceptualise gender norms, values and roles?***

To answer this, the thesis uses the three sub- questions:

1. In what ways and to what extent did economic reintegration programmes support FFCs' ability to secure employment in Sierra Leone?
2. What can FFCs' experiences reveal about their efforts towards rebuilding relationships with their families and communities? What do FFCs identify as hindering or supporting their efforts towards rebuilding their social relationships in Sierra Leone?
3. What can FFCs' use of voice or silence reveal about their reintegration experiences in Sierra Leone?

One of the central arguments this thesis makes is that we need to reclaim and reassert reintegration as an important and necessary process in post-conflict environments for FFCs. In advancing this, the thesis contributes to feminist scholarship that identifies reintegration as a potentially transformative process for FFCs, as it can be an avenue for advancing gender equality in post-conflict environments. For economic reintegration, this can mean that FFCs engage in diverse skills training opportunities that can lead to sustainable formal or informal employment and transcend traditional gender roles/expectation/dynamics. For social reintegration, this can mean that FFCs can actively share their conflict experiences, which will inform how they and their families and communities reshape gender dynamics, values, and norms in their new normal.

Another key argument this thesis makes is that there is value in engaging with FFC experiences several years into the post-conflict period, as their experiences reveal the long-term impact of reintegration programmes on their ability to secure sustainable income and rebuild their social relationships. FFCs' experiences also reveal that economic and social reintegration have a symbiotic relationship, which means that both should be *equally* prioritised: failure of one can be detrimental to the success of the other. Moreover, engaging with FFCs' experiences that cover a period of 18 years reveals insights into how and why some FFCs employed silence, and the role that audience and time can play in FFCs' employment of silence or voice as both informed their reintegration experiences. Before delving into the narratives and experiences that inform these arguments, it's important to construct an understanding of reintegration by first situating it within disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR), unpacking the different reintegration components, and providing insights into how it supports former combatants in the post-conflict environment.

1.2 Disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR)

Definitions

The United Nations (UN) Integrated Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration standards (IDDRS) (2006) offers definitions of DDR, which are still dominant in literature, practice and policy. All the literature reviewed for this thesis which analyses or discusses DDR in Sierra Leone cites this definition as the most applicable for the programme, and therefore this thesis will use the same definition of DDR.

Disarmament

> The collection, documentation, control, and disposal of small arms, ammunition, explosives, and light and heavy weapons of combatants and, often, of groups within the civilian population in a conflict zone (IDDRS, 2006).

In official disarmament programmes around the world, former combatants are gathered at assembly points to hand in their weapons and, in exchange, receive short-term support in the form of food, shelter, and healthcare, and sometimes – as was the case in Sierra Leone and Liberia – cash payments per weapon handed in. A census is also conducted, and former combatants are issued discharge documentation (Ball, 1997). It's important to note that civilians are also involved in the handing-in of weapons. Disarmament is usually the first stage of the DDR process; taking weapons out of circulation is often seen as the first step in reducing the possibility of outbreaks of violence and creating a secure environment for civilians and former combatants (Knight, 2008:28).

Demobilisation

> The formal and controlled discharge of active combatants from armed forces or other armed groups. The first stage of demobilisation may extend from processing individual combatants in individual centres to massing troops in cantonment sites. The second stage of demobilisation encompasses the support package provided to the demobilised, which is reinsertion, a short-term process that exists and facilitates the first stages of reintegration. (IDDRS, 2006).

Demobilisation is a social welfare-oriented transitional safety net designed to sustain demobilised individuals as they leave cantonment sites to return to their families or to settle into new communities. During this process former combatants receive financial packages (termed reinsertion packages), to cover their basic needs which can include travel allowances, food, clothes, shelter, and medical services in the short-term (IDDRS, 2006). This stage is deemed essential to the next stage of the DDR process – reintegration – as individuals are registered (for training programmes, education, employment, or tools) and for information to

be gathered, especially identifying vulnerable and special interest groups (Knight and Özerdem, 2004: 507).

Reintegration

This is defined as the process by which former combatants acquire civilian status and gain sustainable employment and income. Reintegration is essentially a *social*, *political*, and *economic* process, with an open timeframe, primarily taking place in communities at the local level, and designed to facilitate the assimilation of ex-combatants in a way that allows them, and their families, to adapt to civilian life in communities that may not necessarily be ready to accept them (IDDRS, 2006). Economic reintegration is understood as the way in which former combatants are equipped with productive skills and employment so that they can acquire civilian status (Ginifer, 2003:43).

> In most cases, this process involves the provision of cash or a compensation package of some sort in exchange for the commitment of ex-combatants not to return to conflict, providing ex-combatants with longer-term job or career training, initiating sustainable income-generation projects, repatriating refugees, and displaced persons, and establishing of a forum and process for truth and reconciliation (Knight, 2008:29).

Political reintegration is the 'process through which the ex-combatant and his/her family become a full part of the decision-making process' (Kingma, 2000:28). A prerequisite of this is the existence of a functioning state and legal system, which promotes 'the strengthening of state capacity, law and order, the development of process and democratic decision-making and non-violent conflict resolution' (Kingma, 2000:28). Social reintegration is the process that can 'make positive contributions to social cohesion' (Bowd and Özerdem, 2013: 453) or put differently it is the process through which former combatants and their families feel part of and

are accepted by their recipient community (Kingma, 2002 cited in ibid). Social reintegration is also identified as a long-term process without a timeline, and one which has received less attention than political and economic reintegration because 'many of the effects of conflict it addresses are soft in that they are psychological, social and cultural and therefore less obvious than physical injury or disease or economic desperation' (McKay, 2004:26).

It's important to acknowledge that in some conceptual literature, reintegration has been expanded to the 3RRRs, resulting in DDRRR, or *disarmament, demobilisation, reintegration, repatriation, reintegration* and *resettlement* (Rufer, 2005). Another variation was evident in the delivery of the Liberian programme, where the process was referred to as 'DDRR', or *disarmament, demobilisation, reintegration,* and *rehabilitation*. This sets out to deal with the psychological and emotional aspects of former combatants when they are reintegrating. However, this variation has not gained much traction, neither in the literature nor the post-conflict reconstruction community, as nearly all programmes address rehabilitation in one way or another during the demobilisation and reintegration phases. The most frequently used acronym in literature, policy and practice continues to be DDR (Mazurana and Carlson, 2004: 8) and was the term used during the programme's implementation in Sierra Leone.

History of DDR

In terms of soldier demobilisation and former combatants' reintegration into civilian life, DDR programmes were being implemented in countries after World War I and World War II; yet DDR didn't emerge as a specialist field until the early 1980s, with the conclusion of armed conflicts in Zimbabwe, Ethiopia/Eritrea, Uganda, and Namibia (Lamb, 2008: 1). The late 1980s and early 1990s saw an increase in considerable financial resources and intellectual capital being committed to DDR, as the end of the Cold War saw an increase in intrastate conflicts, and there was a need to adapt the way UN-sponsored peacekeeping missions were being

implemented (CCDDR, 2009:7). The first UN Security Council-mandated DDR process took place in Namibia in 1989; Cambodia, Central America and Mozambique implemented their programmes soon after.

However, the official incorporation of DDR activities into all UN missions and doctrines did not take place until 1992, when the former UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali conceptualised peacebuilding as an activity to be undertaken immediately after the cessation of violence, in his 'An Agenda for Peace' report (Boutros-Ghali, 1992). For Boutros-Ghali, military and security concerns posed the biggest threat to countries transitioning from war to peace, and he envisioned DDR programmes as being part of a 'framework for ensuring that violent conflict would not reoccur in post-conflict settings' (Knight, 2008: 25). Under this new mandate of peacebuilding, from the mid-1990s, DDR rapidly assumed a central role within the UN's post-conflict peacebuilding and reconstruction mandate and activities (UN, 1998). All programmes implemented under this mandate are referred to as first generation/wave DDR (CCDDR, 2009: 7). It is important to note that these programmes were designed to facilitate organised cantoning and decommissioning of combatants that had participated in conflicts across Southern Africa and Latin America. These combatants were all part of organised and formal military units (rebel groups or soldiers), meaning eligibility for reinsertion and reintegration programmes was not difficult to ascertain. It follows that it was not difficult to request that, upon receiving financial packages, or in some cases, veteran's pensions, combatants should embrace their new civilian status, and return to their communities. The only beneficiaries exempt from this expectation were those joining the new armed forces. The experiences from these DDR programmes are widely known as 'first-wave DDR', and the lessons from the programme in this period went on to inform the UN Integrated DDR Standards (IDDRS), based on the lessons drawn from those programmes (Muggah and O'Donnell, 2015: 2).

In the wake of the conflicts in West and Central Africa, as well as the Balkans and South-East Asia in the 1990s – where the lines between soldiers, combatants and civilians were increasingly blurred – the mandates for UN peacekeeping missions expanded in the early 2000s, along with the policies and practices of DDR programmes. The UN acknowledged that second wave DDR had arrived (Muggah and O'Donnell, 2015: 3). This need for change was officially recognised as one of the recommendations from the Report of the Panel on UN Peace Operations (2000), commonly called the Brahimi Report, which called for an explicit link between 'UN peacekeeping, peacebuilding and socioeconomic development' (Knight, 2008: 26). For DDR, this meant a shift in focus 'from a narrow preoccupation with demobilising and reintegrating ex-combatants – *spoilers* in the vernacular – to the much broader goals of building the conditions for sustainable peace' (Muggah 2005 cited in Muggah and O'Donnell, 2015: 3). It was envisaged that second wave DDR would do this by ensuring that it provided not only 'short-term military activities that focuses primarily on establishing stability and physical security in post-conflict environments' (Knight, 2008: 28), but supporting 'the sustainable social and economic reintegration of former combatants' (Bell and Watson, 2006 :3) – only possible if DDR was linked with broader national recovery efforts (Knight, 2008: 31). These broader efforts would include 'promoting reconciliation between combatants and communities, rebuilding and reinforcing social institutions, and promoting economic livelihoods for combatants, their dependents and neighbourhoods' (Muggah 2009 cited in Muggah and O'Donnell, 2015: 3). This change meant a shift in how security was conceptualised in peacebuilding, from the 'concrete minimalist aims of security and stabilisation' (CCDDR, 2009: 16), which focused on physical security, to the incorporation of broader development and human security concerns. Various academics and practitioners maintained that this move would promote the conditions of sustainable peace (Muggah, 2005); they hoped this change in DDR would 'promote security and stability in the short term

while simultaneously creating the conditions for longer-term development' (Coletta and Muggah, 2009 cited in Muggah and O'Donnell, 2015:2).

Whilst this thesis focuses on a second-wave DDR intervention, it is important to note that the evolution of DDR continues. The latest iteration of DDR is termed 'next-generation' (Muggah and O'Donnell, 2015) or 'third-generation' DDR (Boutet, 2019: 10), which results from practitioners and policymakers considering recommendations from second-wave DDR programmes. This learning is evident in that more recent DDR programmes (see Afghanistan, 2004; the Democratic Republic of Congo, 2005; Haiti, 2010 and Côte d'Ivoire, 2012), have had an interim stage as a stabilising measure, which means that implementation begins before peace agreements are reached. Next-generation programmes are also different in that – as well as targeting the main/larger armed factions – they also target armed groups that might not explicitly be included in peace agreements but pose enough of a risk to be spoilers of peace. The programmes are also moving away from voluntary participation to more forceful means of implementing the DD stages. Next-generation DDR has also been conceived with a concerted effort towards community engagement, placing the local political and social context at the centre of the processes (Muggah and O'Donnell, 2015: 6).

There are also increased efforts to ensure that next-generation DDR programmes do not strictly adhere to previous programme sequencing (where disarmament is the first step; demobilisation the second; and always the final step is reintegration (UN DPKO, 2000 cited in Ollek, 2007:11)). Instead, they take onboard the fact that DDR involves different activities, whose elements overlap, are interrelated and mutually reinforcing, but do not need to follow a specific order. As such, programmes should be prepared, negotiated and administered in a manner that reflects the context in which they are being delivered (Muggah and O'Donnell, 2015: 7).

With this understanding of reintegration, the next section will provide context for the thesis by summarising the conflict and detailing how the DDR programme was implemented in Sierra Leone.

1.3 The Case of Sierra Leone

The Sierra Leone civil war began after a group of rebels, the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) led by Foday Sankoh, claimed that – through the creation of a shadow state – the state had failed the unemployed and marginalised, especially the youth, and promised to reinstitute people's power. The RUF cited the unjust rule of local chiefs, exploitative labour practices, and the inability to access land as reasons to challenge the existing system and structure (Peters and Richards 1998). These claims were justified, insofar as most people felt a deep anger at the lack of good governance, lack of economic competence and political marginalisation of rural areas and widespread injustice. This sense of injustice was perpetuated by the exploitation of the country's rich natural resources through the illegal diamond trade (Sesay and Suma, 2009: 4). As a result, individuals – especially the youth in the rural areas – bore the brunt of the lack of investment, economic inequality, and poor social services (Keen, 2005:65). However, these sentiments were not shared as a motivation for joining the conflict by all the combatants; some were forcibly recruited or conscripted (Humphreys and Weinstein, 2004: 25). They were then used by the RUF to 'constitute a viable fighting force and a credible 'popular uprising' against the All People's Congress (APC)' (Richards, 1995: 5).

The RUF also seem to have been motivated by a scramble for the country's wealth of natural resources and particularly diamonds (Richards, 1996: 5). Some combatants saw benefits in the war economy, through looting and access to resources and benefits given to them by their commanders (Lujala et al., 2005: 540). This is evident in the behaviour of the commanders of various factions, who:

> capitalised on the prevailing disorder and utilised coercive means to capture and trade commodities. Looting and exploitation became an end, rather than just the means to the struggle among RUF commanders (who smuggled extractable alluvial diamonds into Liberia to sell and buy weapons), the army and mercenaries (who mined diamonds as a means of payment, given that the government would struggle to pay). (Frerks, Klem, Douma et al., 2008: 9)

The Sierra Leone civil war began in 1991, after the RUF's hundred-strong rebel force (made up of a mix of Sierra Leone exiles, some mercenaries from Burkina Faso and some Charles Taylor[1] loyalists from Liberia (Richards, 1996)) entered eastern Sierra Leone from neighbouring Liberia. The APC government, at the time led by Major General Joseph Saidu Momoh, responded by sending a contingent of the Sierra Leone Army (SLA) to defend the country's borders with the help of the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) troops from Guinea, Nigeria and members of the United Liberation Movement for Democracy (ULIMO)[2] (Abdullah, 2004). Whilst the APC were able to push the RUF back into Liberia in the initial stages of their response, they did not quell the RUF uprising for long, as the majority of the SLA and ECOMOG troops were poorly trained and underpaid (Mama and Okazawa-Rey, 2012: 107).

In 1992, the RUF launched fresh attacks, making major advances and expanding their territory in eastern Sierra Leone, taking over villages and small towns. The RUF grew in size as they advanced, capitalising on the manpower of unemployed and disgruntled youth as well as those forcedly recruited (Richards, 1996: 5). In April 1992, General Momoh's APC government was

[1] At the time, Charles Taylor was the head of the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL), a rebel group in Liberia that sought to overthrow the Liberian Government.
[2] A Liberian anti-rebel group fighting the NPFL from Sierra Leone.

overthrown after a coup d'état by the National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC). When this change in government occurred, the RUF asked for a ceasefire, but an agreement with the NPRC was never reached, and the conflict continued. During this time, the RUF gained control of the major diamond mines, located in the east and southeast parts of Sierra Leone which meant that they could continue receiving military aid and assistance from Charles Taylor due to their diamonds-for-weapons deal. To regain access to the mines, the NPRC government hired Ghurkha Security Guards (a private military company) in 1993, but that partnership didn't last, and after three months, the NPRC hired Executive Outcomes (EO, another private military company) to fight off the rebels. In 1995, EO prevented the RUF from taking over the capital of Freetown, and by the end of 1995 they had driven the RUF back to the Liberian border (Alao, 1999: 56). It was during this period in the conflict that the RUF performed some of their most brutal acts of violence against civilians, as well as government officials (Richards, 1996: 9). This state of unprecedented violence led to the appointment of a UN Special Envoy, with a mandate to work with the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) and ECOWAS to negotiate a peace settlement (Olonsikan, 2008: 135). However, a coup occurred within the NPRC Government in January 1996, and Brigadier General Madda Bio took over. Once in government, President Bio faced increased pressure to hold elections. The RUF didn't want any elections to be held until a peace agreement had been signed (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1999). However, after consultations with civil society leaders at a National Consultative Conference revealed that civilians wanted elections before peace President Bio continued with plans to hold elections as scheduled. NPRC members did not support this decision, as they thought it would lead to renewed violence from the RUF (Gberie, 2000: 21). To stop the election process and dissuade people from voting, the RUF started running violent campaigns against civilians such as *Operation Stop Election*, in which civilians had their right hand or both hands amputated. When committing these acts, the rebels informed civilians that without their hand/hands, they

couldn't vote for democracy (Quist-Arcton, 2002). Despite these attempts by the RUF, elections were held successfully, and the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) won; Bio stepped down, and Ahmad Tejan Kabbah became president (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1999).

Soon after the elections, a UN Special Envoy began negotiating the Abidjan Peace Agreement between the RUF and the SLPP Government. The agreement contained provisions which required the cessation of hostilities, disarmament of the RUF, and the inclusion of the RUF in the new government structure as well as armed forces (Olonisakin, 2008: 21). The road to signing the Abidjan Peace Agreement was not smooth – the RUF wouldn't sign the agreement until the departure of EO – and while the agreement was eventually signed in November 1996, due to mistrust between the SLPP government and the RUF, it was never implemented. In turn, Sankoh sought to rearm the RUF, but was arrested in Nigeria in 2000 for illegally possessing weapons, before successfully re-mobilising the rebels (Olonisakin, 2008: 135).

Due to the failure of the Abidjan Peace Accord, there was a coup by disgruntled members of the SLA, led by Major Johnny Paul Koroma. Once in power, Koroma formed the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC), a political party which was a coalition of the SLA and the RUF. The AFRC/RUF coalition managed to lead a coup and in May 1997 President Kabbah was exiled. The AFRC/RUF was eventually overthrown by the Civil Defence Forces (CDF) (which largely drew its members from the Kamajors and Gbethis ethnic groups) and ECOMOG (Africa Confidential, 1998). After the deployment of the UN Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL), Sierra Leone was briefly declared conflict-free, and Kabbah's presidency and the SLPP Government's rule were restored in February 1998 (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1999). However, this period of ceased hostility didn't last long, the AFRC/RUF rearmed, regrouped and started fighting again in January 1999, this time engaging in violent campaigns against civilians such as *Operation Pay Yourself* (where combatants committed massive destruction of property as they were encouraged to loot as much as they wanted) and *Operation No Living*

Thing (where combatants committed acts of violence that led to a huge loss of life, mutilations, torture and gang rapes against civilians) (TRC 2004, 3). In response to these attacks, the UN sent UNAMSIL troops to assist the existing battalion and ECOMOG forces already in Sierra Leone, who then regained some of the territories the AFRC/RUF had taken. A ceasefire was declared, and the Lomé peace agreement was signed in July 1999. The Lomé Agreement set out a power-sharing deal that gave Sankoh and other members of the RUF positions in Government, on condition that the AFRC/RUF forces demobilise their forces (Hirsch, 2001: 138). Unfortunately, this peace agreement did not last long; some AFRC/RUF coalition members perceived the agreement to be more beneficial to the RUF than the AFRC, and took hostages from ECOMOG troops, UN military observers, aid workers, and journalists. While the hostages were released after negotiations, AFRC-aligned forces carried out more abductions, including several RUF leaders (Olonisakin, 2008: 22).

The conflict peaked in May 2000, when the rebels captured Freetown, and Sankoh was captured during an operation in which the SLA, CDF, and British troops drove the RUF out of Freetown. Whilst the RUF/AFRC continued to operate under General Issa Sesay, it wasn't long until they started losing territory. The CDF had gained control of many RUF/AFRC rural strongholds, which meant they couldn't replenish military supplies without access to the diamond mines, while an oil and arms embargo had been imposed upon them (Olonisakin, 2008: 22). In 2001, UNAMSIL set about negotiating a new peace agreement and ultimately the Abuja Protocol was signed in May 2001. The decade-long civil war formally ended in January 2002. The conflict resulted in approximately 70,000 deaths, 2.6 million people were internally displaced or were forced to become refugees in neighbouring countries, and tens of thousands had been physically mutilated (Kaldor and Vincent 2006). The end of the war saw the establishment of different post-conflict peacebuilding activities, including disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration

(DDR); security sector reform (SSR); the truth and reconciliation commission (TRC); and the special court for Sierra Leone (SCSL).

The combatants

The recruitment tactics used by the CDF, RUF, SLA and AFRC varied: some groups comprised community members, others were of strangers, or a mix of both. Some groups recruited members through abduction or forced conscription, others had members who joined voluntarily, and some contained a mix of both. All factions had subgroups with diverging interests which changed during the conflict, evident from the fact that at one point in the conflict, the SLA and RUF merged into a union which led to the phenomena of SOBELs (soldier by day – rebel by night). In terms of the gender makeup of the different groups, whilst most of the combatants were men, women and girls formed between 10 and 30 per cent of the fighting forces in the different groups (Richards, 1996: 89; Mazurana and Carlson, 2004; McKay and Mazurana, 2004: 92). Most FFCs were forcibly recruited, either through abductions or under the threat of violence against themselves, their family members or the community (Mazurana and Carlson, 2004), but some volunteered or joined for survival reasons. Those who joined voluntarily cited different motivations: for some, it was because they believed in the cause of their group – whether this cause was the RUF's aim to address economic and social grievances as stated in their propaganda, which a lot of youth could relate to (Abbink, 2005, 16-17 cited in Mensah, 2021: 18), or the more localised concern to defend/protect their families or communities or to retaliate or settle scores (Mazurana and Carlson, 2004).

From the outset of the conflict, women and girls took on different roles, some of which were *support* roles, fitting into Sierra Leone's gendered notions about women's roles in the conflict (cook, porter, diamond mining, caring for the wounded, wife, messenger, spy). Others took *active combat* roles, such as 'leading lethal screening and killing of pro-rebels civilians or pro-

government forces, poisoned or injected war prisoners with lethal chemicals or acid, gun trafficking, cleaning weapons, fighting and conducting military training' (MacKenzie, 2009: 249).

DDR in Sierra Leone

In addition to analysing reintegration, and situating it within the wider context of DDR, this thesis offers insights into how the programmes were actually implemented in Sierra Leone. The Sierra Leone DDR discussion below summarises the experiences of FFCs and former male combatants (FMCs). The literature review and the empirical chapters will then delve into the experiences of FFCs in more detail.

Disarmament and Demobilisation (DD)

The DD process of DDR in Sierra Leone was done over three phases. **Phase One** began in September 1998, after the Kabbah administration gained government control. It was led and implemented by the Sierra Leone Government (through their newly established National Committee for Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration, NCDDR) with the support of the UN Development Programme (UNDP), ECOMOG and World Bank. The programme aimed to disarm and demobilise 32,000 combatants and set up training and employment programmes (TEP). However, this phase ended abruptly in December 1998, due to a deterioration in the security situation and limited funding/structures in place to implement the programmes. The failure of Phase One was also attributed to the fact that the Government failed to consult or involve any armed factions when setting up the NCDDR or developing and designing the programme. In this phase, only 3,200 were disarmed, mainly SLA/AFRC combatants who surrendered to ECOMOG (Solomon and Ginifer, 2008: 8-9).

Phase Two began in October 1999, after the Lomé Peace Agreement was signed (Article XVI stipulated that all combatants needed to participate in the DDR process). The NCDDR led this

phase as before, but in this instance, they received support from UNAMSIL rather than ECOMOG forces. The target for this phase was to disarm 45,000 combatants, collect and destroy weapons and ammunition, provide reinsertion packages, and set up the TEPs. This phase was suspended in May 2000, following the hostage crisis and increased violence by the RUF in different strongholds across the country (Solomon and Ginifer, 2008: 9). Unlike Phase One, Phase Two DDR had been the culmination of negotiations with the RUF (Sesay and Suma, 2009: 12). In total, 18,898 combatants from different factions were disarmed during this phase (Zongwe, 2002: 2-3). A further 2,600 were disarmed in the interim period between Phase Two and Phase Three (May 2000 – May 2001) via a low-key DDR process (Solomon and Ginifer, 2008: 9).

Phase Three was the final phase, starting in May 2001. This resulted from the signing of the Abuja protocols, when the Sierra Leone Government and the RUF reached a peace agreement. It was conducted and coordinated by the NCDDR with the support of UNAMSIL, ECOWAS and the British Army (Solomon and Ginifer, 2008: 9). This phase concluded in January 2002, with 42,330 weapons and 1.2 million pieces of ammunition having been collected and destroyed (UN Draft, 24 June 2002 cited in Meek and Thusi, 2003:5); approximately 72,500 ex-combatants disarmed, and 71,000 demobilised. Of the 72,500 adult combatants, only 6.5 per cent were women; of 6,845 child soldiers, 8 per cent were girls (Mazurana and Carlson 2004: 2).

Reintegration

The official reintegration programme was two-pronged: economic and social. Political reintegration was not integrated directly into the programmes, as it was seen as part of a wider process focused on restoring democracy and good governance (Ginifer, 2003:43). The economic reintegration process began soon after the DD phase concluded. Programmes were

set up to aid former combatants' ability to engage in sustainable employment and livelihoods and assist their social reintegration efforts (Ginifer, 2003:43).

Economic reintegration

Building schools or re-establishing academic institutions schools and providing access to them was one of the main proponents of the economic reintegration programmes. This is because, in Sierra Leone, there was a very low literacy rate among combatants; 36 per cent had never attended school, and just 1 per cent had attended secondary school (Statistics Sierra Leone, Survey on Reinsertion & Reintegration Assistance to Ex-Combatants, 2002 cited in Ginifer, 2003: 43). The NCDDR and UNICEF managed to support the re-entry of child soldiers into schools, by giving school incentives to accept them, paying for school fees, textbooks and uniforms, as well as proving them with a subsistence allowance. Whilst most combatants placed in school were under 18, some FCs over that age undertook a professional qualification in computer studies, accountancy or management within a school setting (Solomon and Ginifer, 2008: 18).

Economic reintegration was also supported through vocational skills training. In these, FMCs were given training options for carpentry, car mechanics, building, plumbing and metalwork, and there were labour-based schemes to train in construction and road maintenance. Whilst a small minority of FFCs also engaged in the skills training assigned for FMCs, the majority only had access to skills training in catering, soapmaking, hairdressing, sewing, gara tie-dye, and agriculture (Smet, 2009: 158). Former combatants with recognised formal sector employment skills also received support with securing employment, and incentives were given to different employers and businesses to take on former combatants (Ginifer, 2003: 43).

By October 2002, 56,751 former combatants had registered for the programme; 14,220 had completed the training, 19,073 were still undergoing skills training programmes, and 23,458

were either still awaiting registration or self-reintegrated (Solomon and Ginifer, 2008: 14). At this point, the NCDDR had also managed to place 23,000 beneficiaries into various projects (Fanthorpe, 2007: 7 and 13 cited in Solomon and Ginifer, 2008: 14). By January 2004, the NCDDR recorded that 28,901 former combatants had completed vocational skills training/apprenticeships; 12,182 were enrolled in formal education; 9,231 former combatants were in agricultural projects; 444 were on job placement, and 364 were in other positions (Country Programmes Report by the UN 2000-2009 on UNDDR website).

FCs also received support for economic reintegration through the provision of irregular / micro-credit loans awarded to individuals or their communities through microfinance institutions (MFIs). These were meant to help former combatants support their family's financial needs and facilitate business activities. The loans were generally interest-free for a year through NGO-MFIs (Ager, Stark et al., 2010: 74).

Some former combatants sought economic reintegration through employment as soldiers or officers in the newly formed Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces (RSLAF). This wasn't formally recognised as part of the economic reintegration programme, falling under the Security Sector Reform (SSR)[3] jurisdiction, but because former combatants were selected or registered for retraining in the new army during the disarmament and demobilisation stages, it can be considered as an avenue of economic reintegration for former combatants. The training involved learning different combat techniques and the use of different weapons, as well as

[3] OECD DAC Guidelines define the Security Sector under four categories: *Core security actors*: 'armed forces; police; gendarmeries; paramilitary forces; intelligence and security services (both military and civilian); coast guards; border guards; customs authorities.' *Security Management and oversight bodies*: 'ministries of defence and internal affairs, financial management bodies and public complaints commissions.' *Justice and law enforcement institutions*: 'judiciary and justice ministries, prisons, prosecution services, traditional justice systems.' *Non-statutory security forces*: 'liberation armies, guerrilla armies, private security companies, political party militias' (OECD-DAC Guidelines, 2007:5)

training on human rights and interacting with civilians. Additionally, education was provided to 2,500 illiterate soldiers and officers (MoD of SL, 2002: 12 cited in Gbla, 2007:23). The programme also set out to increase regimentation and implement sensible salaries, attractive retirement options, and resettlement packages (Gbla, 2007:21).

Social reintegration

There were efforts by the official coordinators of the Sierra Leone DDR programmes to fund some of the activities that support social reintegration, such as sensitisation campaigns, counselling, and reunification from the main DDR budget. However, complementary activities were also implemented by community leaders, religious organisations or NGOs who were not part of the DDR programme. The interventions supported from the DDR programmes were delivered through the TRC, at the cantonment sites, or through large-scale national campaigns. The community led programmes were implemented as required by the communities, and some started after the UN led DDR programmes had concluded their activities.

One way that social reintegration was supported was through sensitisation programmes delivered as part of UN led DDR efforts. These campaigns communicated messages promoting forgiveness and reconciliation between FCs and their communities and families (Ginifer, 2003:47). These programmes also sought to support attitudinal change in wider society through promoting messages tackling the stigmatisation of former combatants who had committed acts of violence, as well as dealing with past and present issues of sexual violence (McKay, 2004: 28). These interventions were seen as one of the efforts to help communities develop an empathetic understanding towards former combatants' conflict experiences, as some of them had suffered/committed violent acts under duress or the influence of drugs (Ager, Stark et al., 2010: 75). These sensitisation programmes were delivered through media campaigns over the

radio and TV, as well through plays in local communities and schools, clothing merchandise, and adverts on billboards (Ginifer, 2003:47).

DDR programmes also supported social reintegration through the provisions of services supporting the improvement of mental health amongst former combatants and civilians. This is because some former combatants and civilians emerged from the conflict with psychological and emotional wounds, and services were set up to support them in dealing with these. These services were available for former combatants at cantonment sites; former child soldiers could access them at the rehabilitation centres they were housed in before being reunited with their families or placed with an organisation or community. Support was provided through different psychotherapy interventions, such as psychoeducation, narrative exposure, and counselling, all aimed at reducing the clinical symptoms or risk of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

The other aim of these interventions was to support a change in intergroup emotions and attitudes, especially changes that would lead to intergroup forgiveness and better mental health (Mughal et al., 2015: 593). Outside the cantonment or rehabilitation centres, organisations such as the Catholic Overseas Development Agency (CAFOD) set up services to support improved mental health, behavioural change and social inclusion. The services were delivered with the support of the University of Makeni, through free-of-charge daily services that provided rehabilitation through psychiatric treatment and counselling (particularly to support patients dealing with symptoms of PTSD and behavioural problems from drug-induced phobias, paranoia and depression), and which equipped them with techniques and methods, as well as medication. Community outreach activities were aimed at communities developing a better understanding of mental health problems and encouraging engagement in talking therapies as a means of dealing with trauma (Mughal et al., 2015: 595).

Cleansing rituals were one of the interventions that local communities and families used to support social reintegration, as part of religious and traditional ceremonies. The religious ceremonies often involved the individual confessing their sins, asking for forgiveness, and then praying or counselling with religious leaders. The traditional ceremonies varied depending on the community and, in some instances, the gender of the former combatant; the varying forms involved a public confession through bonfire ceremonies (as was the case through Fambul Tok)[4] or private confession in the presence of a traditional healer or community leader, after which a ceremony would be held to call upon the ancestors to drive out the dead spirits and protect the community from contamination (McKay, 2004: 27). In the case of Fambul Tok, bonfire ceremonies were meant to give community members the opportunity to share their experiences and air any grievances, and if there were any perpetrators in the community, they were meant to face their victims/the victims' families and confess their crimes and apologise to the victim/the victims' families and receive their forgiveness. The traditional cleansing practices involved communication with ancestors and pouring libations, after which everyone would participate in a feast (Fambul Tok website).

All forms of cleansing ceremonies were seen as a means of ridding the evils of wartime experiences from families and communities (Stark, 2006, cited in Olsen et al., 2010: 74) and a way of dealing with the psychological health problems encountered by communities and families, as well as the FCs' social exclusion. They were also an opportunity for community and/or religious leaders to reiterate rules, values and behaviours that were acceptable and to convey advice to FCs; and an opportunity for community and/or religious leaders to convey

[4] Fambul Tok (Krio for 'Family Talk') is a face-to-face community-owned programme which brings together perpetrators and victims of the violence of the conflict to promote reconciliation and reintegration efforts at a local level. The programme worked with communities to organise ceremonies that include truth-telling bonfires and traditional cleansing ceremonies see http://www.fambultok.org/what-is-fambul-tok

messages of reconciliation or acceptance by forbidding families and communities from provoking FCs, or using language that isolates or segregates FFCs in everyday interactions (McKay, 2004: 27).

Social reintegration was also done through programmes that encouraged the rebuilding of social capital. This was done through FCs performing tasks and activities that would assist communities, such as civil works, street cleaning, and rebuilding homes and infrastructures. It also supported adult education programmes, civic and peace education, music, sports groups, and other projects that helped to rebuild social capital (Ginifer, 2003: 46).

Social reintegration was also supported through UN led DDR programmes which were not part of DDR, but were complimentary to the aims of the reintegration aspect of DDR, in so far as the TRC was meant to promote reconciliation as well as reintegration. This is because the TRC was mandated to create:

> …an impartial historical record of violations and abuses of human rights and international humanitarian law related to the armed conflict in Sierra Leone, from the beginning of the conflict in 1991 to the signing of the Lomé Peace Agreement; to address impunity, to respond to the needs of the victims, to promote healing and reconciliation. (Art. 6 (1) of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Act 2000).

The TRC set out to deliver this mandate, by allowing victims and perpetrators to tell their truth to bring reconciliation, restore peace and support reintegration (Thapa, 2017: 82 in Cullen, 2020: 120). The TRC started in late 2002 and submitted its final report in October 2004. During this period, 7,706 statements were submitted via oral or written statements during 500 public hearings, broadcast in different media. All but nine of the 149 districts in Sierra Leone were reached for interviews. According to the Sierra Leone TRC, of these 7,706 statements, two-

thirds were given by men (4,878) and one-third by women (2,728). 81.85 per cent of the statements were from victims, 12.84 per cent were from witnesses, 3.79 per cent were from hearsay witnesses, 1.38 per cent were unspecified, and 0.65 per cent were from perpetrators (Benetech Human Rights Data Analysis Group, 2004). The TRC report was produced in different formats and languages, and disseminated in schools and local communities nationwide to ensure a broad outreach. In the report, which contained some recommendations, the TRC provided a detailed account of reparations for victims of the war. The first was a service package[5] meant to ease the transition of both victims and perpetrators into post-conflict life. The second was in the form of symbolic reparations,[6] to acknowledge the suffering of the victims. However, since the TRC had neither the mandate nor the budget to provide reparations, they couldn't implement any of these recommendations (Sesay and Suma, 2009:17-19). In fact, the reparation programme wouldn't come to fruition until 2006, when the Government issued a directive designating the National Commission for Social Action (NaCSA) as the official government agency to implement the reparations programme, and in 2008, the UN Peacebuilding Fund provided financial support for catalytic funding for the programme. A lack of interest and funding for reintegration and reconciliation measures hampered any opportunity for effectively linking DDR and TRC processes (Sesay and Suma, 2009: 20).

The above has provided context on the Sierra Leone case study; next, working definitions for the terms 'female combatant', 'gender' and 'post-conflict' are provided, all of which are central to this thesis.

[5] This comprised free medical, educational and training services to the victims (especially amputees), establishment of a micro-credit scheme for war victims, and a pension to all adult amputees and other war-wounded victims whose earning capacities have been reduced.

[6] The creation of public memorials, and the inclusion of victims in government decisions regarding their interests.

1. 4 Key concepts

Former Female Combatants (FFCs)

In this thesis, the definition for former female combatant(s), FFC, is a woman or girl who was part of or associated with an armed faction, and engaged in *any* activities or roles that advanced the group's effort to participate in armed conflict. This definition includes those that self-identified as part of the armed group, as well as women who were identified as part of that group by association, or because they lived with that armed faction for a time. This definition includes those that fit the strict definition of a combatant (the strict definition of combatant being an individual that engages in active combat; active combat is understood as any act that is purposefully performed to physically harm or kill during the conflict). It *also* includes women or girls who played a 'supportive' role to combat/the conflict (e.g., cooks, messengers, health workers, porters, spies, etc.); and those that were dependents/camp followers (e.g., male combatants' wives, girlfriends, widows, daughters, or family members).

The length of time Sierra Leonean for which female combatants were part of an armed group varied. Some women/girls would be a member for just a few weeks/months, while others would remain with a group for years. Some were consistent members, while others had intermittent breaks after escape or leaving, only to return, or be forcibly recruited or abducted back in. Therefore, there is no minimum or maximum timeframe used in this definition. This definition also includes those who, at the start of the DDR process, were classed by DDR officials as girl soldiers because they were under the age of 18. In Sierra Leone, these individuals would have been classed as women rather than children. This is because they had behaved in line with what was expected of them as women in their society: engaging in sexual intercourse, getting married, living within a family structure where they had the role of wife or mother, amongst other roles (Mazurana and Carlson, 2004: 14-16). Additionally, including girl soldiers in this

definition means that the project also benefits from the experiences of a wide age group, as they are now in their late 20s to mid-30s.

The thesis definition of FFC is informed by a desire to ensure that the experiences captured in this research are diverse, as female combatants are not a homogenous category who all experienced the conflict similarly. No value or importance is placed on one female combatant's conflict experience over another's; all are equally important in understanding female combatants' conflict and reintegration experiences.

This definition also aligns with feminist scholarship on female combatants, which argues against delineating between women who engaged in combat, and those who performed supportive roles or were dependents in conflict (Alison, 2004). This point is also evident in resistance within feminist scholarship to terms such as 'camp followers' or 'fighters associated with fighting forces', oftentimes found in reports or data on conflicts, peacebuilding interventions or policies. As Enloe, for example, has shown, the use of the term 'camp follower' is problematic, in that it devalues women by identifying them only as dependents (Enloe, 1999: 37 cited in Henshaw, 2016: 42). Other feminists have also shown that identifying female combatants as only occupying supportive or dependent roles obscures whether the role is one which female combatants occupy by choice, or because they were deliberately excluded from leadership roles (Park, 1994; Tetreault 1994c in Henshaw, 2016: 42). Furthermore, feminist scholars also reveal that it is problematic to define female combatants based on whether they engaged in active combat or performed a supportive role, because each function plays an important part in ensuring that the group's efforts are advanced. Moreover, as will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Two, female combatants have reported that any duties they performed in a supportive capacity were interlaced with their active combat role (MacKenzie, 2009:249).

To avoid any confusion, it is important to state that the term and abbreviation FFC is also used throughout this thesis when referring to existing research which uses other terms to refer to female combatants, such as female fighters, female soldiers, camp followers, female cadres or females associated with armed forces and groups (FAWAGs).

Gender

In this thesis gender is understood as:

> The set of socially constructed roles and relationships, personality traits, attitudes, behaviours, values, relative power and influence that society ascribes to the two sexes on a differential basis… Gender is an acquired identity that is learned, changes over time, and varies within and across cultures. (Smet, 2009: 149).

As such, gender is 'both a facet of individual identity – whom we think we are – *and* an integral part of social relations and practices' (Steans, 2013:29). Gender is therefore not something 'just' assigned or attached to bodies, but is rather a fundamental power relation of global politics that influences, shapes and makes im/possible global ideas, norms, structures and institutions. As Butler (1990) has shown the 'binary notions of gender, male/female, masculine/feminine – only exist because of hegemonic heteronormative repetitions through performativity' (cited in Edward and Greenough, 2020: 715). When referring to the traditional gender norms, values and roles assigned to FFCs and FMCs, this research refers to what society prescribes and expects from females and males based on their biological sex and societal positions.

Post-conflict

It is important to state how the term post-conflict is defined in this thesis, as there is a debate about when the post-conflict period begins and ends (Jackson and Beswick, 2018: 150). This thesis adopts the definition of post-conflict that most international agencies utilise, using a four-

stage conflict cycle, in which post-conflict begins when the post-ceasefire stage is reached (see below from Jackson and Beswick, 2018: 160); there is no formal end to this period.

Stages of the conflict cycle

Stage	*Nature of conflict*	*International response*	*Peace operations*
Escalation	Gradual escalation of violence culminating in formal start of armed conflict	Diplomacy aimed at conflict prevention	Conflict prevention activities, primarily diplomatic
Armed conflict	Battle death casualties under formal conflict conditions	Mitigation	Humanitarian and 'peacemaking' interventions, including armed intervention
Post-ceasefire	Gradual decline in absolute levels of violence, and change in nature of violence	Termination, DDR	Peacekeeping operations and peace enforcement operations
Peace	Few or no conflict casualties	Recovery	Peacebuilding operations, SALW control

Source: Jackson and Beswick, 2018: 160

1.5 Thesis structure

This thesis consists of seven chapters. Building on insights into reintegration and the definition of FFC provided in this introductory chapter, Chapter 2 reviews feminist literature on FFC experiences with reintegration from scholars who work within conflict, security and post-conflict reconstruction studies. The thesis demonstrates how feminist work on the diverse roles and experiences of women/FFCs in conflict environments has contributed to their visibility, going beyond the victim narrative, by unpacking the dichotomies that have historically fed into this perspective. The chapter then demonstrates how a failure to recognise these diverse roles and experiences may have negative consequences for women/FFCs' lived experiences with post-conflict reintegration programmes and beyond. The chapter concludes by situating this research within the existing scholarship, highlighting its new contributions.

Chapter 3 provides details of the methodological design, research strategy, data collection and analysis process. The research philosophy is explained through ontological and epistemological positions, followed by insight into the theory informing the methodology. The chapter then goes on to share the research strategy, methods used and details of the data collection. In the fourth section, I share ethical considerations, and the fifth section focuses on reflexivity, unpacking my positionality and potential biases. Finally, the last section details data analysis and the writing-up process.

Chapters 4, 5 and 6 contain the empirical section of the thesis. All three analyse the data from research trips conducted for this thesis. Chapter 4 develops understandings of FFC experiences with economic reintegration, and Chapter 5 unpacks FFC experiences with social reintegration. Both chapters not only reveal the different challenges for FFCs with both UN led and community led reintegration programmes as they were implemented in Sierra Leone, but also identify the different ways that the active inclusion of FFCs in the consultation process when designing and implementing the different programmes may advance their participation in economic and social reintegration activities, formally and informally. Whilst these chapters reveal how exclusion from economic and social reintegration may be detrimental to FFC social and economic status in post-conflict environments, they also reveal how participation in these activities may provide an opportunity for FFCs to transcend traditional gender norms, values and dynamics in their families, communities and work environments. These two chapters also reveal how FFCs who were part of the Sierra Leone reintegration programmes had to share their combatant identity and experiences within a specific timeframe and to a particular audience.

Chapter 6 builds on this last point, by problematising the assumption and demand to voice experiences to participate in reintegration programmes and the TRC. The chapter reveals why and how some FFCs employ silence for years into the post-conflict period, and how their transition to voicing their conflict experiences or combatant identity is influenced by the

progression of time and strategic audience selection. The chapter reveals the value in capturing FFC experiences many years after the conflict concluded, and how insights from those experiences demonstrate the importance of those reintegration programmes that continue to provide support and access, many years into the conflict environment.

Chapter 7 concludes by summarising the key arguments of the thesis and making explicit its main contributions to academic scholarship. The conclusion also suggests different avenues for further research on FFC reintegration experiences, and offers some recommendations for policy and practice in this area.

Chapter 2: Feminism and former female combatants

This chapter unpacks the different feminist scholarship from international relations (IR), critical security studies, critical peacebuilding, post-development, and post-colonial studies on female combatants. It starts by sharing the literature on female combatants and conflict, the problematic ways in which gender stereotypes have historically been used to inform narratives on women, and FFCs' roles and experiences. To do this, feminists challenge the different dichotomies in conflict literature, where FFCs are often conceptualised through the victim lens. The section ultimately highlights the importance of ensuring that FFCs' conflict experiences are conceptualised in a manner that honours their varied experiences and roles, as not doing so has negative consequences for their reintegration, whether or not they engage with UN led reintegration programmes or not.

The second section of the literature review focuses on the literature on female combatants and reintegration. This section offers three specific angles: (i) women and FFCs in peacebuilding, from peace negotiations to designing and implementing interventions. (ii) The different obstacles/challenges that FFCs face in entering or fully participating in reintegration programmes in a manner that supports their efforts towards sustainable and positive economic and social reintegration. This section problematises the gendered nature of reintegration programmes, which stems from the conceptualisation of FFCs' conflict experiences and roles from the victimhood angle. (iii) Feminist literature that challenges reintegration by questioning the aims and foundations of reintegration. The latter section questions whether reintegration in practice effectively supports the post-conflict lives of FFCs, and whether addressing gender bias will lead to positive experiences or outcomes. The chapter concludes by summarising all the arguments, and reiterating how this thesis builds on existing literature and contributes new knowledge.

2.1 Conflict experiences

This section delves into feminist literature that interrogates how FFCs' conflict experiences and narratives have been conceptualised in scholarship, policy and practice. One of the central tenets of this literature is in problematising how gender stereotypes have historically been used to inform and shape narratives on the role and experiences of women and FFCs in conflict. Of specific focus is the importance of ensuring that experiences of women and FFCs in conflict go beyond the victim narrative. A second factor in this literature is ensuring that female combatants' diverse roles and experiences in conflict are captured and their narratives are included in scholarship, policy and practice.

2.1.1 Gender and violence

Feminist IR scholarship has shown that dominant conflict narratives or experiences are often framed within a binary framework of 'victim/perpetrator', in which men are the perpetrators of violence and women are passive, peaceful victims (Utas, 2005:405). This binary also exists in another form: 'victim/protector' (Enloe, 2000, Young, 2003), where men are 'just warriors and women are the beautiful souls' (Elshtain, 1995). Whilst feminists acknowledge that women and FFCs can be at the receiving end of acts of violence (physical and sexual) and can also seek protection from men during the conflict, they argue that reducing women/FFCs' experiences to a victim narrative oversimplifies their conflict experiences. As such, feminists have set out to demonstrate how women/FFCs' conflict experiences are diverse and complex beyond the victim narrative.

One way that feminists have done this is through research – for example, by scholars such as Alison, 2004; Cohen, 2013; Coulter, 2009; MacKenzie 2012; Mazurana and McKay; Marks, 2013 – which demonstrate the need 'for a corrective, agency-oriented examination of women as both perpetrators and victims of violence' (Marks, 2013; 68). It is evident that there are often

situations where offenders and victims are the same individuals, encapsulating the 'victim-offender overlap... a phenomenon where a person's offending activity and victimisation experiences are positively correlated' (Shrek and Stewart, 2011 cited in Selim, 2017: 278). For some feminists, this assertion can be evidenced by the fact that women have historically supported and advocated for war by encouraging their family or community members to join the war effort (Dilario, 1992: 51 cited in Utas, 2005: 406). Moreover, some women have harnessed their status as mothers to advance the war effort by using their life-giving capacity (Cooke, 1996), because they possess the ability to give birth to children who can be combatants in the future (Brunner, 2005: 36). In these instances, feminists argue that the notion that women are naturally peaceful (Åhäll, 2012: 290) or bear an essential relationship to peace and non-violence is brought into question (Alison, 2004: 460).

Other feminists support the victim-offender overlap through research on how women/FFCs committed acts of physical and sexual violence against civilians and, in some instances, fellow combatants. In Sierra Leone, for example, Cohen (2013) documents how FFCs committed acts of sexual violence either by inserting objects into victims' bodies or as part of the group of individuals that assist in group acts of sexual violence by physically restraining the victim. Other FFCs stated that they were at the receiving end of acts of sexual violence instigated by other FFCs, as a means of punishing them or rewarding male combatants. The involvement of women in identifying potential victims of sexual violence (as done by the RUF) is arguably a means by which they participate in combatants' intragroup bonding activities (Cohen, 2013: 386).[7]

[7] It is important to acknowledge that women or FFCs that commit acts of physical or sexual violence are not unique to Sierra Leone; they have been documented in Northern Ireland (in the IRA) and Sri Lanka (in the LTTE) (see

Indeed, female combatants in the RUF gained a reputation for being fiercer than male combatants when they committed acts of violence. Whilst this could be explained by the fact that there still exists 'persistent underlying societal gender role expectations that men and women's involvement in violence remains more shocking and disturbing than men's involvement' (Alison, 2004: 457), this can also be attributed to the fact that some female combatants felt the need to overcompensate, to prove that they were just as capable as their male counterparts in performing acts of violence or combat (Cohen, 2013 : 398).

Therefore, feminist research challenges the conventional wisdom that tends to identify perpetrators of acts of violence (especially sexual violence) as men, and women as victims – demonstrating that both women and men are capable of being victims or perpetrators of violence (Cohen, 2013: 384). As such, the experience of violence during conflict should not be built on a single understanding for each gender (Moser and Clark, 2001: 5).

Feminists note that, despite these varied experiences, gendered assumptions remain within conflict scholarship. In some, there is a continued subscription to the notion that women bear an essential relationship to peace and non-violence. This is evident in the fact that the idea of a woman/female combatant committing violence:

> is often only uneasily accepted, and the political violence such women participate in seems still to be seen as more shocking and less acceptable than comparable violence committed by men, indicating an underlying discomfort with such a challenge to gendered expectations (or established

Alison, 2004, the Democratic Republic of Congo (see Johnson et al., 2010), Haiti (see Faedi, 2010), and Rwanda (see Jones, 2002; Wood, 2009).

ideas or societal security) that may be widely cross-cultural (Alison, 2004: 460).

Feminists attribute this discomfort to the idea that women who engage in acts of violence are perceived as acting unnaturally or incomprehensibly (Coulter, 2008: 62). This is because the behaviour of women who commit acts of violence as combatants is often 47onceptualized as running counterintuitively to traditional perceptions of women as 'maternal, emotional, peace-loving, naturally nurturing and emotionally sensitive' (Kaufman-Osborn, 2005:597 and Ehrenreich, 2005 cited in Sjoberg and Gentry, 2007:2). Sjoberg and Gentry (2007) unpack this understanding, suggesting that there are three versions of maternalism used to understand women/FFCs who commit acts of violence: passive, active and twisted. They categorise these as *mothers* (passive), in so far as their ability to commit acts of violence comes from maternal passions and biological urges to defend their husbands, lovers or children (Gentry, 2003: 242 cited in Sjoberg and Gentry, 2007:13); *monsters* (active), because their behaviour is 'deviant, abnormal, irrational, a result of faulty biology or faulty construction' (Sjoberg and Gentry, 2007:13); or *whores* (twisted), because their violence is inspired by 'sexual dependence and depravity' (Sjoberg and Gentry, 2007:12). Feminists also argue that in scholarship linking violence to masculinity, there also exists an understanding of women who participate in violence as lacking in maternal skills or instinct, because 'they are masculinised, so they sit outside of normal women' (Åhäll, 2012: 292).

For feminists, the narrow, gendered assumptions detailed above leave little room for understanding women's decision to engage in violence in the same way as men: as rational or logically motivated (Sjoberg and Gentry, 2007:14). For Snider (2003), this is because of the 'salience of idealised notions of gender and women's identity, in which assigning agency in a crime situation to a woman corrupts the widely held image of women as both generally and specifically innocent' (2003: 351 cited in Sjoberg and Gentry, 2007;15). Feminists, therefore,

maintain that any interrogation into *how* and *why* one performs acts of violence in conflict must appreciate that women and men face the similar social pressures within armed groups to commit acts of violence, and will presumably respond in similar ways (Cohen, 2013: 386). Moreover, they argue against the adoption of essentialised understandings of conflict where men are actors/perpetrators and women are objects/victims.

2.1.2 Participating in conflict

Feminists have also problematised how female combatant conflict experiences have been identified as homogenous or uniform (Giri, 2021). They do this by challenging how FFCs' participation and roles in conflict have historically been situated and interpreted through a victim lens, both in how they join the conflict and their roles.

2.1.2.1 Joining the conflict

Feminists argue that the historical tendency to focus on FFCs as only joining conflict because they are recruited or conscripted through force, coercion, or abduction fails to fully capture the FFC experience. Whilst feminists acknowledge that there is evidence that most FFCs are forcibly recruited or conscripted into armed factions in civil conflicts, they also assert that this ignores the experiences of FFCs who have shared that participation was voluntary. Henshaw's (2016) research on women's roles in armed insurgencies found that whilst forced recruitment was the reality of most FFCs in some rebel movements, many groups with female combatants relied on voluntary engagement (Henshaw, 2016: 41).

Feminists suggest different motivations for FFCs volunteering, ranging from 'nationalist commitment, death of a loved one and other experiences or perceptions of suffering and oppression at the hands of the state (including experiences of displacement); educational disruption and restrictions, poverty, women's emancipation' (Alison, 2004: 453). For other FFCs, their motivation is their desire to defend/protect their family or community from violent

attacks or, in some instances, capitalise on the protection offered in the camps, as was sometimes the case in Sierra Leone (Mazurana and Carlson, 2004). For others, holding a gun or a weapon gave them a sense of power, because it formed and illustrated the 'reversion of their initial position of vulnerability, altered their position in the rebel hierarchy which in a sense empowered them and rendered them some sense of authority in the trajectory of their own lives, however illusory' (Coulter, 2008: 60- 61).

Whilst these motivations stem from trying to readdress grievances, FFCs also cited motivations such as having access to food or imported goods, or attaining status and upward mobility in camps or communities as a girlfriend or wife of a male combatant (Utas, 2005, Mazurana and Carlson, 2004, Specht, 2006). A more robust analysis of female experiences during conflict also requires analysis of women's engagement in the war economy of looted goods (Utas, 2005: 426).

Whilst some scholars argue that these motivations can be separated into either *greed* or *grievance* (see Collier and Hoeffler, 2004), the reality may often be more complicated – in most instances, there is a mixture of both motivations, either simultaneously or at different points in time. Female combatants' experiences inform this assertion by revealing that their motivations for joining or staying in the rebellion shifted between grievance and greed at different points. It was sometimes difficult for them to identify if one was more prominent. This is especially the case in research on African rebel movements, which advances that, whilst some FFCs' participation in conflict is a result of force, coercion or abduction, some FFCs decide to remain with the group when given the opportunity to escape or leave; instead, they are seeking out 'a more advantageous position within the group' (Auchter 2012; MacKenzie, 2009, 2012; McKay, 2005; Utas 2005 cited in Henshaw, 2016: 42). Connell puts forward this point when she challenges looking at victimhood and agency as 'mutually exclusive states' (1997: 121 cited in Utas, 2005: 405). This assertion echoes the argument shared earlier in the chapter that FFCs

may be both victims and perpetrators, because they can be victims who, at some point, use agency to capitalise on their situation – what Baines (2016) terms 'complex victimhood'.

Scholars on combatant agency in conflict would further argue that FFCs are 'not mere victims devoid of agency, nor free actors – they are tactical agents engaged in the difficult task of social navigation' (Utas, 2005:426) in 'tight corners' (Lonsdale, 2000). Utas elaborates on this point using the experiences of Liberian female combatants, where he proposed the term 'victimacy' to describe the 'agency of self-staging as a victim of war and deploying this as one tactic of social navigation of war zone' (2005: 405). Such victimacy has been particularly evident in conflict settings where female combatants have capitalised on the victim label by pleading innocence to escape capture by the enemy or revenge attacks from civilians (Sjoberg, 2014). It is also evident in cases where being identified as a victim can be used with the intent of ridding the person of social blame for acts performed during the conflict and creates a platform for both '(re) - acceptance and socio-economic possibilities' (Utas, 2005: 409). In post-conflict settings, some FFCs can thus present themselves as victims and establish credentials as a legitimate recipient of humanitarian aid (Utas, 2005: 409).

In summary, it is important to understand that, for FFCs, there are a variety of interconnected motivations for joining conflict (Alison, 2004: 453), which don't fit into a simplistic 'victimhood' narrative. Moreover, focusing on the victimhood of FFCs also neglects experiences where they employ agency during the conflict – gaining status and power or engaging in the war economy – regardless of how they were recruited. Beyond resulting in incorrect and incomplete conflict narratives about FFCs and their motivations for joining the conflict, focusing on the victim narrative has far-reaching consequences, as it is often incorporated into the post-conflict environment, and informs how post-conflict reconstruction programmes are formulated and implemented (MacKenzie, 2012). More than that, it results in

narratives that sideline the experiences of male combatants that were also forcibly recruited (Cohen, 2013: 409).

2.1.2.2 Roles occupied by FFCs in conflict

Feminists also advance that because conflict narratives have historically identified FFCs and women as victims who only perform supportive or dependent roles, the diverse roles FFCs occupy in conflict are often overlooked. This is despite research such as Henshaw's (2016) on the roles of FFCs in over 70 conflicts, which revealed that, whilst FFCs tend to be more active in supportive roles or be dependents, they also take part in nearly a third of armed combat attacks in all rebel movements, and take on leadership roles in a quarter of all movements (Henshaw, 2016: 41).

Whilst Henshaw's research used the conventional definition for combat (mentioned earlier in Chapter 1, section 1.5.1), Alison (2004) argues that if the definition of combat is broadened to include terrorist attacks, bomb-making, and assassinations, the number of FFCs that are categorised as performing a combative role would increase. I would add that the definition of combat must include interdiction, setting traps, raiding, transportation or movement of ammunition, logistics and providing food and supplies. This not only means a broader understanding of the different ways one can engage in combat, but also allows us to recognise the importance of these acts as they advance the war effort.

The importance of ensuring that the diversity of FFCs' roles in conflict is acknowledged is also evident in the fact that, whilst in some instances, the different roles that FFCs occupy in conflict may be separated into the three different roles mentioned in Chapter 1 (*supportive, dependent* and *combat*), these distinctions are not always possible, as FFCs combine these roles (Bouta, Frerks and Bannon, 2005: 15). A good example of this was evident in Sierra Leone, where FFCs reported that any duties that they performed in a supportive capacity were interlaced with their

role of engaging in combat (MacKenzie, 2009: 249). From my research, I would add that, in most instances, FFCs stated that they fulfil multiple roles that overlap or evolve on a day-to-day basis, depending on the needs of the group, so it is often difficult to locate them as (exclusively) involved in combat or (exclusively) in supportive roles.

Feminist researchers also reveal the importance of unpacking the diverse roles that FFCs occupy in conflict, by highlighting how the conflict roles that FFCs perform are often misunderstood, as some domesticated titles don't always effectively reflect the activities therein. For example, in the RUF, a wife's responsibilities in the group depended on the ranking of her husband or boyfriend. Whilst most commanders were men, positions such as that of a commander's wife allowed women to exert their power in the group. For example, when the commander was away, their wife could be in charge of operations and logistics as well as the day-to-day activities of the camp. Commanders' wives, therefore, had a great level of influence and power; if removed from their position, they would be sent to the frontlines instead of returning to civilian status, as they would be a risk for the camp given the amount of information they knew (Mazurana and Carlson, 2004: 14).

In making such arguments, feminist scholarship challenges the historical assignment of gender values and roles in how women and men engage in conflict, which continues to shape the portrayal of who fights, who dies, and the conduct of war (Sharoni, Welland et al., 2016:24) with men as heroes (Åhäll, 2016:47) and women as victims. Whilst this example is not representative of all FFCs, it provides insight into the complexities of their roles and the plurality of experiences in conflict. More significantly, it demonstrates the importance of ensuring that conflict narratives do not minimise the contribution of FFCs to the war effort. Even when FFCs are in supportive roles, there is an appreciation that they are contributing to the war effort, and as such, their participation is not secondary, nor is their contribution passive.

2.2 Reintegration experiences

This section unpacks the feminist literature on FFCs' experiences with reintegration, emphasising the importance of the diverse roles and experiences of FFCs beyond the victim narrative, by demonstrating how not doing so is problematic in post-conflict reintegration.

2.2.1 The gendered nature of reintegration

Some feminist scholars have focused on unpacking the obstacles to reintegration encountered by FFCs engaging with DDR programmes. For some feminists, the lack of FFC engagement with DDR is because – despite the adoption of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda into the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 – an agenda which advocated for full, equal and meaningful participation of women (civilians and former combatants) in peacemaking, conflict prevention and peacebuilding. Some feminists attribute this to the fact that there is often 'strict division of labour that reassigns traditional roles and responsibilities to women and men in the reconstruction process' (Puechguirbal, 2012:4). In doing so, peace is feminised, and the expertise that women (civilians and former combatants) can bring to the reconstruction process is defined within an 'essentialist realm with the aim of preserving social order' (Shepherd, 2008: 90).

Whilst there is an acknowledgement by feminists that the presence of women/FFCs in peace talks or the peacebuilding initiative design doesn't necessarily mean that their involvement will lead to the inclusion or participation of all FFCs – as those at the table won't always represent the interests or needs of all FFCs (Shepherd, 2010b: 152) – their *absence* does make a difference. Inclusion of women advances 'women's global status demands that they are co-architects with men of remerging post-conflict societies' (de la Rey and McKay, 2006:150). Women/FFCs can practice agency, representing their needs regarding DDR. More broadly, women/ FFCs can safeguard their families or communities from violence through activism and

campaigns against human rights abuses and barriers to equality and justice, as key drivers in reconciliation and reintegration efforts (Manchanda, 2005). Without this representation and inclusion, reframing women's identity in post-conflict environments from victims to agents of change can become difficult to achieve (Hamilton and Shepherd, 2016: 470).

Some feminists, however, caution against overstating the impact of the presence of women/FFCs in peace talks or in the design and implementation of post-conflict reconstruction programmes. Ní Aoláin (2016), for example, writes that, despite the acknowledgement, inclusion, and presence of women/FFCs in peace talks or in the design and implementation of post-conflict reconstruction programmes, there is evidence that their presence has not led to any substantial changes to the core elements, especially the security dimension, because their influence remains marginal. Shepherd (2008), on the other hand, argues that the moderate implementation of UNSCR 1325 is not because women's experiences/narratives are not acknowledged or included in the design and implementation of post-conflict reconstruction programmes, but because of the problematic way gender is conceptualised. As such, until gender is seen as more than being equal to sex by the male elites who are part of the leadership in international systems that support peacebuilding, women will continue to be seen as fragile, passive, and in need of protection. Moroever, engaging women is seen as a tokenistic effort towards gender mainstreaming,[8] because it doesn't lead to 'challenging contested and structural gender inequality' (Shepherd, 2008: 396). This point is further driven home, as under liberal peacebuilding approaches, just 8 per cent of post-conflict budgets have been specifically attributed to women's needs (Pathak, 2011: 7 cited in Basini, 2016: 123).

[8] The application of analysis to gender issues throughout policies and programmes, particularly the UN.

In essence, feminist research has identified the move towards equal gender representation at different stages in the peacebuilding process as the 'add women and stir approach' (MacKenzie, 2016 and Ní Aoláin, 2016). There is then a need to pay attention to advancing the influence and power stemming from the inclusion and engagement of women (and, in this case, FFCs). Such analysis should be intersectional, considering the multiple interests of women and FFCs, and ensuring efforts are made to have representation across class, religion, geographical location, disability and ethnicity (Ní Aoláin, 2016).

At the same time, insights from postcolonial feminists point to the biases female international experts or practitioners bring from the Global North, regarding advancing gender equality for women and FFCs in the Global South. They have, for example, 'questioned the relevance of Anglo-Saxon feminist ideas for women in the Third World, arguing that such theories presumed a unified category of a poor woman of the Third world' (Mohanty et al., 1991: Okeke, 1996, Chang, 2000; Rowley 2003 cited in Agathangelou and Turcotte, 2010: 50). In this case, power, influence and multiple interests go beyond a male/female polarity, to that between women from the Global North and Global South.

The de-securitisation of FFCs

At the same time, feminists like MacKenzie and Jennings argue that an obstacle to FFC DDR participation is that they are not the *target* of the programmes. Using her work on DDR in Sierra Leone, MacKenzie (2009, 2012; 2016) argues that FFCs are excluded from the DDR programme, because the programme relies on gender stereotypes, assuming men experienced the conflict only as combatants and women as victims or non-combatants. This assumption creates a bias in the conceptualisation of security threats posed by civilians: FMCs were identified as a security threat and received significantly more attention from policymakers; their reintegration is emphasised as essential to sustainable peace. On the other hand, FFCs were de-

securitised and seen as naturally peaceful subjects; their reintegration was deemed a social concern and moralised as a return to normal (MacKenzie (2009: 241-242).

In contexts where security concerns are heightened, i.e., transitioning from conflict to peace, it's important to interrogate how gender norms, values and roles are conceptualised. This requires us to pay attention to how gender and security are constructed in post-conflict environments, interrogating the different processes or terms (such as reconstruction, rehabilitation, and reintegration) and what they mean for men and women (MacKenzie, 2016: 491).

The traditional binary division of male/female roles and high/low politics creates a false ranking which excludes an accurate conceptualisation of women's 'security value' – 'the valorisation of traditional issues of *high politics* (men and states with guns) relies on the devaluation of *low politics* (sex, domestic work, childbirth and family)' (Sjoberg, 2006, cited in MacKenzie, 2009: 243). Women typically use everyday experiences to define their security needs, rather than state-centric or nationalist concerns; the 'everyday' encompasses the private, social and public realms. It is through this understanding that empowering becomes possible for women to participate as active agents (Hayns, Cahn and Ni Aiolain, 2012: 220 cited in Porter, 2016). In contrast, when a binary lens is adopted that assigns an individual role in society based on their gender, even when women are invited to participate in activities of high politics or sectors traditionally deemed as security, their power or influence is restricted, and their contributions are confined to the private sphere/domestic realm.

Jennings (2008) also interrogates the issue of how security is conceptualised in reintegration and its reliance on gendered assumptions. Jennings argues that although reintegration has historically been understood and implemented 'as a development project – the 'soft' counterpart to the technical disarmament and demobilisation components, 'it has become increasingly

securitised' (Jennings, 2008: 328). Using her research on Liberia, Jennings explores the notion of 'idleness' amongst former combatants, to support the argument that reintegration is more concerned with security than development. Whilst reintegration was conceptualised as a means to connect socio-economic development with physical security (provided by the DD elements of DDR), in practice, this approach is steeped in the preconceived notion or view that former combatants' idleness = instability and, in turn, instability = insecurity (Jennings, 2008: 334). She suggests this is evident in DDR-related policy formulation and literature, where idleness is understood as 'the absence of other demands on one's time or perceived stake in society' (Jennings, 2009: 481), which can lead to instability and, in turn, violence among former combatants.

Tellingly, however, the linking of the idleness of former combatants with instability/insecurity relies on a gendered assumption, in that it is only referred to as a risk for former *male* combatants, supporting the narrative that 'men's participation in DDR is far more vital – including to the sustaining of the peace – than women's, thus prejudicing the content of and access to the programme disproportionately in favour of male ex-combatants' (Jennings, 2009: 480-1). Jennings maintains that DDR-related policy and literature do this by affirming that FFCs are never idle – because, like other women in society during the post-conflict period, they are preoccupied with their roles of financially supporting female-headed households or as caregivers. This understanding perpetuates the assumption that, unlike women, men are not bound to a duty of care for their families. Moreover, it perpetuates the notion that while idleness can contribute to male combatants being violent, it cannot be used to explain female combatant violence. This is even though in Sierra Leone, in the years after the conflict ended, FFCs led and participated in violent riots and protests that impacted the country's peaceful transition. Whilst the explanation for this is not straightforward 'idleness' on the part of FFCs, some of the reasons participating female combatants gave for protesting was because they had time, due

to unemployment, and they had nothing to feed their children at home (Mazurana and Carlson, 2004: 26).

2.2.2 Access to DDR

Building on the above, feminists like Mazurana and Carlson (2004) have gone on to argue that an obstacle to FFC participation in DDR can be attributed to global reintegration practices for the eligibility criteria for combatants registering for DDR – specifically, the submission of a weapon as evidence of membership of a fighting force. Whilst some FFCs can hand in weapons, the fact that some FFCs oftentimes shared weapons (as they performed different roles in the conflict) meant that many could not hand in a weapon, and as such, could not register for DDR. The requirement for a weapon also puts pressure on male combatants and commanders to take weapons from female combatants so that they can prove their eligibility (Ollek, 2007:55), leaving FFCs with the difficult task of proving their combatant status without a weapon. As discussed in the previous section, this difficulty is compounded for FFCs, due to the gendered nature of conflict narratives, identifying men as perpetrators of violence and women as the passive, peaceful victims (Utas, 2005).

Following this, feminists such as MacKenzie (2012) suggest that FFC access/engagement with DDR programmes is impacted by the over-classification of FFCs as only occupying supportive roles such as camp followers, sex slaves and wives, not combatants, as discussed earlier. In the case of Sierra Leone, this was realised, in that DDR officials excluded wives, girlfriends or those who performed supportive roles from entering the programme. It was argued that the focus of DDR was on the main fighting forces (male combatants), and minority groups would not take priority over them (Mazurana and Carlson, 2004:21). Even when at a later stage, the implementers of the DDR programme decided that wives of former male combatants could apply for micro-credit to support their families, they needed to have their husband present to

identify them when signing up (Mazurana and Carlson, 2004: 18). In many ways, the Sierra Leone conflict illustrates how DDR programmes adopted very strict gendered definitions of combatants and failed to appreciate the non-military roles taken by FFCs.

Feminists also examine how some FFCs may not engage with reintegration programmes because of security concerns (Brecht and Specht, 2004). In Sierra Leone, for example, going through the DDR programme requires one to get a photograph and provide personal information to be recorded on a database, and in some instances, interviews were conducted in open environments. Fear of retaliation or the system being used as a 'trap to screen anti-government combatants' (MacKenzie, 2009: 250), were all identified as security concerns that informed FFCs' decisions to engage with DDR or not.

Similarly, feminists have written about the logistical challenges to FFC participation in DDR programmes. O'Neill (2015) details how FFC engagement with DDR was affected by cantonment sites having separate facilities (latrines, washing areas and kitchens) in locations away from FMCs. Some FFCs wanted spaces where they could safely move around without fear of FMC harassment or GBV. Some FFCs have attributed the lack of safety measures for women to self-demobilise or, as Farr puts it, 'disappearing from view without taking advantage of any of the opportunities of demobilisation such as job retraining healthcare and the like' (Farr, 2003: 32). In these instances, feminists argue for 'a strong female representation among programme staff and leaderships at sites' (O'Neill, 2015: 5). This argument gains further credence, in light of reports of peacekeeping officers and humanitarian workers asking FFCs to trade sexual services for access to humanitarian aid or protection for themselves or their family members (Sierra Leone TRC report, 2004). Another logistical challenge identified by feminist research that affected FFCs' ability to engage in reintegration programmes was the lack of social care facilities, such as childcare; this deficiency often results in FFCs being unable to

attend the training sessions because they had care responsibilities (Coulter, 2011; Basini, 2016 and Bouta, 2005).

Studies of FFCs' experiences with reintegration programmes also emphasise the stigmatisation and shame associated with their acts (O'Neil, 2015; Azmi, 2015). These experiences were evident in Sierra Leone, where some communities struggled to accept FFCs, regardless of whether their involvement was voluntary or forced, because of the physical violence that FFCs had perpetrated – they had transcended traditional gender norms assigned to them as women in their society. Some experienced stigmatisation because they had committed acts that communities deemed evil, such as cannibalism and drinking blood, either in the initiation period or afterwards (Humphreys and Weinstein, 2004:24). In other cases, FFCs faced stigma and shame because they were known or suspected to have been at the receiving end of acts of sexual violence. As a result, many were deemed unmarriageable (Bouta, Freks and Banon, 2005). Female single combatants who had borne children during the conflict faced double stigmatisation, because it was assumed that they had been raped or had given birth to children outside of wedlock (Shelper, 2002). In other instances, they were forced to marry their rape perpetrators to avoid shame and reintegrate into society (MacKenzie, 2009: 257). This stigma and shame persisted, despite the sensitisation initiatives aimed at fostering forgiveness for former combatants or an empathetic conceptualisation of FFC conflict experiences by the civilian population (Ginifer, 2003:47).

Feminist research has also evidenced how some FFCs actively chose not to participate in the DDR process, seeing the end of the war as an opportunity to escape captivity and return to their families. This was the case in Sierra Leone for many female and child combatants. Other combatants chose not to go through DDR because they didn't feel they needed assistance returning to their families or communities, as they had retained connections with their community and enjoyed a high level of respect and appreciation within them (Frerks, Klem,

Douma et al., 2008:32). This was the case for the CDF combatants whose relatives, neighbours or friends recruited them, and whom they fought alongside (Humphreys and Weinstein, 2004:24). For other FFCs, the label of being a recipient of DDR had negative consequences for their efforts towards economic and social reintegration, as they were seen as benefiting from committing crimes and acts of violence (Ginifer, 2003: 42).

Whilst for other scholars, the end of the war allowed FFCs to explore different opportunities, such as working as armed combatants in conflicts in neighbouring countries like Guinea, on the basis that they had learned new skills in war, but had not been recruited into the new security forces being constructed through the SSR programme (MacKenzie, 2009: 250). Lastly, some female combatants stated that they didn't join the DDR programme because it was not truly set up to help them; it was either to benefit NGO workers through monetary gains or a means for the international community to push their political ambitions. Mistrust of the international community was understandable, given that there was a lack of engagement with female combatants during the peace process, and communication about the aims of the DDR programme was poor (MacKenzie, 2009: 250).

The above section highlights the different challenges that FFCs face with regards to accessing DDR programmes which are specific to them as women. These ranged from narrow definitions of combatants that informed the eligibility criteria and meant some FFCs couldn't participate in the programmes to the shame and stigma because being a combatant meant that they had transcended the traditional gender, norms and roles assigned to them as women. The section also revealed the practical challenges FFCs faced when they did get access to DDR programmes from the lack of facilities, services and resources that would help support them as women, mothers and carers going through the programme. Finally, the section also shared the different reasons that some FFCs stated as having informed their decision not to participate in DDR

programmes. The next section expands on some of these points by delving into feminist literature criticising the gendered nature of reintegration.

2.2.3 Participating in reintegration

Feminists who have focused on the experiences of FFCs who enter reintegration programmes point to the ways that FFCs included in DDR programmes continue to experience gendered inequalities, because the programmes 'encourages a return to a prior (gendered) status quo' (Friedman, 2018: 634). The employment and skills training offered to FFCs support a return to traditional feminised professions (as highlighted in training options that FFCs received in Chapter 1). Enloe, for example, writes that a common patriarchal way of demobilising female combatants is by encouraging them to embrace a return to their traditionally assigned gender roles as wives and mothers. This is despite female combatants who go through DDR looking for:

> [H]ealth care, childcare, secondary schooling, and a way to make an autonomous living – and not just by becoming domestic and garment workers. The sewing machine is one of the classic things to teach women in demobilisation programmes. But many women would like to be schoolteachers or doctors. Demobilisation [and reintegration by extension in DDR programmes], then, is as gendered – and as potentially patriarchal – as any other political process and will continue to be so if not assessed with feminist analytical skills (Enloe: 2013: 6).

To explain why there might be this push, Pankhurst writes that this return to pre-existing patterns in post-conflict environments is because FFCs and women suffer 'a backlash against any new-found freedoms, and they are forced back into kitchens and fields' (2003: 161). The recipients of this backlash include FFCs and women who are deemed to have become

economically independent since the conflict, having taken on jobs that would have traditionally been assigned to men; it also includes women who insist on pursuing an education in communities where women would traditionally be homemakers, and women who migrated to urban areas during the conflict and who refuse to return to rural areas where they have no land ownership or job prospects (Pankhurst, 2003: 161).

Women who are identified as community leaders or political adversaries are also often targeted because 'participation in social movements, and non-governmental advocacy networks to voice their political or societal concerns is perceived as threatening the status quo' (Bardall, 2011:17). For patriarchal societies, the challenge posed to traditional gender roles by the different positions that women take on during conflict is perceived as threatening to the social and cultural norms. 'The ideological rhetoric is often about 'restoring' or 'returning to' something associated with the status quo before the conflict, even if the change undermines women's rights and places women in a situation that is even more disadvantageous than it ever was in the past' (Pankhurst, 2003:161). Kesby adds that, in some societies, there is a perception of healing or therapy in returning to the pre-war status, where there were certainties such as 'patriarchal institutions and traditions' (1996:582 cited in Sórensen, 1998: 37). In such instances, women have to navigate this post-conflict period carefully – they may end up having less space to challenge gender relations than they did during the conflict or pre-conflict.

In post-conflict environments, FFCs are given very few options to exercise roles or positions of authority they may have gained in the conflict that challenged pre-war gender norms in their societies. They either remain silent or face stigma and potential retribution; they receive training that means a return to feminised roles, or no training altogether, or return to their families having been stripped of their identity as a combatant (Veale, 2003: 11). In doing so, they return to their *normal* places in the community, where they are prescribed traditional gender norms embracing the traditional feminine values of what women 'should' and 'can' be and do. Arguably, these

prescriptions close the window of opportunity offered by periods of peacebuilding for communities to decide whether 'cultural practices, laws and policies are outdated, worthy of preservation or should be transformed for gender equality to eventuate' (McWilliam and Ní Aoláin, 2013:14).

2.2.4 Reintegration as a concept

Jennings (2007) poses the question '*Reintegration into what?'* to demonstrate that the effectiveness of reintegration is not just about former combatant experiences or engagement with the programme, but also about the *families, communities, systems* and *structures* into which former combatants are reintegrating themselves. Contrary to some assumptions – that in post-conflict environments, there exist functioning values and norms – *the reintegration into what* question 'highlights that, where countries experience both massive destruction and significant mobility and change through conflict, the assumption that a reasonably cohesive and functioning society exists into which reintegration can occur is questionable' (Jennings, 2007: 213).

Shepherd (2010) contributes to this point, arguing that reintegration is founded on the assumption that the context in question is *post*-conflict (in as far as there is negative peace, see Galtung, 1964). That is not always the case, however, as there are often violent skirmishes or episodes occurring within communities or nationally, in the years succeeding the end of the conflict (Shepherd, 2010: 156). Davies and True (2017) add to this observation from a different angle, arguing that post-conflict environments are often filled with ongoing experiences of multiple forms of insecurity and violence (physical and structural) for women and FFCs (Davies and True, 2017).

As such, it is important that when post-conflict interventions like DDR are being formulated, implemented or analysed as processes of social reintegration, certain considerations are critical:

the history of the conflict; the type of warfare and violence that occurred; the intensity of the conflict by region or against a specific ethnic, religious or group of people; differences in recruitment and activities amongst warring factions; and conflict duration. Practitioners must consider the 'experiences and characteristics of the post-conflict society, as it doesn't mean a return to pre-conflict values, norms and structures, as society is neither assumed nor supposed to be a static force' (Jennings, 2008:328).

Another way that feminists have interrogated the concept of reintegration is built on the notion that reintegration aims to offer a temporary distraction for former combatants – given that the successes of economic reintegration have often not been fully realised by combatants. In many ways, the different economic reintegration activities (such as vocational skills training and formal education opportunities, access to micro-enterprise schemes and toolkits provided to former combatants), can be seen as a way to occupy former combatants, as these activities only last a few months. In Sierra Leone, the vocational skills training provided as part of DDR was deemed poor quality by the FCs, local artisans and tradesmen. This poor quality has been attributed to several factors: (i) non-professional / non-specialist trainees delivered the training rather than experienced tradesmen/artisans; (ii) the training wasn't standardised, and there was a lack of quality control (Solomon and Ginifer, 2008: 37); (iii) limited funding was assigned to the training – in Sierra Leone, this led to the programme prematurely running out of funds, and training was cut short from the planned 12-month courses to three / six months, and in some instances, just three weeks (MacKenzie, 2016: 152).

Moreover, given that previous reintegration programmes have been criticised for equipping former combatants with skills without guaranteeing a job or means of earning an income, this argument begins to gain traction. Whilst the DD (disarmament and demobilisation) elements address the existence and circulation of weapons and group affiliations, the R element (reintegration) of DDR is seen merely as a means to keep the former combatants occupied,

whilst buying time for the transitional and elected governments (Jennings, 2009: 477). Viewed from this perspective, the main aim of reintegration becomes 'containment, not resolution; the end state and resource requirement is modest, and implementation and forms of control are securitised' (Jennings, 2008: 332).

With the above understanding in mind, feminists such as Jennings (2007) and MacKenzie (2012) have gone as far as to argue that the aim of reintegration programmes will not be fully realised until reintegration is separated from disarmament and demobilisation. For MacKenzie (2012) separating R from DD means that DD can focus exclusively on security, without the funding or milestones for that aspect of DDR overshadowing the R element, in terms of budgets and implementation.[9] For Jennings (2007), separating R from DD would not only lead to a more directed focus on the transformative nature of reintegration, but would also allow the programmes to ring-fence spending more clearly, and expectations and outcomes to be scaled back/down. Moreover, the separation would allow reintegration programmes to be mapped out more clearly in terms of their contribution with regards to short-term vs long-term socio-economic development, divorcing programmes from the 'presumption that good outcomes will result regardless; where reintegration cannot deliver, other components of the peacebuilding agenda will' (Jennings, 2008: 333). Separating reintegration from the DD elements of DDR would also build accountability, clarifying what period 'long-term' covers, and when, how and who is responsible for implementing and monitoring the programmes once the international community ceases to support the official DDR programmes. Whilst this latter point is arguably

[9] Other scholars from post-conflict scholarship have argued that DD needs to be done as a separate activity on the ground that R can implemented as a long-term process that marks the end of 'an individual's status as an ex-combatant and their starting to occupy the status of a civilian' (Ball and van deGoor, 2006: 3). Knight (2008) however challenges this argument by stating that the line that separates ex-combatant and civilians is arguably artificial and difficult to draw/define.

addressed by the UN's emphasis (in theory and practice) that reintegration is a national responsibility, and that with time there is reduced dependence on an international presence, the lack of a clear handover and longer perspective has created few incentives for sustained institutional attention, enabling insensitivity by internal practitioners to counterproductive impacts of the programme over time (Jennings, 2008: 333).

In saying all this, Jennings (2007) does acknowledge that delinking DD from R may only be suitable for environments with a clear distinction between combatants and civilians, or the battlefield and non-conflict zones; otherwise, a more holistic approach is required (Jennings, 2007: 215). Understanding the post-conflict environment is central to 'what is possible and what is not, why developments follow a certain path rather than a different one, and how effective certain activities are opposed to others.' (Porto and Parson, 2003:6).

2.2.5 Beyond the local and beyond gender

Feminists argue that, as well as addressing the problematic way that gender is conceptualised in reintegration (and DDR more broadly), there is a need to challenge the participation of motivations of male fraternities. This is because local male fraternities might seek to reassert their power as individuals or as leaders in their various roles in political and communal life, through advocating and supporting policies and practices that encourage a return to traditional gender norms, roles and values in their communities/societies.[10] Postcolonial feminists add that there is also a need to challenge males engaged in the funding, designing and implementation of reintegration from the international community ,as some of them are part of the:

[10] As will be discussed in Chapters 4 and 5 in the stigma, bias and sexism sections.

> international fraternity – the community of decision-makers and experts who arrive after a conflict on a mission of 'good will' – holds the upper hand, morally, economically and politically. …As individuals, they have significantly greater financial power than local people. Morally, they are the 'saviours'. They have been brought in because local males have 'failed'… (Handrahan, 2004: 433)

This is evident in that the heads of most of these international organisations are male elites, inevitably bringing with them their interpretations of gender hierarchies and norms and patriarchal behaviour, which they subconsciously or consciously transpose. Sometimes, the norms or behaviours they transpose differ 'drastically from norms otherwise adhered to 'at home'' (Handrahan, 2004: 433). For the most part, though, these international fraternities' patriarchal authority is ascribed to their being from institutions promoting liberal and neoliberal values (MacKenzie, 2009). Their approaches 'perpetuate institutional masculinity with the structures that implement peace initiatives (e.g., UN agencies, foreign governments, international NGOs and banks) focusing on a form of patriarchal dominance' (Connell, 2002: 37 cited in Basini, 2016: 123).

It is important to note that, despite these different fraternities coming from different regions, or holding different power and interests in the post-conflict environment, some of these internal and local fraternities of male elites share fundamentally similar patriarchal views, that seek to establish gender hierarchies in which women and FFCs return to traditional gender roles (Ní Aoláin, 2016: 41). MacKenzie presents evidence for how such patriarchal biases can be seen in the funding conditions that existed in Sierra Leone, resulting in FFCs being restricted to skills training in line with traditional gender roles (MacKenzie, 2009: 213).

Building on this and earlier arguments, post-colonial feminists also advance that, as well as addressing the way gender is conceptualised when it comes to reintegration, we must address the colonial overtones of DDR – the architects of reintegration are from the Global North, and there are always power dynamics at play between them and those in the Global South. This is especially as 'DDR programmes limit the boundaries of approved and unapproved activity, define ideal and deviant behaviour, and prescribe acceptable expectation and realistic aspirations of former combatants' (McMullin, 2013a: 390). Like post-development scholars who have long critiqued development theory, policies and practice, MacKenzie advocates for interrogating how some post-conflict interventions (including DDR) in Africa are steeped in 'exerting paternal authority and continuing neo-colonial capitalist relationships of exploitation' (MacKenzie, 2016:146). As such, we must embrace post-colonial theory and feminism and interrogate the post-conflict theory, policies and practice, since interventions such as reintegration are not only gendered, but also a product of colonial and neo-colonial relationships of exploitation. Using the work by Shilliam and Césaire on civilisation discourses, MacKenzie identifies the

> ideals of civilisation as a linear process which stems from colonial fantasies of transforming 'savages' into 'proper' citizens. In turn, the process of attaining civility, or the 'evolution' from 'savage to citizen' could only be ordained and guided by European authority (MacKenzie, 2016: 149).

In this respect, MacKenzie argues that reintegration, empowerment, security and progress in the context of DDR should be treated as 'a continuation of civilising efforts born out of colonial rule' (MacKenzie, 2016: 147) – where there is a need to civilise the savage. As such, any conceptualisations of these four ideas should be identified as 'emancipatory concepts that are about satisfying hierarchical and capitalist global relations, and not about improving the everyday living conditions or lives' (MacKenzie, 2016: 157).

Given its foundations in liberal and neo-liberal theories, DDR has faced challenges from critics of both theories in the same vein. Such critics argue that it is:

> a form of Western imperialism that imposes a specific agenda and conception of peace to maintain economic supremacy and global order under an interventionist approach. With that in mind, it does not promote local ownership or fully consider indigenous forms of peacebuilding or community engagement, meaning that those at the grassroots have few opportunities to influence the new political, economic and social systems being built around them (Basini, 2016: 123).

Whilst not exhaustive of the argument, this certainly demonstrates that, as well as addressing the gender 'problem' within DDR, efforts must also be made to challenge existing or historical narratives that continue to promote approaches/interventions that support the liberal agenda, as they can be Eurocentric in nature.

This section reiterated the need to engage with the gendered nature of conflict, as it spills into post-conflict narratives, and informs who and what is included in peacebuilding interventions. The section also highlighted the importance of including women and FFCs in the different aspects of peacebuilding, as failure to do so leads to incomplete views of their experiences in the policy world, as is evident in DDR programmes (Cohen, 2013: 389). There has also been discussion on the problematic way gender has been conceptualised in reintegration scholarship, policy and practice. The section ended by highlighting other areas beyond the gender problem to be addressed or considered, in order for reintegration to be a more effective and viable intervention supporting FFCs in post-conflict environments.

2.3 Conclusion

This literature review puts forward feminist literature on the varied conflict experiences of FFCs by summarising the changing gender roles that are possible during conflict for women. It also unpacked how gender stereotypes have historically informed the conceptualisation of the roles and experiences of women and FFCs in conflict. It makes the argument for broadening the definition of combatant, given the varying roles FFCs occupy in conflict, as well as the importance of dismantling the gendered binary frame dominating understandings of gender and violence. The chapter highlighted how a victimhood framework has negatively impacted the post-conflict realities of FFCs, as well as their experiences with peacebuilding interventions such as DDR, and specifically reintegration. Framing informs policy and practice; in this context, this has deemed FFCs *not* a security concern and thus not a target recipient for DDR – unlike FMCs, who *are* seen as a security threat. Additionally, this framework informs the design and implementation of unimaginative DDR programmes, such as eligibility criteria, facilities and support, and the activities in which FFCs are or are not included, thus having a material impact on what assistance FFCs can and cannot access.

Additionally, the chapter interrogated reintegration as a concept, as well as a practice, demonstrating not only the problematic way gender is conceptualised within it, but other aspects of reintegration that must be addressed if reintegration is to be transformative, address substantive grievances; lead to fundamental social change, the reconstruction of social capital, and become a 'jump-start for the political economy of peace' (Jennings, 2008: 331). Lastly the chapter revealed the importance of ensuring that, when challenging gender essentialism promoted or advanced by male fraternities in post-conflict interventions or environments, it is just as important to challenge local as well as international male fraternities.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter explains the methodological design, research strategy and methods, data collection and analysis process. Given that, in any academic piece of work, it is essential to identify the research philosophy which informs the researcher and the different components that make up the methodology, this chapter will begin by putting forward my ontological and epistemological positions. From there, the section will articulate how feminist theory underpins the methodology employed in this research. The second section will share the research strategy and methods used for the data collection, with the third section detailing the data collection process. The fourth section will delve into the ethical considerations of this research with the fifth section focusing on reflexivity. The final section shares the data analysis and the writing up process, as well as the theory that informed both.

3.1 Research philosophy and methodological framework

Ontology and epistemology

> Feminists start from an ontology of social relations in which individuals are embedded in and constituted by historically unequal political, economic and social structures. (Tickner, 2006 in Ackerly et al, 2006: 24-25).

Like other feminist theorists, I work from the ontological position above, and hold that the norms and values upholding the stated unequal structures are inherently gendered. This critical intersubjective ontology informs the aim of feminist theories, which is to challenge these unequal power relations, as not doing so results in the continued existence of a gendered political realm (Maruska, 2010: 3).

I subscribe to a *post-positivist* epistemological position, which maintains that there is no single reality to be revealed; instead, there are many realities, which change over time, space and

context, as well as with the identity of the person investigating the subject, and their motivation (Peterson, 1992:12). This epistemological position leads me, as a feminist, to ask: 'how social realities came to be, and how these realities came to be understood as norms, institutions or social facts – often examining the gendered underpinnings of each' (Maruska, 2010: 3). I also subscribe to a *standpoint* epistemology, which argues that 'one can know the world more fully or critically (with less of a material or ideological stake in maintaining the *status quo*) from the subject position of the marginalised or oppressed' (Ackerly and True, 2020: 23). More recent iterations[11] of feminist standpoint epistemology situates those marginalised because of their gender at the centre of knowledge creation on their lives and gender inequality/dynamics. Moreover, it advocates that no single standpoint exists, but rather multiple standpoints intersect, and are all informed by ethnicity, culture, sexuality, social class, geographical location and other factors (Maruska, 2010: 12).

This research focuses on FFCs' lived experiences in a post-conflict environment. These experiences contribute to feminist scholarship by shedding light on issues around gender security and development. Building on the literature in the previous chapter, the following section lays out how this research employs feminist theory in the methodology.

Methodological framework

A methodology is a system of methods or ways of conducting research. Scholars like Ramazanoğlu and Holland (2002) hold that there are a set of protocols for employing a feminist methodology or methods that are specifically feminist. However, like many feminist researchers, I believe that there is no specific method and or methodology that is unique to

[11] Some earlier conceptualisations of standpoint feminist theory suggested an essentialist view of gender as a means of getting closer to objectivity/ approximations of 'truth', see Harding, 1992.

feminist scholarship (Reinharz, 1992: 243 cited in Tickner, 2006: 21). This is in large part because, whilst feminism has historically been split into three categories/traditions (liberal, radical and socialist/Marxist feminism), the reality of different movements within feminism since the 20th century goes beyond such categorisation. This has led to feminism not only being diverse but, as Ackerly (2008b) puts it, 'a contested concept' – thus making any assertions of a 'feminist method theoretically problematic' (cited in Ackerly and True, 2020: 70).

As such, I agree that research is *feminist* when there is:

> a distinctive methodological perspective or framework which fundamentally challenges the often unseen androcentric or masculine biases in the way that knowledge has traditionally been constructed in all disciplines… Furthermore, feminist research requires that knowledge is built and analysed in a way that can be used to challenge and transform women's lives. (Tickner, 2006: 20, 23).

When deciding on a research area, I considered the potential my research had for changing women's post-conflict lives as well as contributing to limited narratives of FFCs post-conflict experiences. This is evidenced by the fact that this research aims to redress the limited engagement of FFCs in post-conflict reintegration programs in a manner that supports their participation in economic reintegration opportunities that not only transcend traditional gender norms, values and roles but ensure a sustainable means of earning a living and social reintegration. Moreover, social reintegration activities that support progress towards gender equality through the reconceptualization of traditional gender norms and roles for FFCs who want that. In analysing the experiences of FFCs within the private and public sphere, this research also interrogates how beliefs about femininity and masculinity inform gender relations at familial, societal and institutional levels, and how unpacking these beliefs shape or inform

gender inequality. This research, therefore, contributes to a rich history of feminist research, work and activism – which seeks to make the 'invisible visible [by] bringing the margin to the centre, rendering the trivial important, putting the spotlight on women as competent actors, [and] understanding women as subjects in their own right rather than objects for men' (Reinharz, 1992: 248 cited in Tickner, 2006: 21).

Ackerly and True (2008) add to Tickner's understanding of feminist methodology by arguing that a researcher needs to take *four points of consideration* on board in their methodology, if their research is to be distinctly feminist. These are 'the power of epistemology, boundaries, relationships and situatedness' (Ackerly and True, 2020: 22). While the chapter will go on to demonstrate in-depth how the research incorporated all these considerations in the sections on research strategy and method and data collection, it is worth briefly explaining these four points.

Epistemological power

It is important to pay attention to the power of epistemology, because a 'researcher's epistemology has authority in their research' (Ackerly and True, 2020: 22). More than that, the scholarship that informs a researcher's work is also informed by different epistemologies, some of which may be the same as, or complement one's work, but in other cases, they may be different.

As such, there are compelling epistemological insights which lie in the connections made between knowledge (creation and interpretation) and power (Lennon and Whitford, 1994, cited in Doucet and Mauthner, 2007: 40). In paying attention to the power of epistemology, the researcher is 'continually reviewing and challenging notions of what are appropriate and reliable ways of knowing, in particular from the standpoints of different individuals and social groups' (Ackerly and True, 2020: 24). More than that, the researcher is engaged in the process of unpacking the power dynamics that exist in how knowledge is investigated, defined and

understood (Wolf, 1996). ‘As a feminist, rethinking one’s epistemology may reveal biases that come from the feminist theory itself’ (Ackerly and True, 2020: 26) – such a realisation can only enhance the research project’s contribution to scholarship.

Boundaries

Different types of boundaries exist in the research process. These boundaries may be within or between disciplines because of differences in bodies of knowledge and theories. They may also be among researchers, because of their commitment to certain research topics, epistemological positions, methods and theories. Rather than encouraging a researcher to stay within the confines of their discipline – in terms of what existing scholarship informs knowledge or how knowledge is formulated – crossing disciplinary boundaries is encouraged, as it ‘encourages us to become more interdisciplinary in our search for knowledge and inspiration’ (Ackerly and True, 2020: 28).

Boundaries may also be between the stakeholders involved in the research process: between the researcher, the researched and the research team. It is important to pay attention to such boundaries, because doing so helps identify any blind spots, silences, or absences that may result in excluding or marginalising narratives, participants/contributors or scholarship. A conscious awareness of boundaries between these different groups may also mean that the researcher is not only aware of the power dynamics between the group, but can make strides towards mitigating the impact on what and how knowledge is captured and how it is conveyed. As such, a feminist-informed researcher must not only be aware that, whilst boundaries will always exist when it comes to knowledge creation, ‘we need to be conscious of and take responsibility for their intended and unintended effects’ (Ackerly and True, 2020: 22).

Relationships

As the above suggests, feminist researchers are committed to 'rebalancing or softening the complex and unequal power relations' (Jenkins et al., 2019: 419) that exist in the relationships between themselves and all the individuals or groups involved in the research process. For a feminist researcher, the unequal power relations between the researcher and the researched lie in the fact that the researcher decides on the topic under investigation, the theory that informs the research they are to conduct, the methodology and methods used, and controls the interpretation of data. Those who are research subjects usually only engage in the process at the data collection stage. More than that, the researcher is instrumental in who is engaged and who isn't engaged, what knowledge is captured, and how this knowledge is conveyed in interactions. In these situations, the unequal power dynamics are in 'issues surrounding authority in the research process as well as the written representation of research' (Stanley and Wise, 2002: 189).

Feminists have responded to this by advocating for research strategies that emphasise interactions that are less extractive and more reciprocal in nature (Cook and Fonow 1986, 1990:76 cited in Tickner, 2006: 27). Efforts towards redressing this power imbalance are also evident in feminist-informed research that goes beyond a commitment to not causing any harm, to a commitment to making a difference in the lives of the researched. In feminist-informed research, when it comes to the emotional rapport between the researcher and the researched, there is 'a stronger commitment to do research 'with' or 'for' participants, rather than 'on' them' (Kingston, 2020: 533). It is also important to note that, whilst feminists have made strides towards redressing the unequal power balance between researcher and researched, feminism still runs the risk of being exploitative, as this inequality cannot be nullified, only reduced.

For feminists working in contexts where inequalities are acute, such as low-income communities or developing countries, unequal relations are also impacted because the researcher is located in academic, policy and practice research institutions, whilst the researched are not. In these situations, research can inadvertently exacerbate inequalities between the researcher and the researched; by its nature, research is an intrusion and intervention into a system of relationships where 'the researchers are far freer than the researched to leave' (Stacey, 1991:113).

As well as relationships with those being researched, feminist-informed researchers must also consider the power dynamics between themselves and their research team (translators, research assistants). The research team are engaged not only for their ability to facilitate conversation or deliver certain services, but also for sharing their knowledge and insights. As such, there is a need to ensure that interactions between the researcher and the team reflect this collaborative dynamic. More than that, there is a need to ensure that the team are acknowledged as collaborators, as:

> [their] knowledge and insights are often appropriated and presented in research findings under the names of lead researchers, whose careers flourish in an international context where their prospects and their bargaining power as professionals are both starkly different from the local staff who have given so much to the work. In these relationships, feminist lead researchers need to 'walk their talk' on partnership and challenge the norms and conventions of research rooted in colonial and post-colonial racism. (Jenkins et al., 2019: 419).

Situatedness and positionality

Feminist-informed research requires that the researcher be particularly reflexive about their positionality and situatedness. This means paying attention to one's intellectual biography, social, political, and economic relationships, the topic under investigation, and the research participants/contributors. As an approach, reflexivity – or the emergence of self-consciousness regarding 'self and other' – has altered the way qualitative researchers in sociology, anthropology and political science interrogate their research (Acker et al., 1999; England, 1994). Reflexivity requires researchers to acknowledge that positionality incorporates ideas of power and privilege. A failure to explore, acknowledge and situate how a researcher's personal, professional and structural positioning frames their research inevitably leads to the reproduction of narratives informed by dominant gender, race and class biases (Naples, 2003). As such, Woolgar advocates *constitutive reflexivity*, whereby the researcher acknowledges their personal positioning because their positioning constitutes and forms part of the 'reality' they create; from how the individual analyses their research (1988: 22), to the theory they incorporate, as well as how the research is written and disseminated (Kelly and Jackson, 2019: 301). Reflexivity thus requires the researcher to define and set out 'who the knower is' (Code, 1991), 'whose knowledge is put forward' (Harding, 1991), and 'who speaks for whom' (Mohanty, Russo and Torres, 1991) – what is their positioning, and how does it inform their research?

Moreover, reflexivity calls for researchers (especially those doing in-depth interviews) to have a 'heightened sense of self-awareness about their personal understandings, beliefs, prejudice and world view with the understanding that their social, historical, and cultural baggage influences the research process' (Sankar and Gubrium, 1994: xiv cited in van den Boogaard, 2019:258-59). 'Position and identity cannot be understood in terms of a single dimension. Indeed, race, class, education, age, religion and other identity markers interact with gender and influence position to create particular experiences (Crenshaw, 1991: Hancock, 2007), which

can simultaneously limit and facilitate research' (van den Boogaard, 2019: 263). Post-colonial feminists ask that, along with recognising the need for a heightened sense of how personal understandings, beliefs, prejudice and world view influence the research process, researchers also must take on board the history, society and culture of the environments they are researching, as they can be invaluable for providing context (Sankar and Gubrium, 1994: xiv cited in van den Boogaard, 2019: 258-59).

Beyond reflecting on a researcher's own identity, reflexivity for feminists also requires the researcher to consistently 'revisit epistemological choices, boundaries and relationships throughout the research process' (Ackerly and True, 2020: 34). Employing such an approach means a researcher can put in place mechanisms to mitigate ethical issues that may occur in advance of conducting the research, as well as during the research process itself (Ackerly and True, 2020: 35).

3.2 Research strategy and methods

The research strategy and methods employed in this research were selected because they fit the research philosophy and theoretical framework, and were best suited for generating the contextualised data required to develop a more nuanced understanding of FFCs' lived experiences in post-conflict Sierra Leone. As such, this research uses a case study research design, which:

> allows the researcher to retain the holistic characteristics of real-life events while investigating empirical events… At the simplest level, the case study provides descriptive accounts of one or more cases, yet it can also be used in an intellectually rigorous manner to achieve experimental isolation of one or more selected social factors within a real-life context (Schell, 1992: 1-2).

More specifically, this research is an interpretive case study, in that 'it is guided towards an interest in a subject rather than creating generalisations but paying attention to theories that have been used previously' (Gomes and Saraiva, 2021: 39 in Morin, Olson and Atikcan, 2021). This research design lends itself to a feminist approach in that it considers the fact that research is not about truth-telling, but instead, it is about how the data is interpreted as the researcher is involved in the production of data and knowledge (Carson et al., 2001:7). This point is crucial for me, because as a researcher working from a feminist-informed approach, I believe that I cannot objectively interpret my research – as everything I know and do is informed by my personal positioning, as well the positioning of those with whom I engage for my research (Marsh and Furlong, 2002:19). Moreover, a case study supports the collection and use of qualitative data, which is the type of data that is used to inform this research.

Site selection and sampling

The research trips occurred over two phases: **Phase One** was in November/December 2019 and took place over four weeks, and **Phase Two** was in December 2020/January 2021 over a three-week period. The research had four research sites: Kissi town (a former combatant settler town near the capital city Freetown), Bo city (second largest city, located in the Southern Province), Kenema (a town in the Eastern province, located 38 miles from Bo) and Makeni (the largest city in the Northern Province, located 67 miles from Bo). Given that the aim of the research was not to be representative or provide a complete picture but rather to offer in-depth insight into the reintegration experiences of different FFCs, and what these diverse experiences reveal about gender, conflict and reintegration this regional variation was important. The regional variation was also important, as it would allow for a wide breadth of experiences and narratives as the intensity of the conflict varied along different geographical locations (as various fighting

forces had strongholds in the different regions)[12]. It is important to note that each of the chosen locations held DDR cantonment sites and had the largest centres running DDR training programmes for FFCs[13].. This would have affected how the combatants interacted with the communities regarding the levels and types of violence and recruitment methods, and how their communities or families received them in the post-conflict period.

The research used a mix of purposive and snowball sampling to recruit the research contributors/participants. Purposive sampling was instrumental in generating the initial group of research contributors/participants, as they were identified through different organisations that worked with FFCs in the delivery of economic and social reintegration programmes, such as Caritas Makeni, Fambul Tok and Kakajam Technical Vocational Training. Local gatekeepers (such as community chiefs) were also an excellent source of knowledge with regards to the location of FFCs. The research contributors/participants I met through these avenues then introduced me to other FFCs they knew in their area. In doing this, snowball sampling came into effect as, by definition, it 'initially engages with a small group of people relevant to the research questions, and these sampled participants propose other participants who have the experience or characteristics relevant to the research' (Bryman, 2012: 424).

In terms of sample size, I had no specific number in mind, and instead sought to ensure that there were enough interviews to reach 'data saturation, theoretical saturation or informational

[12] The RUF started the conflict in the eastern region of the country in the Pujehun and Kailahun district which boarder Kenema district where Kenema town is. Whilst this means that Kenema was one of the first town to encounter the RUF and experienced the conflict the longest, as the conflict progressed Kenema developed a strong presence of the CDF especially after the CDF was reinforced by ECOMOG forces. Bo was the town that was least damaged in the conflict as there was a lot of resistance against the RUF by many of the local youth and it was the main centre for the rise of the CDF. Makeni was also a city that was strongly defended and taken over by the CDF and ECOMOG forces in the first half of 1998 but after the after the January 6, 1999 battle for Freetown, the AFRC/RUF took it over as they retreated from the capital and Makeni became the de facto rebel capital until the end of the conflict (Peters, 2007: 10-11).

[13] Kissi Town also engaged the Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and refugees

redundancy' (Onwuegbuzie and Collins, 2007: 289), which can be achieved either as a result of there being 'no new or relevant data emerging regarding that category or the category is well developed in terms of its properties and dimensions demonstrating variation or the relationships among the categories are well established and validated' (Strauss and Corbin, 1988: 212 cited Bryman, 2012: 421).

In Phase One, interviews were conducted with 23 FFCs; in Phase Two, interviews were conducted with nine FFCs. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the plan had been to conduct follow-up interviews with the 23 FFCs interviewed in Phase One, and then have a further 20 interviews with a new group of FFCs, plus some FMCs to add breadth and depth to the existing data. However, due to COVID-19 travel restrictions, we had to reduce the sample and the sites of investigations in Phase Two. As such, after identifying the participants/contributors whose insights provided varying degrees of life trajectories, we conducted interviews with nine of the 23 FFCs from Phase One. The decision to revisit these nine FFCs was also informed by the fact that these nine lived in locations that reduced travel and risk that came with conducting face-face interviews during the COVID-19 pandemic. Ultimately, the nine FFCs interviewed in Phase Two were from three of the four sites from Phase One: Bo, Kenema and Makeni. [14]

Data collection methods

The research used a combination of in-depth interviews and a chronological timeline to generate qualitative data. These methods are among the many used by feminists which are drawn from a long post-positivist interpretive tradition of capturing the experiences of key informants located firmly in context, by collecting descriptive and insightful information (Mack,

[14] See breakdown of sample by age, geographical location, armes faction they were affiliated with and information on their engagement with economic reintegration programs in the Appendix on page 257

Woodsong et al., 2005). These methods also enabled me as a researcher 'to enter into the realm of lived experiences, which has been a privileged location for feminist research' (Nordstrom, 1995:139 cited in Sylvester, 2012:51).

The interview questions included a mix of introductory, direct, probing, and open-ended questions, and each interview concluded by asking the participant/ contributor if they had any questions for me.[15] Whilst these were numbered and led into one another in a narrative form (Gillham, 2005:74 cited in Morin, Olsson and Atikcan, 2021: 151), the order did not need to be strictly followed. This was my chosen approach as it would allow the flexibility to probe initial participant responses (Mack, Woodsong et al.,2005:1) with follow-up questions, and improvisation; both of which factor as an integral part of semi-structured interviews, as stated by Moore (2013:129-130) and Taarnby (2013: 213). Moreover, this approach also takes into account that each interviewee would answer each question differently. An added benefit of having some flexibility with the research questions was that, in between interviews, there is the opportunity to add questions on topics that had emerged in earlier interviews.

The chronological timeline was included as a data collection method, as an additional means of capturing the participant/contributor's life, and to allow us to double-check the information that had been captured in the interview, and make any corrections when writing up the combined interview notes. In terms of constructing the timeline, we adopted Adriansen's approach to timeline interviews, which advocates ensuring that when doing the mapping, the interviewer ensures that the questions/process allow the participant/contributor to go beyond telling their story in a friendly, linear, rational and coherent manner, because we don't necessarily live just

[15] These questions were split into three areas which aligned with the three sub-research questions of this thesis.

one life – 'we live many lives, and we can make room for these different lives, for the different stories and their contexts' (Adriansen, 2012: 42).

Research team

For **Phase One**, the research team consisted of myself and three in-country Research Assistants (RAs) who were referred to me by academics who had previously used their services in Sierra Leone. Before being recruited, all the RAs were examined on their interview, translation and interview note taking skills. Their knowledge of the local communities and their ability to negotiate access was also considered. The RAs who became part of the research team were located in three of the four research sites (one female RA from Freetown, one male RA from Makeni and one male RA from Bo, the RA based in Bo was also knowledgeable about Kenema town, thus covering all the four research sites). There was no preference with regards to the gender for the RAs as initial consultations with other academics who had worked in Sierra Leone had revealed that it was highly unlikely that I would be able to find any female RAs outside Freetown as NGOs tended to recruit male RAs as they were better placed to negotiate with male gatekeepers for me to access FFCs and they had the most experience. These observations turned out to be the case for Makeni and Bo/Kenema as after two rounds of advertising, all the candidates that applied or were referred to me were male.

Whilst standard practice withinI was confident that my presence during the interviews would provide some gender balance to the interviews led by the male RAs and would allow for us to employ strategies that harness cross-gender dynamic interactions when it comes to data collection as these spaces can still yield nuanced results and engagement as observed by scholars like Turner, 2010 (cited in Stevano and Deane, 2019: 7). Whilst in Turner's case she reflected on female RAs who found it easier to interview men than women because it was more culturally acceptable for men to talk and share information and not women, her assertions

contradicted perceived wisdom that female participants/contributors would be more comfortable with female RA or male participants/contributors would be more comfortable with a male RA. As such, the research team was made up of both male and female RAs.

Once appointed, the RAs and I had a meeting in which we developed a plan for the data collection process. We went through all the interview questions, and they shared their thoughts and provided input on the individual questions, the terms and language used, as well as their sequencing. From there we discussed the step-by-step process we would take to conduct the interviews and record in writing the responses by the FFCs. The RAs' insights were invaluable, and engaging them in this manner meant that we established a collaborative dynamic between us; thus we went into the data collection process identifying ourselves as a research team.

For **Phase Two**, the research team consisted of me and one in-country RA. The reduction in team size was due to the fact that I could not travel to Sierra Leone due to the COVID-19 travel restrictions, there was limited funding, a reduced sample size, and restrictions on movement within the country. The RA who was part of the team for Phase Two was the male RA with whom I had worked in Phase One (for the interviews in Bo and Kenema), had proved highly competent and resourceful, had excellent knowledge of the revised research sites, and could work independently. In addition, he had experience of conducting research during a pandemic, as he had been employed by a local organisation to help track and trace data processing during the Ebola crisis. It was also beneficial to the research project as he were based in Bo city (which was central to three of the four sites, and as such there were no restrictions on movement for him).

In the same way that we worked as a team in Phase One, we did the same in Phase Two. The only difference was that we engaged in conversations remotely, and the RA led the process of gathering information and contacting the participants/contributors, as he could make local

phone calls and travel to locations as required. Whilst working together to revise the research questions and finalise a data collection plan is something we had done before, one difference was in that we worked together on revising the risk assessment and decisions on the data storage and transfer. Another difference was that we revised the allocated budget and had to take into consideration new costs, like PPE and health insurance from a local provider, none of which we had done previously. The RA's assistance was invaluable in this process, and I know our working together in this manner made strides towards establishing us as a team working collaboratively. As a team, we came up with a plan for me to have some involvement in the interview process, where I created a video specific to each participant/contributor that was to be shown to them before each interview commenced. In the video, I explained my absence and why we were conducting follow-up interviews, and mentioned specific points of interest about their experience or them as a person I remembered or related to from the Phase One interview, to demonstrate how meaningful their experiences are and their importance to the research. With each point, I made sure to reiterate and reaffirm that the RA and I were working as a team.

3.3 Data collection

In **Phase One,** all the interviews were conducted in private spaces of the research contributors/participants' choosing. This was one way I (in agreement with the research team) felt we would make strides towards rebalancing the power dynamics between the researchers and the researched – as in this instance, the participants/contributors engaged in some of the decision making with regards to how the interviews were conducted. In an effort to ensure that this research incorporated some of the considerations that inform a feminist research project (as discussed earlier), conducting the interviews in person meant that we could build a rapport and break down barriers, and also ensured that each interaction was not extractive, and was personalised.

Regarding the flow of the interviews, all research contributors/participants received a participant information sheet and informed consent form, both written using simple and clear language accessible to them. The RAs spent time working together to ensure that all the documents were translated to Krio and Mende[16] from my English version which had received ethics approval. To accommodate participants with varying degrees of literacy, we offered to read out loud the participant information sheet and consent form. Participants were also informed about the different options they had with regards to signing their consent forms, including using a signature, their initials, verbal consent, or an inked imprint of their index finger.

Each interview was done in collaboration with one RA. In instances where there was no need for them to translate, we both took turns asking the interview questions and adding any follow up questions where necessary. On average, we conducted three interviews daily, which lasted approximately an hour and a half to two hours. None of the interviews involved the use of a recording device as FFCs expressed discomfort with the use of recording devices and as such didn't give consent. As a result, the RAs and I each took detailed notes, and at the end of each day we spent time reviewing our comments and combining them so that there was one document that contained each interview/participant's responses. 90 per cent of the interviews were conducted in Krio, with the remaining 10 per cent in Mende. This turned out to be an advantage for me, because once I had grasped Krio (which, for the most part, is similar to Pigeon English which I speak well) there was reduced need for the RA to act as an interpreter.

[16] Krio is an English-based creole language that is the national language in Sierra Leone, and Mende is the main language spoken in southern Sierra Leone.

The data in **Phase Two** was collected using the same methods as those in Phase One, except that I wasn't physically present for the interviews (as detailed earlier), and we had to follow guidelines by the Sierra Leone Government and international COVID-19 regulations for conducting face to face research. We could not conduct the interviews virtually, as most participants couldn't access or afford electronic devices; those with devices could not afford mobile data or Wi-Fi, or had insufficient access to electricity to guarantee that their devices would be charged. Even if I were to provide devices in one location for them to use for virtual interviews, they all lived in different locations, and because of COVID-19, the safest option was for them to be interviewed outside their home or in a public space near their home. Asking them to travel to one location in a city or town would also have been challenging, as some had jobs and sole responsibility to care for their family members. Additionally, the research questions were centred around a sensitive topic where privacy is paramount, and the participants needed to feel safe and comfortable.

In terms of how the interview days were structured, the RA and I had a briefing session before each interview to ensure he had all the resources he needed to conduct the interviews scheduled for that day. We also had a debriefing session at the end of each day, to regroup and plan for the next day. In terms of the interviews themselves, the only changes to how the interviews were conducted was that the RA played the video I had pre-recorded before each interview, and then he went through the participant information sheets and consent forms before starting the interview. The interviews also varied in length with each FFCs, as the length was dependent on how much they had shared in Phase One and how many follow-up questions there were. The RA also had to spend time going over the chronological timeline with the participant/contributor to ensure that what we had captured was correct.

3.4 Ethical considerations

The previous section briefly delved into some of the ethical considerations of this research regarding informed consent and anonymity. Here I will share further ethical considerations relevant to this research.

Minimising the risk of harm to participant/contributor(s)

The most relevant aspect of participant well-being in this research concerns itself with not causing emotional harm. This is mainly because, whilst the focus was not on the participants' experiences of gender-based, sexual or political violence, there was the risk that research contributors/participants would share memories of violent incidents (directed at them or another individual), which might cause them some emotional distress. Dolnik writes that this is unavoidable, even if the researcher is sensitive and avoids direct questions that could trigger such memories. Instead, he put forward that researchers can minimise the risk,

> by acknowledging their understanding of the emotional difficulty of the interview process and can offset the negative impact of emotional recollection by empathetic listening, and by providing the interviewee with the opportunity to recollect positive images associated with their grief. (Dolnik, 2013: 227).

Hutchinson, Wilson, and Wilson (1994) propose that, for these participants, the process of talking about these events or experiences can have benefits for them, as the interview provides 'catharsis, self-acknowledgement, a sense of purpose, self-awareness, empowerment, healing, and a mean by which they can provide a voice for the disenfranchised' (cited in Ellsberg and Heise et al., 2001:2).

When conducting the interviews, I found that, although all of the female combatants I interviewed spoke of having experienced or witnessed some violence, 60 per cent spoke about it without using emotional language, but in purely descriptive terms. Some FFCs who became

upset refused my offer to stop the interviews; others took me up on the offer of a break, but none wanted to stop the interview altogether. Because of this, at the end of all the interviews, I ensured that I shared information with all the research contributors/participants about organisations that could offer them support through therapy/counselling. I was careful to explain what type of support they would receive, as I know that well-intentioned suggestions like 'talking to a therapist' can sometimes be received as insensitive, carrying with them connotations of mental illness – since often only mentally ill people are deemed to need that type of support (Dolnik, 2013). Some FFCs expressed that they would follow up with the available local therapy services. In contrast, others openly expressed that the interview process itself had been cathartic, and appreciated my engaging with them to capture their experiences.

In **Phase Two**, the other consideration was the physical safety of the participants/contributors due to COVID-19. As such, those engaged in Phase Two did not have to travel any distance to meet with the RA, as all interviews were conducted in outside spaces near their homestead or in an open space where they had privacy, within walking distance from their home. In advance of each meeting (at least one day before), the RA made sure to contact the interviewee and inform them of the measures that needed to be in place during the interview process, such as both of them wearing PPE, there being no physical contact, and respecting social distancing rules. In this conversation, the RA also informed them that they had to declare if they were experiencing COVID-19 symptoms or if anyone in their household was isolating, so that the interview could be rearranged. The participants/contributors were also asked to make this declaration in person at the same time that they were giving their verbal informed consent. At the end of the interview, the participant/contributor(s) and the RA had to agree on a means to contact each other if either of them started experiencing symptoms, or received a positive COVID-19 test soon after the interview. Fortunately for us, this never happened, and all the

interviews were completed without a positive COVID-19 result or COVID-19-related medical treatment for the contributor/participant(s).

Lastly, given the sensitive nature of the research, and to minimise the risk of harm to participant/contributor(s), each FFC was given a unique ID number at the outset to ensure data protection from the point of collection to storage, and pseudonyms were assigned at data analysis to ensure anonymity. For both phases of the data collection process, all the information/data/consent forms were stored on a password-protected computer, and the files were encrypted during and after the completion of the data collection and the analysis process. The research followed the University of Warwick's secure and ethical data management guidelines, including data protection, retention and deletion guidelines. The data remains safely stored per the Data Protection Act of 1998 and the General Data Protection Regulation (EU) 2016/679 ('GDPR').

Research team safety

For **Phase One**, given that the RAs were conducting interviews in their hometowns, we met at my accommodation, and used public transport to get around. Before parting each evening, the RAs ensured I was at my accommodation. I had also put in place safety measures when I was out in the field, which meant sending messages to my supervisors, a family member in the UK, and a local contact in Freetown every morning, and every evening confirming my safe return to the accommodation. To ensure their safety, the RAs all used the mode of transport we had booked for that day, always ensuring that we communicated when they arrived at their homes.

For **Phase Two,** before starting the data collection process, the RA self-isolated for two weeks and took a COVID-19 test (which was negative). As an added measure, he recorded his temperature before commencing each interview. He wore a PPE kit and had access to hand sanitiser for travel to, during and after conducting interviews. He used a private mode of

transport, so he didn't interact with other public members while conducting the interviews. When Phase Two was conducted, there were no travel restrictions between the two interview sites.

The interviews were not held in confined spaces, but outside, respecting social distancing rules. We tried to minimise the risk of the RA contracting COVID-19 by ensuring that he used a private car. As an added precaution, at the end of each week of data collection, the RA took a COVID-19 test, and only continued after receiving a negative result. Fortunately for the team, we never had a positive COVID-19 result or need for medical treatment.

As detailed above, the RA knew the city of Bo and Kenema town very well, so he knew the measures he needed to take to ensure his physical safety. To ensure that we could communicate at any time of the day, the RA used two mobile phones from different network providers, which were useful if he ever ran into network issues on one of the phones. Both phones were fully charged before conducting interviews, and he had an unlimited mobile data plan.

Responsible research

In conducting research and interviews in a country where the researcher is a foreigner, the participant/contributor may expect that agreeing to participate may benefit them individually or for their community (financial or otherwise). It was, therefore, my responsibility to ensure accurate expectations in this regard. In most instances, anticipated benefits are monetary, but may also include equipment donations, assistance in immigration or scholarships (Dolnik, 2013:229). Additionally, benefits may also be seen as an opportunity for a change in personal circumstances through reforms to legislation or oppressive practices, access to resources, better social services or governance.

These expectations are common to former combatants or research in the Global South, but one may also encounter similar situations in the Global North. More importantly, a request to offer some form of compensation is not out of turn; everyone's time has value, regardless of their employment status, geographical location, or the information they can give. Considering all this, I ensured the participants understood that I was a student and, therefore, not conducting research for a large NGO or organisation, and that I was not able to offer them any financial compensation for their time. I did, in Phase One, ensure that I covered transport costs (where relevant) and bought some refreshments and food for us to consume during the interview.

Linked to the above is the issue that, beyond expecting direct benefits or gains, several participants/contributors expressed their general dissatisfaction with researchers because of previous experiences where there was no follow-up meeting. They were never given sight of nor information about the outputs, which meant they never knew how useful their participation or the information they divulged had been. This demonstrates the importance of ensuring that participants/contributors are updated with how their contribution has informed knowledge or impacted individuals or societies unknown to them. This is primarily because some of them engaged in the research because they saw it as making a positive contribution to others (Clark, 2008: 960).

These concerns were also expressed by the RAs and some gatekeepers, who felt that, as a country, they had been over-researched or because they, as an individual, were experiencing research fatigue. This is because Sierra Leone, as the 'donor darling' (Broadbent, 2012: 5) of the international community, has had unprecedented numbers of researchers visit the country since the end of the conflict in 2002. These researchers may be split into three categories: those seeking to capture the conflict experiences of what has often been referred to as one of the most brutal civil wars, those seeking to capture the experiences that former combatants have had with different peacebuilding activities, and those who came to research the Ebola crisis.

A means of mitigating researcher fatigue is to engage participants/contributors in a way that covers four key factors:

> The purpose of the research is clear, the need for the work is firmly established, there are identifiable benefits for the participants, and if the same people are to be interviewed, they know what the new insights your research is seeking to offer. (Peterson, 1999:8 cited in Clark, 2008: 956)

We had put in place measures to counter this, through ensuring that the participant information sheet and video I recorded were clear about aims and objectives of the research, and they understood the new insights this research sought to interrogate. Additionally, and even more importantly, the participants/contributors knew the intended outcomes, audience, outputs, and how these will be communicated. The last two points offered some challenges, as at the time the main output of the research was a PhD thesis and academic journal articles, which would mean that the research would not be accessible for the participants/contributors or the research assistants. After discussions about this with the RA, upon returning from my research trip, I discussed the issue with my supervisors, and committed to returning to Sierra Leone to disseminate my thesis using outputs accessible to the FFCs and their communities. I am aware of some potential funding streams for this, such as the British Institute in Eastern Africa (BIEA) dissemination grant, for which I have applied.

3.5 Reflexivity

Reflexivity allowed me to pay particular attention to how my ontological and epistemological underpinnings contributed to all aspects of my research; not doing so 'may reify one kind of binary or hierarchy even as we seek to undo another. And because hierarchies are intersecting, the reification of any hierarchy undermines our scholarship' (Ackerly and True, 2020: 10).

Given my commitment to employing feminist informed research, reflexivity allowed me to interrogate subjectivity, to understand how my positionality affects and impacts this research, and to be conscious of the fact that my 'own basket of privileges and experiences conditions our knowledge and research' (Ackerly and True, 2020: 21).

During Phase One, I was conscious of the fact that 'research participants use researcher's physical appearance, accent, mannerisms and multilingual abilities' (Paluck, 2009:45) and other identity markers, such as gender, race, religion or age (Marshall and Rossman: 158-159 cited in Eggert, 2017:124), to position them – and all of these affect the research process. This is because 'perception and misconceptions of our position in the social world are inconsistent and dynamic' (Gold, 2002; Arendell, 1997), but are 'continuously negotiated on issues of national location, age, generation and reciprocity' (Thapar-Bjorkert and Henry,2004: 363 cited in van den Boogaard, 2019: 259). Several informants, gatekeepers and officials with whom I spoke suggested that my being a black female of African descent would go a long way in helping the research contributors/participants to feel that I could relate to them, as I didn't fit the typical white male / Western researcher trope.

However, I knew not to take my race and gender as a given for my acceptance. Previous experience from conducting research for my masters degree in my country of birth, Zimbabwe, had shown me that, whilst I could speak the local language, and my middle and last name could place me to a specific ethnic group, the 'locals' still didn't see me as one of them. Most of them deciphered that I was not a 'local' – not because of an accent, but because of the texture and tone of my skin, the colour of the clothes I was wearing, and my behaviour and gestures. In Sierra Leone, a few people remarked on the same points, saying that even though my face was shaped like a Fula, my skin colour and quality betrayed me. This last point was particularly interesting to me and would be worth exploring; I have not identified any articles discussing this issue of race/colourism amongst researchers with a similar background to me as a black

African female living in the diaspora. Yacob-Haliso's (2018) *Note in African Affairs* is the closest piece of work I have identified, which unpacks the role of a researcher similarly positioned.[17] However, her focus is on how her similarities to her research subjects (regarding gender and mothering) and their differences (nationality and education) impacted her research, and did not address the race/colourism point made above.

To embrace my position as an 'outsider', I tried to acknowledge this and reduce unconscious stereotyping. So, whilst I did not overtly start each conversation by saying that I am a 'foreigner', I used the introductory exchanges to convey this to the gatekeepers and research contributors/participants before each interview. In most cases, I did this in subtle ways, such as apologising for my poor pronunciation of the Krio greeting *'how di body'* and explaining that my interest in the research and speaking to FFCs came from conversations I had with my grandmother about her reintegration experience, after having fought in the Zimbabwe Liberation struggle. I also told them that my decision to travel to Sierra Leone and speak to them in person was driven by my desire to hear directly from those who experienced it, and not just from books or journal articles. In doing this, I impressed upon them how I was the one being educated – they were the 'knower' and the 'insider.'

By weaving in anecdotes about my life, similar to those they had shared, I aimed to put my research contributors/participants at ease. This was particularly the case for the research contributors/participants with whom I was close to in age, or when they expressed pressures that they faced from society similar to my own, such as getting married and having children. When the research contributors/participants were older than me, age also played a positive role,

[17] Yacob-Haliso is a black African (Nigerian) living in the UK, who conducted research in Liberia on post-conflict motherhood in post-conflict Liberia.

as it gave weight to my approach, wherein my research contributors/participants felt they were in a position to convey knowledge and educate me, the inexperienced researcher. Arendell writes of a similar approach that resulted in research contributors/participants seeing the 'exchanges as opportunities for instruction, thereby establishing that they were collaborators if not conductors of [the] research enterprise' (1997:350). The RAs also played an integral role, as they also shared anecdotes from their own experiences or lives that helped contextualise some of the questions, and develop rapport between the research team and the participants/contributors.

While the research contributors/participants didn't take 'charge', I found that adopting Cynthia Enloe's concept of *feminist curiosity* helped form and maintain relationships. This approach encourages feminist researchers to be curious – not just about the 'official or public discourses and behaviours of people in groups or institutions *but also* at their informal, private, casual conversations, at shared jokes, gestures and rituals' (Enloe, 2004: 5 emphasis added). This research was conducted on the understanding that all women are worth paying attention to, and everything they do – how they do it, with whom they do it, and when they do it – has meaning and purpose that reveals their lived experiences. Applying this approach encouraged an open conversation that produced in-depth insights, because I was interested in the textures of the participants'/contributors' lives.

Doing this helped 'reject the assumption that maintaining a gap between the researcher and the research subject produces more valid knowledge' and instead adopted 'a participatory research strategy that emphasises a dialectic between the researcher and the researched throughout the thesis' (Cook and Farrow 1986, 1990:76 cited in Tickner, 2006: 27). As such, the interviews not only generated qualitative data, but it allowed for high levels of rapport with the contributors/participants, and there was a degree of reciprocity. Whilst I am aware that the power dynamics between the researcher and the researched will never be fully nullified, I felt

that this approach helped, at least to a certain extent, to rebalance the unequal hierarchical relationship between us. Such a hierarchical relationship is provoked by (among other things) the status held by interviewers in designing and asking the questions, implicitly placing the research contributors/participants in a position of subservience or inferiority (Bryman, 2012: 493).

The RAs noted that my being female was a positive attribute, as the FFCs would feel more comfortable talking to someone of their gender, especially when discussing personal or intimate points. This sentiment was further expressed to me by all the research contributors/participants, who made comments along the lines of 'it was easy to talk with you because you are a woman, so you know the struggle' (Titi[18]) or 'men dey don tire when I try to express myself about issues we women face' (Mariatu[19]).

On reflection, I can relate to Pierce, who writes that, in her experience, female research contributors/participants confided in her, 'not just as a person but rather in an imagined relation as a feminised 'Other' (1995:98 cited in van den Boogaard, 2019: 262). Van den Boogard herself writes that, as a foreign researcher, she found a unique status was bestowed upon her:

> an almost third gender – wherein outsider women are not perceived as existing within culturally specific gender space, having access to both male and female worlds within a particular society, though without ever being fully accepted by either (2019: 262).

This is not to say that as a female researcher, I was or was perceived to 'always be neutral, or an invisible researcher' or 'Anyman', or that access to women as a woman was always easy (Kelly and Jackson, 2019: 307). As a female researcher, van den Boogaard writes that when

[18] 55-year-old female based in Kissi Town, interviewed on 18 November 2019.
[19] 34-year-old FFC based in Bo, interviewed on 19 November 2019 and 26 December 2020.

she was conducting research in locations with a conventional patriarchal gender hierarchy, she found she had difficulty gaining access and building rapport with male participants when conducting interviews (van den Boogaard, 2019: 260). However, this was not the case for me, as male combatants were scattered everywhere, and everyone I met suggested I interview them instead.

Whilst the above deals with the notion of my 'perceived identity/positioning', I cannot ignore the fact that 'beyond the chimaera of objective and value-free research, each researcher carries personal ideas, feelings and stereotypes into the field' (Armakolas, 2001: 174) that affect their conduct and how they engage with their research contributors/participants. My identity as a feminist influenced the questions I asked, how I asked them, and how I recorded the responses.

At the same time, the time spent conducting interviews brought to the surface the fact that whilst being of African descent meant I had higher degree of familiarity with research participants and partners, the fact that I lived in the diaspora meant I had 'a multi-layered identity' (Alfred, 1995, cited in Hirsch, 2019:93). I occupy what Hirsch describes as 'a geographical and social position of ambiguity' (2019:93). This ambiguity was evident in the decisions I made about the focus of this research. Whilst the research I previously conducted for my master's degree focused on rape as a tool of political violence in Zimbabwe, I consciously decided not to put sexual violence against women in conflict at the centre of this research. I did not include any questions on this topic in the interview questions, nor did I raise this topic with anyone I spoke to about my research. This decision was partly driven by the fact that, as a researcher using an African country as a case study, delving into this topic could unintentionally contribute to colonial tropes of 'racialised stereotypes of African men as primitive and brutish savages and African women as passive and helpless victims' (Baaz and Stern, 2016: 123). I was also conscious that a plethora of work had been done documenting, evidencing and researching sexual violence against African women during conflicts and in post-conflict environments – research which has

contributed to the 'global attention on rape becoming a clear lucrative source of attention, goodwill and resources for donors and international NGOs' (Baaz and Stern, 2016: 129)

Moreover, this existing research had, in many ways, led to a focus on conflict experiences of women and female combatants that centred around their being victims of sexual violence, and has inadvertently side-lined other narratives (as discussed in the literature review and as the FFCs in this research revealed in all the analytical chapters). However, the topic did come up in the interviews for this research. Some FFCs shared their experiences of sexual violence as part of answers to questions I asked, but I distinctly remember one FFC (Mariatu[20]) saying, 'but you haven't asked me if they violated me when I was in the bush', as I was concluding the interview and asking her if she had any questions. I responded to this point by telling her: 'you can share with me anything you want, so if you want to share that, please go ahead'.

It was feminist reflexivity that helped me turn a critical eye on my unease, and my position when I was reflecting on the interviews or going through the notes that captured the responses given by the FFCs to the interview questions. In these moments, I realised that I was doing my research a disservice by not sharing these experiences; not including them would be actively silencing the experiences of some FFCs. Ultimately, I accepted that as a feminist researcher, I must include the diverse lived experiences/standpoints of FFCs to the best of my ability. I accepted that, like other researchers, I 'have a responsibility in how the phenomenon of wartime rape is framed, represented and critiqued. (Any framing, no matter how nuanced it may be, remains limited, incomplete and involves inclusions and exclusions)' (Bazz and Stern, 2016: 133). As such, I only needed to ensure that I was clear about the applicability or generalisability of the experiences I captured for the reader.

[20] 34-year-old FFC based in Bo, interviewed on 19 November 2019 and 26 December 2020.

I was also aware that researching the lived experiences of FFCs would be emotionally taxing on the participant/contributor(s), myself, and the RA(s). Despite my best efforts, I was unprepared for the emotions I experienced. Whilst most of the contributors/participants remained poised, conveying experiences of sexual violence or other acts of physical violence in an almost factual manner, I wanted to join them when some started crying. I was conflicted about expressing these emotions in front of my participants. I felt and heard their pain in their voices and their crying, and it would have been inhumane not to feel sadness or pain with them or for them, but at the same time, who was I to cry? I couldn't relate to their experiences; these acts had not happened to my family members or to me, so would they see my emotions as performative, pity, or genuine compassion? Constantly navigating everyone's feelings, including mine, required much effort, but I took it in my stride, and treated each participant/contributor as an individual, taking my cues in those moments from them. As each interview happened, I took the approach that navigating all these emotions was part of the research process. Thomson et al. rightly capture this reality when they state, 'Things will be tough. You will face emotional challenges that cannot be planned for and anticipated. Accepting this is inevitable is one part of finding a solution to the problem and turning challenges into opportunities to deepen your analysis' (Thomson et al., 2013: 2-3).

Overall, I was pleased with how the four-week Phase One research period transpired; I achieved all that I set out to do, and returned to the UK with renewed zeal about the importance of my thesis in terms of its contribution to academic research and non-academic impact (policy and practice). The trip also gave me new confidence regarding my ability to collect in-depth insights, because I had built rapport with the FFCs, gatekeepers and RAs. This trip also helped me experience the realities of working with in country RAs collaboratively as part of a team, which really contributed to the success of Phase Two.

Whilst changing the direction that a research project or PhD topic takes is not unusual in academia or practice, doing so because of a pandemic was a new experience for everyone. Navigating a change in the data collection process was also new, as it was not just a matter of pivoting, but revising the process of identifying and implementing alternative data collection methods, whilst dealing with existing worries and anxieties I had about my own health and well-being as well as that of my loved ones. These fears were also exacerbated by the fact that I had to trust that everyone that contributed to the data collection process in Phase Two respected and honoured all the COVID-19 protocols introduced, to ensure that they were safe and that the research was being conducted ethically. This was especially the case, as Sierra Leone had fewer recorded cases of COVID-19[21] by the time Phase Two started, and had removed most of the protocols implemented in countries like the UK, such as social distancing or wearing PPE. I also had to reconcile that my insistence on using PPE was something the RA and participants/contributors honoured begrudgingly, as they felt that it was a waste of money, having been deemed a non-essential item in Sierra Leone and no longer being widely used.

Another point of reflection regarding conducting research during COVID-19 was that I had to repeatedly explain why I couldn't conduct the interviews using platforms such as Zoom and MS Teams to everyone with whom I interacted, when seeking ethics approvals to conduct Phase Two. I would hope that during this time – when everyone was learning new processes – there would be a shift away from assuming everyone has access to the internet, electronic devices or even electricity to charge them; some people experience digital poverty every day, which was worsened by the pandemic. Whilst I already knew this, I went through a process of reconciling

[21] This was primarily attributed to the fact that Sierra Leone could implement the track and trace and safety measures in place for COVID-19 effectively because they had gone through similar protocols during the Ebola virus epidemic.

myself with the privilege of having funding to pay someone to go and conduct research for me while I was in the safety and comfort of my home in the Global North.

Working with an RA/ RAs

As a feminist researcher, it is important for me to also acknowledge the fact that in all the different roles that the RAs take on, they are also knowledge producers and not outsiders (see Middleton and Cons, 2014 also Holmberg, 2014; Middleton & Pradhan, 2014; Stevens, 2001). This is not just because they were involved in the data collection process but because they gave me advice on how to approach difficult conversations, and their presence during the interviews would have affected how the research contributors/participants engaged with the process. Their role in the research process is especially evident if we understand that RAs can 'bridge the elitist distance between academic scholars and research participants' (Middleton and Cons, 2014, 286 cited in Tang and Gube, 2021: 164). This is because they can 'soften the image of an official inquisitor and diminish the hierarchical relationship between interviewers and interviewees, thus facilitating rapport building with participants' (Vaidya, 2010, cited in Tang and Gube, 2021:164). More than anything, like me, RAs lack objectivity; they bring their views and assumptions to the research process.

Whilst the RAs and I worked well as part of a research team in **Phase One**, it was not without challenges. One challenge was around selective translation, where in the first interview we did in Mende the participant/contributor gave long responses but the RA translated these as one or two words. Whilst I knew that 'translators also form part of the process of knowledge production. There is no neutral position from which to translate, and the power relationships within research need to be acknowledged' (Temple & Young 2004: 164), it was important that we made strides to mitigate this effect. Fortunately, I picked this up early in the interview process, and the RA and I took a break where we discussed this issue. We agreed that he would

capture each response regardless of whether the responses were off-topic or not answering the question.

I cannot conclude this section without discussing the fact that the data collection for Phase Two was done by a male RA who was working by himself. It's important to discuss this as doing a male RA working by himself meant that there was a mismatch in the socio-demographic characteristic of gender between the research assistant and research participants/contributors. Moreover, doing so, this arrangement was a deviation from standard gender-sensitive practice as it pertains to ensuring that when interviewing women on topics that involve discussions of sexual violence, the interviewer is of the same gender.

It's important for me to state that the option of a male RA working by himself in Phase Two was not something that I did deliberately. This arrangement was therefore a result of my being unable to travel to Sierra Leone for Phase Two due to Covid-19 and the restrictions placed on movement in Sierra Leone as well as limited funding which meant that the female RA I had worked with in Freetown couldn't travel and conduct these interviews with the male RA. The original plan had been for the approach that we took in Phase One where the research team for each area was made up of two individuals (an RA and myself, where there were male RAs in Makeni, Bo and Kenema and a female RA in Freetown) which would mean that there was at least one female who was part of the research team.

Whilst it could be argued that this arrangement would have affected the information that some FFCs shared in the interview especially as it pertains to sexual violence experiences during the conflict, we were confident that any negative impact of having a male RA would be minimal. This is partly because the initial interviews were done with the male RA present so we had created enough rapport with the research participants/contributors that they felt it was a safe space to share such experiences with the male RA. Phase Two was also done with

participants/contributors where the questions followed up on their responses from Phase One, as such any questions on any sensitive topics were based on information that they had previously shared which we both felt had been shared freely by the FFCs. The participants/contributor's rapport with the RA was evident in the fact that some of the FFCs expressed to the RA that they felt more comfortable to share more details about their conflict experiences with the RA in Phase Two because the RA being a local had a nuanced understanding of what the realities of the conflict had been. As discussed previously, I was also confident in the fact that there is value in an approach that contradicts perceived wisdom that female participants/contributors would be more comfortable with female RA or male participants/contributors would be more comfortable with a male RA.

3.6 Data analysis

Thematic analysis (TA) was the chosen data analysis method, as it aims to find themes within qualitative data. Given the contested definitions of what is a theme, it is important to state that in this research, a *theme* is defined as a means of capturing a common, recurring pattern(s) across a dataset clustered around a central organising concept(s). Simply put, a theme is a 'shared meaning, patterns of meaning united by a core concept' (Braun et al., 2019, cited in Morin, Olson and Atikcan, 2021: 286). A benefit of using TA is that it offers the systematic element characteristic of content analysis, but also permits the researcher to combine analysis of the frequency of codes with analysis of their meaning in context (Joffe and Yardley, 2004).

Another benefit of TA is that it is a theoretically flexible analytical method, meaning it has 'fewer inbuilt restrictions than many other qualitative analytical approaches (e.g., discourse analysis). Using TA means a researcher has considerable scope to shape their use of TA to suit their purpose and commitment by combining it with various theories such as feminism' (Morin, Olson and Atikcan, 2021: 284). More importantly, one of the TA approaches adopted in this

research, *reflexive TA*, sits firmly within feminist methodology – it is centred on and informed by the reflexivity concept. This is insofar as it acknowledges that research can never be objective because, like other aspects of conducting research, *analysis is subjective* – the process is not independent of the researchers' thoughts, knowledge and disciplinary location. More importantly,

> the researcher's subjectivity is viewed as a resource rather than a potential threat to reliable coding. Furthermore, the notion that coding can and should be accurate or reliable is rejected; coding is conceptualised as an organic and ever-evolving process. Good coding requires rigour and depth of engagement, not an agreement between multiple coders. (Morin, Olson and Atikcan, 2021: 285).

Data analysis for this research was done in two parts. In Phase One, I manually reviewed all the interview notes to identify recurring themes and questions that needed to be revisited and responses that needed to be clarified or expanded on in Phase Two. This process also informed the discussion I had with my supervisors, as well as the RA who conducted the data collection process for Phase Two on the interview questions. This was informed by the codebook TA process, which sets out to identify themes in the early stages of the data collection, so that further investigations work within predetermined themes, instrumental in attending to fixed information needs.

After Phase Two, I focused on using reflexive TA, using Braun & Clarke's (2006) six-phase guide, a beneficial framework for conducting TA. The first stage was reviewing the interview notes again, a process which gave me the opportunity to refamiliarise myself with the data. From there, I uploaded the interview notes onto NVivo to code the data, and then used this as a starting point for constructing theme nodes (codes that represent the themes or topics

extrapolated from the data). I didn't go beyond this on NVivo, as this process allowed me to group quotes or words and recurring themes. In reviewing the themes and codewords, I took note of examples of the phenomenon and identified similarities and differences. After this, I set out to define and name the themes I had identified and the final stage was writing up a coherent narrative which included direct quotes from the participants/contributors.

On reflection, the data analysis process was quite onerous; it took me longer than planned to grasp NVivo and upload the data onto it. Constantly revisiting the interview notes to identify quotes and familiarise myself with the data was also quite taxing. Still, once I had a system in place, I reached a point where I had nearly memorised all the different FFCs' experiences, which helped to place their experiences under different themes and identify the quotes to use.

Writing up

I went through two distinct stages when writing up: description and interpretation. The description made the connections between what is to be described, the theory and the empirical referent. It is the first step towards constructing an explanation which addresses that question. Interpretation, on the other hand, responds to the *how* and *why*, because it deals with understanding, insofar as unveiling the meanings of individual or groups' actions through the interpretation of their lived experiences – which are, for the most part, embedded in this thesis using quotes (Morin, Olson and Atikcan, 2021: 81).

During the writing process, there were a few considerations worth mentioning. The first was that, whilst the majority of the interviews were conducted in Krio (an English-based Creole language of Sierra Leone), which is easy to grasp for a native English speaker and which can be quoted as they were expressed, some of the interviews were interpreted from Mende or Temne, and I was concerned that nuances would be lost in translation. I double-checked the interpretations/translations with the RA to limit this impact, and to ensure that my words were

appropriate. The fact that this research also used secondary material from the archives, newspaper sources, and research by other academics meant that data was also triangulated where possible.

The second consideration was recognising that I did not need to verify the accuracy of all assertions by FFCs when they didn't align with what I expected, or with what another FFC had said. I reached this point after taking on the same approach as Atkinson, who argues that truth or accuracy should not be the focus because, at best, relaying an experience 'implies a certain, maybe unique point of view. It is more important that the life story be deemed trustworthy than it is true. We are seeking the subjective reality after all' (Atkinson, 2002:134 cited Morin, Olson and Atikcan, 2021: 206). This approach is in line with ontological and epistemological approaches, as well as a feminist methodology; it supports an approach to research that aims not to provide objective explanations, but to communicate experiences from a socially and politically situated point of view. At the same time, this approach helped me to constantly reflect on how I was choosing material from the interview notes and developing interpretations so that I didn't project my analytical intentions onto the findings, as this would inevitably result in my distorting the meaning of the original accounts as they were relayed to me (Morin, Olson and Atikcan, 2021: 206). This is not to say that no verification was done regarding contextualising general concepts or events; I and the RA did this rigorously.

This chapter clearly articulated the different aspects that make up a research methodology, from the theory to the methods used to collect data, as well as providing a detailed account of the data collection and analysis processes. The chapter shared the rationale behind the different decisions, the challenges, and the measures to mitigate them. Of most importance, this chapter not only conveyed how the methodology is informed by feminist theory, but how the theory supports the aim of this research: to conceptualise the reintegration experiences of FFCs in Sierra Leone.

Chapter 4: Earning a Living

This chapter interrogates FFCs' experiences with earning a living in post-conflict Sierra Leone, addressing the first sub-research question ***In what ways and to what extent did economic reintegration programmes support FFCs' ability to secure employment?*** The chapter will argue that FFCs' lived experiences reveal that prior (and in most instances hidden) histories of gender discrimination and structural exclusion of women/FFCs in society inform the design of post-conflict reintegration programmes – and in doing so, contribute to the inability of some FFCs' to engage with the programme. For those engaged with the programmes, this discrimination and exclusion affected their ability to participate, especially if their doing so challenged or affected the traditional gender norms and values assigned to women in their society.

The chapter begins by outlining how historical cultural biases, sexism and stigma contributed to a lack of participation or engagement with economic reintegration programmes for FFCs. The second section considers how structural factors, such as gendered roles and responsibilities, compounded these obstacles to prevent uptake. In analysing this, the chapter engages with the material realities of restrictive cultural norms and their impact on how FFCs engage with economic reintegration programmes.

From there, the chapter discusses the mismatch found by FFCs between the training courses on offer and their ideal future careers – particularly considering sectors which historically had been male-dominated before the conflict. On a broader level, the third section also supports the argument that there is a symbiotic relationship between economic and social reintegration, and how the relationship plays a role in whether FFCs secure employment or sustainable income. It shows how social acceptance and support from families, communities and established

tradesmen/artisans can aid or hinder FFCs' securing employment, even after completing their training.

The chapter concludes that the problematic way gender dynamics between men and women are conceptualised in post-conflict interventions, such as reintegration, as well as post-conflict environments must be addressed. Failure to do so will result in many FFCs continuing either not to engage with or only gain limited benefits from economic reintegration programmes.

4.1 Biases, sexism and stigma

> I heard about the DDR programme because I saw some people going for it, but I was told that I couldn't enter without a weapon… I spent most of the war carrying load for people because I was small, and I was trained to defend the camp by setting traps and would only be given a gun when I was on guard defending the camp. (Mary[22])

This section argues that for economic reintegration programmes to better engage with FFCs, there must be efforts to deal with the implicit bias, sexism and stigma levelled against FFCs in post-conflict environments, especially when they try to enter or stay in these programmes. In analysing the experiences of FFCs who didn't enter the programme, the section contributes to existing research, which argues that FFCs are marginalised in DDR programmes, due to the problematic way their conflict roles and experiences have been conceptualised. Mary's comments above provide a good starting point: they are evidence of how her failure to participate in the economic reintegration programmes was due to the eligibility criteria of presenting a weapon, and demonstrate the ability to assemble and disassemble one, in order to

[22] 54-year-old FFC based in Bo, interviewed 18 November 2019 and 27 December 2020

prove she was a member of a fighting force (Mazurana and Carlson, 2004). In her case, this presented an obstacle, as like most FFCs, she didn't have a weapon that belonged solely to her.

Moreover, as Mary points out, she not only performed different roles during the conflict, but some of these changed regularly, depending on whether she was needed in a supportive capacity (carrying load or setting up traps) or in combat (using a gun to defend the camp). As such, I would argue that the inability to accommodate the eligibility criteria challenges facing FFCs can be attributed to a lack of understanding of the diverse roles that FFCs perform in conflict, as discussed in Chapter 1. Whilst this can result in programmes underestimating the number of FFCs and the provisions that are put in place to support them, it can also result in the over-classification of girls and young women as camp followers, sex slaves and wives, rather than as combatants. Such bias and sexism rendered many FFCs ineligible for DDR, as their role in the conflict was dismissed, and they were redirected to other post-conflict programmes supporting victims of the conflict. In doing this, the narrative of FFCs as victims of conflict is perpetuated; FMCs are seen as the real combatants and, thus, the true targets of the programmes.

> One of the commanders from the Kamajoh unit I had fought in came and asked for my weapon so he could register for me. He came back and gave me 100,000 Sierra Leone and said he would come get me when I could go to the centre, but he never came for me. When I went to the centre they said my number didn't exist, so I left it there. (Aisha[23])

The discrimination experienced by FFCs was also evident in the fact that, even in instances where FFCs were in possession of a weapon, during the disarmament process, male combatants and commanders sometimes took weapons from them, and gave them to FMCs from their units

[23] 40-year-old FFC based in Bo, interviewed on 18 November 2019 and 27 December 2020

– a scenario in which Aisha (above) found herself. This trend was exacerbated by the fact that there was a monetary value placed on each weapon submitted (Mazurana and Carlson, 2004: 20). Furthermore, even after the one-man-one-weapon criteria was removed to introduce group mobilisation (allowing two or three combatants to demobilise with a shared weapon), the criteria of one-man-one weapon remained for FFCs (Ollek, 2007:55).

The argument that FFCs experienced bias/sexism, which meant that they couldn't participate in DDR programmes is further supported by the fact that there were instances where officers or commanders denied the existence of female combatants within their faction[24] (Ollek, 2007:55). In other instances, some male commanders and combatants threatened FFCs that wanted to come forward at registration points; therefore 'for some women and girls, official denial was considered a direct attempt to prevent them from entering DDR programmes and collecting benefits' (Carlson and Mazurana, 2004 cited in Ollek, 2007:55).

The creation or perpetuation of the narrative either denying the existence of FFCs or reducing their role to a supportive position, informs the official narrative of the conflict – that only a small number of women were involved in the conflict and only in supportive roles. Moreover, it informs how FCs are conceptualised in post-conflict programmes such as DDR and SSR, how resources are distributed, and how programmes are implemented. In this vein, Sierra Leonean policymakers largely refused to acknowledge FFCs as beneficiaries, or worthy of policy attention (MacKenzie, 2012: 45). For FFCs, this has not only meant that their experiences were side-lined, but it also perpetuated the narrative of FFCs as victims of conflict and of not being

[24] An example is the case with the Civil Defence Forces (CDF): after one of their leaders, a Kamajoh, vehemently denied the existence of FFCs, the myth that women and girls were not involved in the CDF became a 'fact'. This is because during the war, the Kamajohs were widely believed to adhere to the belief that 'sexual contact nullified the perceived magical powers of a fighter's charms, and thus after such contact, fighters had to reapply the charms to regain these supposed powers' (Mazurana and Carlson, 2004: 21).

a ‘security threat’ (MacKenzie, 2009). I would argue that such an understanding leaves FFCs in a precarious position – they must now argue with or challenge their former leaders or practitioners (who are implementing the programmes) in order to be included. These negotiations can be emotionally taxing and lead to shame, in addition to the stigma that FFCs might already be experiencing from their families and communities (see Mazurana and Carlson, 2004). In performing acts of violence, FFCs transcended traditional gender norms that previously identified them as life givers, not life takers. Violence and stigma will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 5, but it is also relevant to note here that shame and fear of stigma have led to FFCs distancing themselves from the combatant identity, and in turn, the economic reintegration training available.

It is also important to note that even when FFCs overcame all the challenges above and entered the programme, shame, bias and sexism were still prevalent, leading in some cases to some FFCs not completing the training. This was the case for Aminata, who shared her experience at the training camps for the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces (RSLAF) as part of the SSR:

> …I knew that joining the military meant that I would get a regular salary and a pension. I had lost so much in the war, but I knew this would help me rebuild… In the end, I had to leave the training. My camp mates and the army leaders treated me bad because I am a woman… No one had been unhappy with my being a woman fighting next to men during the war, but during training my life was made harder because I am a woman. (Aminata[25])

In the same way that communities struggled to accept FFCs because they had transcended traditional gender norms during the conflict, this was Aminata’s experience in trying to join the

[25] 58-year-old FFC based in Jeru camp near Kenema, interviewed 20 November 2019 and 11 January 2021.

army post-conflict. I would argue that this is because her entering the army would have meant she would continue to challenge the myth that women are inherently less violent than men – the ‘life-givers, not life takers' narrative. Not only does this point to the ongoing discomfort many have with women as perpetrators of violence, but also to the historical association of violence with masculinity/male heroism rather than femininity (Zalewski, 2010: 36). What is more problematic is the fact that, ‘despite evidence of women being equally capable of aggression and violence, most societies implicitly condemn female aggressiveness and socially approved uses of force or violence remain largely performed by men in jobs associated with masculinity – army, police, prison officers’ (Segal, 1990: 266-8 cited in Alison, 2007: 76).

So, whilst violence may be perpetrated by women, and is to some extent tolerated or even encouraged during the conflict, in peacetime, an FFC enrolling in the military may be seen as disregarding all accepted rules of feminine behaviour and continuing to exhibit masculine behaviour. This would seem to be particularly the case in post-conflict environments, as some men are ‘seeking to reinforce the image of a strong and masculine man’ (Barth, 2002: 30), and women/FFCs are seen as important for ‘reconstruction as biological reproducers, as cultural carriers and as individuals responsible for socialising children’ (Barth, 2002: 32). In an environment where there is a lack of ‘opportunities for men to assert positive masculinities’ (Ní Aoláin, 2016: 42), this need to reassert their masculinity or reconstruct their masculine selves can lead to men resisting the inclusion of women in jobs that are seen as predominantly for men, as is the case with soldiering. In these instances, some women/FFCs experience discrimination from employers because of the preference for male employees and the reintegration of FMCs (True, 2012: 139).

Aminata’s efforts to join the military arguably placed her in an environment where her physical ability or competency to do the job was overshadowed, and to some extent hindered, by the fact that she was a minority (female) in this environment, and was defying a gender stereotype

(Cockburn, 2010: 188). The military is an environment where patriarchal relationships operate. Such perceptions are echoed when one unpacks the process of 'remoulding' that soldiers undergo in training; the training is done 'through particular gendered – masculinist – discourses of male superiority, dominance and control (and its corollary of 'feminine denigration')' (Welland, 2013: 889). The result of this remoulding training is meant to produce a combat-ready soldier with attributes such as violence, aggression, physical prowess and valour (Welland, 2013: 885), all of which are widely regarded as masculine traits.

It is in institutions such as the military that men become part of the quintessential form of hegemonic masculinity:[26] 'militarised masculinity which is associated with conflict, bravery and military leadership, all regarded as proof of the masculine right and capacity to rule' (Enloe, 2000; Higate, 2003; 2007; Whitworth, 2004 cited in Parpart, 2015: 314). In such a context, it becomes difficult to see how female recruits like Aminata could have fitted in. In fact, such an environment would be toxic for the majority of individuals who possess/exhibit feminine traits. More so because in the military, 'femininity in women has to be managed in a way that often eviscerates the traditional signs of it' (Zalewski, 2010: 33).

Removing the traditional signs of femininity can sometimes be in the form of ensuring that female soldiers' appearance (especially their hairstyles and uniform) is in line with that of male soldiers. The valorisation of militarised masculinity traits is also evident when it comes to male soldiers who do not strictly adhere to such behaviours, who exhibit any feminine traits or who identify as homosexuals; they are stigmatised because they are seen as less masculine (Alison, 2007: 81). This point is supported by Price, who states that in such environments 'men who

[26] The masculinity that occupies the hegemonic position in any given pattern of gender relations (Connell, 2005.

resist violence are suspect. Not only is their loyalty to the state [or nation] questioned, but also their loyalty to (heterosexual) masculinity' (Price, 2001: 222 cited in Alison, 2007 80).

In summary, by interrogating the experiences of FFCs using scholarship on masculinity for context, it is evident that bias, sexism and stigma made it (a) less likely for FFCs to participate in economic reintegration programmes, and (b) more difficult for those that did participate.

4.2 Gendered care responsibilities and return to traditional gender roles.

> It was during the process of demobilisation that I expressed my desire to return to my hometown in Makeni and go through the DDR programme there… I started the training course on catering… I had to stop after three weeks because they expected me to attend lessons every day (five days a week) for six months, and I couldn't afford to be away from home for that long. I was now in charge of my siblings and my grandmother… We were together, but I had no money to get house help, everyone wetting de struggle and training wasn't feeding us… This was not the case for men, as they didn't have to stay home to clean, cook or mind family members or *pikin*[27] … It is the woman who is expected to care for the home so they could be gone all day. (Zainab[28])

Structural factors, such as gendered care responsibilities and the return to patriarchal gender roles, can also prevent FFCs from effectively participating in economic reintegration skills training. Before discussing some possible ways forward, this section will start by interrogating these structural factors and contextualising them within the literature. The above testimony

[27] *pikin* is a Krio or pidgin English word for child.
[28] 42-year-old FFC based in Makeni, interviewed 26 November 2019 and 29 December 2020.

from Zainab offers a good starting point, as she clearly articulates these two structural factors and how they impacted her ability to complete the skills training. The first point she raises is about gendered care responsibilities, detailing how the burden of social care responsibilities informed her decision to discontinue her economic reintegration training. This is especially important, as there was a lack of provision (through facilities) or monetary contributions from the DDR programme in Sierra Leone to support with childcare or other care responsibilities which fell to FFCs (see also Mazurana and Carlson, 2004 and Coulter, 2009: 190). Whilst theoretically, this could be an issue also encountered by FMCs, Zainab's account would claim that FMCs did not usually have to struggle with the same issue. In so doing, Zainab points us towards the second point: that in Sierra Leonean culture (like the vast majority of cultures, albeit to varying extents), traditional gender norms expect women to perform care responsibilities and not men. In including the contrasting expectations of women and men in her society, the gendered nature of care becomes very clear. Ramatu echoes this point:

> When the chance to join the army after the war ended was offered to me, I did not hesitate… Before the war, there were few women soldiers, but now we had fought next to men, and I wanted to be a part of that… I couldn't take my children and husband with me to the barracks whilst I was training. The distance was too much for me to travel and see them often. In the end, my husband and family demanded I return home to care for my children, as it was my responsibility and I had to oblige them. (Ramatu[29])

Ramatu's account confirms that the push to return to patriarchal gender roles informed her husband and family's decision to demand her return home. Her family made no apparent

[29] 53-year-old FFC based in Jeru camp near Kenema, interviewed 20 November 2019 and 11 January 2021.

attempts to step in and support her, or seek help with the care responsibilities; she had to return home and perform her role as a mother, as opposed to attending the SSR training and having the opportunity to earn a living in the formal sector through a military career.

IPE and IR feminists argue that in post-conflict environments, the gendered division of labour in the private sphere is more pronounced, and can often hinder women's ability to participate in the formal economy. For them, this environment is a result of the fact that post-conflict interventions do not recognise the value of 'social reproduction':

> …the labour that goes into reproducing social life, this includes biological reproduction; unpaid production in the home (both goods and services); social provisioning; the reproduction of culture and ideology; and the provision of sexual, emotional and affective services (such as are required to maintain family and intimate relationships) (Hoskyn and Rai, 2007:300, Rai, Hoskyns and Thomas 2014).

In short, social reproduction can be understood as oftentimes gendered (read: feminised) labour that predominantly occurs within the private realm, to ensure familial, household and community reproduction. In most contexts, including in Sierra Leone, this work is supported by public and social services through the redistribution of care. However, when there is a 'deterioration in physical infrastructure, public services and reduced social expenditures' (Rai, True and Tanyag: 2019: 563) – as is the case in post-conflict environments – these redistributive efforts are undermined, and the pressure of performing socially reproductive roles (of which social care is a part) increases for women. In such contexts, institutional structures that fail to subsidise the cost of social care reinforce a gendered division of labour, because women end up filling in the gaps (UN Women, 2016). Concomitantly, programmes can inadvertently reinforce 'gendered norms around women's role as secondary and dependent, not only within the

household but also within public services and markets' (Gideon, 2016 cited in Meagher et al., 2021: 6). This can be observed in the DDR and SSR training in Sierra Leone, which provided neither day-care nor financial support for childcare, to alleviate this burden on FFCs.

Whilst the lack of institutional structures and social services may be attributed to the conflict in post-conflict environments, IPE and IR feminists argue that the burden of social care on women is exacerbated by the fact that it continues to go unrecognised and undervalued, as it is not included in any economic analyses (Barth, 2002: 8). Social care/services go uncounted and unmeasured in national and international systems, which leads to the care economy being neglected through the erosion of care institutions and services (Rai, True and Tanyag, 2019: 565). In addition, in most post-conflict societies, resources are put towards the needs of restoring employment opportunities for men, and towards physical infrastructure such as railways and roads – instead of creches and health clinics, which form part of the public and social service facilities (Rai, True and Tanyag: 2019: 573, 576). This is despite evidence that, whilst the majority of deaths that occur *during* conflict are male,[30] there is a higher number of female deaths in *post*-conflict environments as a result of war's lingering social and economic effects (e.g., reduced access to public service facilities including healthcare) (Li and Wen, 2015 cited in True, 2012: 3).

In some situations, the failure to prioritise social and health services is worsened by neoliberal post-conflict restructuring models, which focus on the 'privatisation of public services and infrastructure'. This 'unintentionally regresses women's rights by placing a greater burden on their labour in the household' (Seguino, 2008, cited in True, 2012: 152). More than that, Rai, Hoskyns and Thomas write that the consequences of not recognising the value of social

[30] As they make up the majority of the fighting forces in direct contact with the violence.

reproduction leads to four types of harm: *discursive harm, emotional harm, bodily harm,* and *harm to citizenship entitlements* (Rai, Hoskyns and Thomas, 2014: 91). Together, these make up indirect forms of structural violence, linked to gender inequality and the unequal distribution of care (Razavi; 2007: 2 cited in Rai, True and Tanyag, 2019: 565).

The non-recognition of social reproduction has also resulted in a depletion through social reproduction (DSR). This is when the gap between outflows – domestic, reproductive and affective labour – and inflows – income earned, health care and leisure time – falls below a sustainable threshold (Rai et al. 2014; UN Women 2019). In these instances, the depletion leads to those who do this unvalued work being harmed at individual, household and community level (Rai, Hoskyns and Thomas, 2014: 86-105). As such, 'the recognition and redistribution of care in conflict response and peacebuilding will not only benefit women's lives but also that of their families and communities, as it supports the regeneration of societies and their 'peaceful transformation into more caring and gender equal societies' (Rai, True and Tanyag: 2019: 562).

The experiences of FFCs like Zainab and Ramatu, therefore, demonstrate that for some FFCs, engagement with economic reintegration was hampered by the burden of social care faced at the end of the conflict, especially as they didn't receive financial support or access to support services. For them, receiving support with their caring responsibilities would have made a difference in how they engaged with the skills training. Their social care responsibilities effectively led them 'to forego income-generating, educational, and other opportunities' (*Nkala and Others v Harmony Gold Mining* cited in Rai, True and Tanyag: 2019: 576). For Zainab, the support required would have been financial provisions to pay for childcare or help in the form of a maid or care assistant. For Ramatu, the request for support may have involved negotiations with her husband and family about getting some assistance from a family member or employing someone to perform the duties her husband could not, at least until she finished her training. In fact, the resumption of traditional gender roles (in terms of a division of labour in the private

sphere) may be as much or more the result of men wanting to reassert their masculinity than simply the inertia of long-held cultural norms.

This points to the need for families and societies to embrace the transformative nature of experiencing conflict, regarding shifts in gender dynamics – especially insofar as women/FFCs adopting roles during conflict that would have traditionally been assigned to men. Recognising the important role social reproduction plays in post-conflict environments 'paves the way for gender-equal societies' (Rai, True and Tanyag, 2019: 562). This is especially the case, as failure to do so not only leads to the resumption of traditional gender roles, but a depletion of women's lives through social reproduction.

In saying all this, even when social services are functioning or the burden of social care is eased in post-conflict environments, some FFCs would still struggle with participating in the formal economy. In the case of Sierra Leone, some communities or families prefer that women do not take up any employment (formal or informal), as 'women are considered not capable of giving and having job opportunities, as they are just good to be wives cooking and giving birth to children' (MacKenzie, 2009:211). Or in Ramatu's case, the only person who should take on the care responsibilities for the family.

Families and communities embracing these sentiments may see the return of 'patriarchal institutions and traditions as therapeutic' (Kesby, 1996:582 cited in Sórensen, 1998: 37), and 'motherhood becomes a privileged category as a means to re-establish gendered hierarchies, in which women's primary role was at home' (Higonnet et al., 1987 cited in King, 2019: 455). At the same time, some men will seek to reassert their authority as the breadwinner and head of household, seeing these social positions as an important component of adult masculinity (King, 2019: 458). The link between the breadwinner identity and masculinity is conceptualised in that 'provision – men's identity as breadwinners legitimating the exclusion of women from formal

work – is an essential property of 'maleness' along with procreation (normative heterosexuality) and protection (women as property to be protected)' (Kersten, 1996: True, 2012: 40). This understanding can be seen as an explanation for why some FMCs not only feel a sense of entitlement to being the breadwinner in the home, but also expect that they should be prioritised over FFCs when it comes to employment and business opportunities (True, 2012: 140).

For FFCs, this can mean that they are discouraged or even prevented from entering into the formal economy – or if they do so, only in a manner that doesn't threaten men's breadwinner status. This situation can create an unspoken understanding that there is a limit to how much a woman can earn without threatening men, in general or specifically, and the gender dynamics of their own families. If women do earn more than men, they shouldn't flaunt it or become too independent. Tenneh provides an example of the lengths required to preserve this implicit balance, giving her husband any money that she earns that is more than his, so that in their community/family, he is seen as the primary breadwinner:

> I give [the money to] my husband so that it looks he earns more money than me, but we both know the truth between us. But what will I gain from telling the truth? Praise for my fellow women, but trouble in my marriage… I have learnt to let it go and welcome the peace I get from it more. (Tenneh[31])

In the face of such dynamics, the threat to masculinity in post-conflict moments is exacerbated by FFCs who, having transcended gender norms during the conflict, want to continue to do so post-conflict. This has sometimes led men to deny or resist employment for their wives or partners. More concerning, however, is evidence that when women have assumed non-traditional roles or gained socioeconomic independence, there has been an increase in violence

[31] 36-year-old FFC based in Kissi Town, interviewed 15 November 2019.

against women, especially in the home, by men seeking to compensate for their loss of economic control and reaffirm their masculinity (Heise and Garcia – Moreno, 2002; Jewkes, 2002; True, 2012). UNICEF noted that this was particularly the case when the male partner was unemployed (UNICEF, 2000 cited in True, 2012: 40).

When we re-engage with historical debates about the roles of men and women in a family in this way, we find that the return to traditional gender roles results in 'the family being a potential source of oppression for women, and society's undervaluing of women's paid and unpaid labour' (King, 2019: 458). In such instances, women must navigate this post-conflict period carefully; they have less space to 'rethink and reshape gender stereotypes and hierarchies' (MacKenzie, 2009: 258). It follows that – by prioritising FMCs and failing to engage with FFCs – economic integration adversely promotes the return to the pre-conflict status, which 'reproduces gendered inequalities' (Dahal, 2015, cited in Steenbergen, 2020: 3). Moreover, delaying this change until after the peacebuilding period means 'women are likely to lose opportunities for training and income which will set them back decades. ''Later' is a patriarchal time zone' (Enloe, 2004: 215).

I would further argue that in economic reintegration training for FFCs focusing on a return to informal employment (such as catering, tailoring, soapmaking, and tie dye), the skills training inadvertently encouraged the resumption of jobs that allow some communities and families to identify these roles as suitable for FFCs, as they could prioritise their social care responsibilities as their work would fit around them. This thinking ignores the fact that in doing these informal jobs, FFCs' earning capacity would be restricted, as will be discussed in the following section.

4.3 Mismatched needs and skills

> When the war started, I was at junior school… my dream was to be a mechanic. I didn't care that only men did this work, I wanted to do it as a

> woman. Unfortunately, I wasn't allowed to train as a mechanic when I registered for DDR; only men were permitted to do the course. I did the sewing course, but that was never my interest – I did it because it was something to do. I tried sewing for some time but sold my sewing machine in the end because I was no good at it…. I am doing an apprenticeship and will be a mechanic in 18 months… I wish I had been given this opportunity at the start, as I would now have worked for years, [and would] not just [be] starting. (Jande[32])

For economic reintegration programmes to engage with FFCs and lead to securing sustainable income, there is a need to address the mismatch between the training on offer and FFCs' needs and skills. Whilst the argument of this chapter is founded in the notion that economic reintegration programmes were generally limited in the training they offered, and there were limited efforts to consider a FC's existing skills and interests, the main thrust of this section is to discuss the contention that the available options were gendered in problematic ways. This gendering is especially important, as the options tended to steer women/FFCs into gaining skills and training in sectors or professions that aligned with traditional pre-conflict gender roles. In restricting FFCs to these roles, three things become apparent: FFCs who developed any skills during the conflict that transcended traditional gender norms were deskilled; the available options were limited not only by gender but also in range, as their individual preferences and/or abilities for careers were ignored; and finally, available FFC options were largely concentrated in certain parts of a highly competitive informal economy, where they could only perform 'low

[32] 36-year-old FFC based in Makeni, interviewed 26 November 2019.

valued and low paid roles that reproduce gender inequalities along economic lines' (Steenbergen, 2020: 10).

Jande's comments provide a good starting point for such a discussion. Her experience of participating in the economic reintegration skills training meant that she engaged and completed skills training in an area of no interest to her, failed to earn a living through it, and eventually returned to training many years later to pursue her preferred option of being a mechanic. Her experience is highly gendered, in that the only reason she couldn't pursue her preferred career option initially was that there wasn't equal access to such programmes for both female and male combatants. Instead, the available programmes promoted the traditional sexual division of labour. FFCs were restricted to skills training centred around domestic tasks and informal work usually undertaken by women, such as tailoring and hairdressing; FMCs had different options, for example, to be a plumber, construction worker, welder or mechanic (Dietrich Ortega, 2010). These different pieces of training were offered, even though, as combatants, both men and women had gained skills that – whilst not certifiable – had demonstrated their ability to perform roles that transcend traditional gender norms, *and* despite the fact that some FFCs wanted to pursue non-traditional professions (Shekhawat and Pathak, 2015: 58).

In Sierra Leone, this has previously been evidenced by MacKenzie (2009), who found that most, if not all, international organisations offered skills training in the same trade across different districts. For FFCs, these were limited to gara tie-dying, soap-making, tailoring, catering, hairdressing and weaving. In some instances, local organisations such as Children Associated with the War (CAW) and Augustan Bintue only offered training for a tailoring programme (MacKenzie, 2009: 209). Whilst not universally true across Sierra Leone, this snapshot demonstrates that FFCs have been disproportionately unable to access skills training in specific sectors. Of further concern is that the skills training offered to FFCs tended to be for jobs that were mainly undertaken in the informal sector, while men had access to skills training

such as welding and construction, opening opportunities for employment in both the formal and informal economy, and to jobs that offered more competitive salaries (Burman and McKay, 2007: 320).

The mismatch between the training offered and the skills and needs of the FFCs is further evidenced by Rosetta's experience, which demonstrates the failure to harness her expertise in midwifery – a field essential to the health and wellbeing of society, specifically that of women and children:

> Before the war, I had trained and qualified as a midwife. I continued working as a midwife even when I was in the bush… When I tried to speak to someone at the DDR camp about going back to midwifery, they said they didn't have that option… they offered me access to sewing, catering or returning to school. When the war ended, I was a mother of four; how could I return to school and study with children of the same age as my own? And for what? For me to learn what I had learnt and been doing before just because of no certificate? (Rosetta[33])

For Rosetta, being unable to return to a career in which she was skilled and experienced was disconcerting at best. She went on to share how, if she had had the opportunity to retrain as a midwife through skills training or placement, she would have done so. The obstacle for her was that midwifery wasn't an option, and to pursue it, she would have needed to secure her own funding to go to school as a mature student, pursuing a career path unavailable as part of the economic reintegration programme. Her case points to the value of assessing FFCs' previous work experience and offering training in related areas where possible. Failure to do so can lead

[33] 63-year-old FFC based in Bo interviewed on 19 November 2019 and 11 January 2021.

to the loss of valuable expertise, skills and experience in job sectors that are part of the formal economy. Moreover, this also validates the earlier assertion that public services such as healthcare and social care are not prioritised in post-conflict environments.

Rosetta and Jande's experiences support Jennings' (2009) argument that, because FMCs are disproportionately able to access skills and vocational training specific to certain sectors, 'their entry into employment and possibly the formal economy is privileged, and the obstacles to women's inclusion exacerbated. Conversely, women are principally located or must remain in the informal economy' (Jennings, 2009: 485) – or return to the domestic and private sphere (Dietrich Ortega, 2010; Pankhurst, 2007). This, in turn, contributes to the feminisation of poverty, due to women's limited access to public resources for food security, health and education (Manchanda, 2005: 4737).

Adama echoed the skills/training mismatch:

> I trained to become a seamstress through the DDR programme, but my dream has always been to be a teacher… I did the training because I didn't want to want to return to my family empty handed… They didn't offer me teacher training or access to something that would help towards that goal; it was just not an option. So, I chose to learn a trade that would allow me to raise money for school and support my family. From my sewing, I managed to put myself through teacher training… I finished my training in 2012 and am still waiting to be appointed. (Adama[34])

[34] 35-year-old FFC based in Kenema, interviewed on 20 November 2019 and 11 January 2021.

Adama makes it clear that, given a choice, she would have taken up a teaching course instead of tailoring. Instead, she undertook skills training in an area of no interest. For her, it turned out well, as she managed to earn a living whilst pursuing her dream career – but that has not been the case for the majority of FFCs. The lack of consultation or matching of individual interests, needs and skillsets has contributed to a larger issue obstructing FFCs from earning a living on completion of skills training: the market became oversaturated with FFCs with the same skills, looking for jobs in the same field, and in some instances, the same geographical location and/or competing for the same clientele, diluting the worth of their trade (MacKenzie, 2009: 212).

> I did the DDR training, and I managed to set up a catering business cooking cassava leaf and potato stew, agidi, oleleh and ground nut stew at the end – but that [only] lasted three or four years…. There were too many of us at the market cooking the same, and there were others that were better and had connections. I even tried reducing the price, but it was no good. I no longer do that business; I now also sell clothes by day. (Mariatu[35])

On probing, during the interview, it became clear that, by 'others', Mariatu meant women who were living in refugee or settlement camps for war widows. In Sierra Leone, the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCRF) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) also delivered vocational and skills training in the same sectors. As a result, at the end of the conflict, the market wasn't just saturated with other FFCs, but also with other women who had civilian status or were war widows, IDPs or refugees.

Beyond matching training with the skills and needs of FFCs regarding career options, scholars have argued that the lack of training options in Sierra Leone can also be attributed to the fact

[35] 34-year-old FFC based in Bo, interviewed on 19 November 2019 and 26 December 2020.

that needs assessments and socioeconomic profiling processes were not performed (MacKenzie, 2009: 208). As such, assessors relied heavily on data on the labour market as it was *before* the conflict, using that to inform decisions on the skills training programmes (Solomon and Ginifer, 2008: 15). A reliance on pre-conflict data on the labour market contributed to a profile of skills training that, for FFCs, meant a return to traditional gender norms and work availability in an increasingly saturated informal sector. More disconcerting was the fact that, because a post-conflict needs assessments hadn't been done, there was a lack of awareness amongst practitioners on the impact such gendered options would have – not just on advancing gender equality in their community, but on FFCs' ability to earn sustainable income (MacKenzie, 2009: 208).

In saying all the above, it's also important to note that as well as a lack of needs assessments and socioeconomic profiling process with the recipients of the programme, there was a lack of the same process with individuals who could inform evaluations on the viability of trades or demand or skills, namely the established tradesmen/artisans. Engaging them in this process would have also helped to identify the incentives that they might need to include FFC graduates into the value chains of the existing local environment (Duthie and Specht, 2010: 5).

A further benefit of engaging tradesmen/artisans might also have been that the process would have helped to repair social relationships between them and FCs. This point is supported by the fact that tradesmen/artisans often wanted FC applicants to not only provide a certificate confirming what training they had been through, but to also have someone from the community or sector to vouch for a FC's skills and work ethic. This requirement points to the importance of having community or familial relationships for FCs in securing employment, no matter how good their training has been.

The importance of ensuring that buy-in from established tradesmen/artisans or colleagues in the same field is underlined by the fact that some felt aggrieved by the DDR process, which many saw as benefitting individuals who had committed crimes and acts of violence (Bolten, 2012: 498). In some instances, FFCs faced backlash or were ostracised because they were beneficiaries of the economic reintegration programme. For example, Mariatu[36] noted how: 'Some customers didn't want to buy from me, and even my colleague didn't want to set up next to me, as they knew I had spent a long time fighting in the bush and had trained through the DDR'.

In many ways, both points above speak to the symbiotic relationship between economic and social reintegration insofar as social acceptance has played a huge part in the ability for FFCs to gain trust and secure employment (Bolten, 2012: 204). In some instances, attempts to insert FCs into apprenticeships were often unfruitful, as 'many apprenticeships required years of engagement and the paying of 'masters' to take on apprentices' (Solomon and Ginifer, 2008: 37). Mariatu's experience above also points to the issues that can exist between FFCs and their recipient families or communities, even after the delivery of sensitisation initiatives aimed at dispelling this understanding of DDR. Ginifer describes how, whilst some civilians accepted former combatants living among them, they often refused to incorporate them into the day-to-day interactions within their communities. In these instances, civilians revealed that they 'forgave former combatants for God, or because the government said so, and not on their own behalf' (2003: 46 cited in Bolten, 2012: 498).

In summary, many FFC experiences with economic reintegration failed to lead to their earning a living from the training, due to the mismatch between their needs and skills with the training

[36] 34-year-old FFC based in Bo, interviewed on 19 November 2019 and 26 December 2020.

on offer. After the training, the market was saturated with FFCs with the same skills, unable to charge competitive rates. For some FFCs, the stigma attached to their participation in the conflict or lack of community ties meant they couldn't secure customers, apprenticeships or employment. For some FFCs, securing employment or customers depended on rebuilding trust, respect and relationships in their communities, demonstrating the symbiotic relationship between social and economic reintegration. Nevertheless, an appetite persists for some FFCs to train for employment in predominantly male fields.

There is however, a need to also acknowledge that whilst Adama and Mariatu's experiences provided evidence to support how mismatched some of the skills training was for them, their experiences also demonstrate that they managed to earn a living for at least four years after completing the training. Beyond four years, for Mariatu, it became a secondary source of income; it wasn't a sustainable main income. For Adama, whilst it is still her main source of income to date, that is only the case because she is waiting to get processed and earn a living from an alternative and preferred source.

4.4 Conclusion

In interrogating the experiences of FFCs, this chapter revealed how the shortcomings of the economic reintegration skills training provided for FFCs could, in large part, be attributed to the problematic way FFCs' conflict experiences were conceptualised, how gender dynamics, norms and values were (re)constructed, and FFCs' engagement in the design and implementation of the programmes in a post-conflict environment. The chapter supported the main argument of this thesis, which is the importance of ensuring that conflict experiences of both women and men inform all post-conflict reintegration programmes, as doing so helps support the redressing of historic gender inequalities and the building of more gender-equitable post-conflict societies.

The problematic conception of gender in economic reintegration was revealed in the failure to support FFCs who wanted to pursue careers in predominantly male-dominated sectors before the conflict. It was also demonstrated by the bias in vocational and skills training activities available for FFCs which geared them for employment in the informal economy, with less competitive and consistent wages than in the formal economy.

The chapter also demonstrated how the lack of conducting needs and skills assessments with FFCs contributed, as conceptualised by feminists in IPE, to the economic marginalisation of women/FFCs. This assertion is further supported by the revelation that FFCs' efforts to engage or secure employment from economic reintegration skills training were obstructed, due to a lack of services and financial provisions to ease the burden of social care, and the cultural push to return to traditional gender roles in the private sphere.

In interrogating the sexism, bias and stigma faced by FFCs when trying to engage with economic reintegration and secure employment, it is evident that all three contributed (albeit to differing extents) to (a) reduced participation of FFCs in economic reintegration programmes, and (b) difficulty in completing the training for those that did participate. In saying all this, it is also important to state that the chapter also revealed the experiences of three FFCs (Adama, Jande and Mariatu) who went through the skills and training programme and did manage to secure a means of earning a living and/or secure employment afterwards. This revelation does, however, come with the caveat that this only applies if one is referring to a FFC's ability to earn a living immediately after they graduated, to a maximum of four years after the training concluded. Beyond that period (to date), Jande doesn't receive any income from the skills or training; Mariatu earns money from catering only on an *ad hoc* basis, and it is not her main source of income; while for Adama, sewing (skills which she acquired during the economic reintegration training) is her main source of income, but it will become supplementary once she

gets her teaching post. In this respect, these experiences support one of this thesis's main arguments: that economic reintegration programmes *can* assist FFCs in securing employment.

The next chapter will continue to examine the reintegration experiences of FFCs, focusing on social reintegration; interrogating the problematic way that gender is conceptualised when it comes to violence; considering further challenges that FFCs face in challenging traditional gender norms and values; and further analysing the symbiotic relationship between economic and social reintegration.

Chapter 5: Rebuilding Relationships with Family and Communities

The previous chapter interrogated FFCs' experiences with *economic* reintegration, and this chapter will continue by delving into *social* reintegration, which is understood as the process through which former combatants and their families feel part of and are accepted by their recipient community (Kingma, 2000). The importance of social reintegration is evident in the fact that, whilst some FCs are welcomed by their communities, some have the opposite experience or a mixed response, and as such have needed support in rebuilding their social relationships. It has historically been challenging for researchers and practitioners to analyse or assess this (Bowd and Özerdem, 2013; Jennings, 2088: 334; Sharif, 2018). The process of reintegration is informed by a combination of 'push and pull factors, ranging from structural violence, poverty, politics and ideology, culture and tradition, family and friends, education and employment opportunities and coercion' (Özerdem, 2012: 52), and is defined as a long-term process without a time frame or quantitative metrics. Whilst Özerdem and Bowd (2013) have made strides towards filling this gap, by developing qualitative socio-economic indicators for social reintegration on three levels[37], their research does not include gender-disaggregated data – hence, the role that gender plays at each stage is unclear.

This chapter responds to this gap by analysing one aspect of social reintegration (social relationships) and asking: ***What can FFCs' lived experiences reveal about their efforts towards rebuilding relationships with their families and communities? What do FFCs identify as hindering or supporting their efforts towards rebuilding their social relationships?***

[37] The three levels are outlined here. Macro-level elements are the combination of political will and physical security and stability. Meso-level elements are all factors that help create and prepare an environment for successful reintegration such as demobilisation camps, community sensitisation and acceptance, positive local leaders etc. Micro-level factors are a combination of former combatant motivation, the family, associations, economic reintegration, and other factors at the grassroots level (Özerdem and Bowd, 2013: 463-464).

Given that there are several factors that contribute to FFC experiences of social reintegration, it is important to state that this analysis is not exhaustive of such experiences or the different social reintegration interventions. Instead, it will focus on three recurring factors raised by the FFCs interviewed for this research: violence, reshaping and redefining identities and relationships, and the symbiotic relationship between economic and social reintegration. These will inform the structure of the chapter.

The chapter starts by delving into FFCs' experiences of violence during the conflict from three different angles:

a) violence perpetrated by FFCs;
b) sexual violence experienced by FFCs;
c) violence to which FFCs' families or communities were exposed.

Whilst previous research, like that of Humphreys and Weinstein (2007) assert that violence 'is the strongest predictor of difficulty in achieving social reintegration' for all former combatants (Humphreys and Weinstein, 2007: 533). From this research it will become clear that violence perpetrated by FFCs, and sexual violence experienced by FFCs presented additional challenges for them because of their status *as women*. The following section advocates that, to rebuild social relationships in their 'new normal', former combatants, their families and communities all need to engage in the process of reshaping and redefining societal values, norms, and behaviours. In saying this, this section reveals that of greatest importance for FFCs is the reshaping and redefining of gender values, norms and behaviours.

From there, the chapter develops the argument begun in Chapter 4, regarding the symbiotic relationship between economic and social reintegration. The third section continues this by unpacking how FFCs' ability to financially provide for themselves, their family or their community contributes to positive or negative experiences in their social reintegration. Whilst

this reveals the tension afforded by the possibilities of either being an economic burden or becoming a breadwinner, the section also reveals the role that social reintegration can play in ensuring that FFCs' acceptance back into their communities is neither predicated upon financial contribution nor prevented by it.

The chapter reiterates that in practice, social reintegration is important to FFCs' efforts to rebuild their social relationships. As in the first chapter, it becomes clear that whilst there is limited room in post-conflict societies (as was the case in Sierra Leone) for FFCs to completely exercise gains towards gender equality, social reintegration interventions can help to institutionalise some of those gains that conflict affords them, by facilitating how gender, gender roles and values are reshaped and redefined in the new normal.

5.1 Violence

5.1.1 Violence perpetrated by FFCs

> My community knew that I had been abducted, but because the battalion I was with during the war killed and amputated so many... someone had seen me with the group when we were raiding a village near our town and reported me... When I returned, everyone dey scatter when they see me... even though I tried to calm them they didn't even give me the chance to explain my own... my husband self-denied me and sent me away... he said he didn't want to be with someone who only knew the ways of the bush. (Fatima[38])

One of the social reintegration challenges faced by some FFCs was due to the violence they had perpetrated during the conflict. This was particularly the case in Sierra Leone, given the high

[38] 38-year-old FFC based in Kenema, interviewed on 20 November 2019.

degree of indiscriminate acts of violence against civilians – including physical mutilation, torture and murder. The fact that some of the acts of violence were perpetrated within communities, and that, in most instances, civilians were required to participate in the violence (being asked to choose the act, who would perform it, or who would receive the violence) meant that violence challenged community and family ties. As such, violence was synonymous with unravelling the fabric of different communities and families (Lahai, 2015:139 cited in Cullen, 2020:117).

The widespread amputations inflicted on civilians in Sierra Leone also meant that, at the end of the conflict, there was a visible reminder on people's bodies that they had been at the receiving end of physical violence. FCs were also feared by families and communities, not just because they had committed acts of violence *during* the conflict, but for fear of possible *future* acts. Families and communities feared that the FCs would do what they had done in the bush again, because they had normalised their violent behaviour (Burman and McKay, 2007: 318).

Whilst all FFCs would have been part of a group that committed acts of violence, for Fatima, this was exacerbated by the fact that her family and community had been directly informed of her violent acts. That she was a known culprit of violent acts in her area undermined any potential empathy for her having been forcibly recruited or committing acts under duress. Even though she didn't attack her own village, her family and community extended the resentment they developed against the rebels towards her (Humphreys and Weinstein, 2007: 548). In this regard, she occupies the dual space of being a security threat to her community, and at risk of being attacked herself (Subedi, 2018: 203).

Whilst FMCs will have had similar experiences, in this research, FFCs reveal that the stigma or marginalisation levelled at them was different. As females, their participation in acts of violence was 'antithetical to traditional cultural norms' (McKay, 2006; McKay and Mazurana

2004) because they subverted societal norms on gender and violence. Coulter (2009) contextualises this subversion of traditional cultural norms in the context of Sierra Leone when she writes that, whilst women were not seen as passive or peaceful during the war (in that they resisted the war through protest and other means), their participation in violent acts was largely perceived as 'going against the submissive feminine ideal' (Coulter, 2009: 136) revered in their culture. The fact that there were stories of widespread brutality by FFCs – who were reported to be especially vicious fighters and who had a reputation for encouraging excessive violence (Cohen, 2013 : 398) – meant that families and communities struggled to articulate the transgression of the 'ideal woman' as anything other than unnatural. In some instances, women having been combatants was referred to as having engaged in socially deviant behaviour (Coulter, 2009 : 139).

Women seen as transcending gender norms (of what a woman should be, are and can do) are classed as 'other': deviants, abnormal, irrational, a result of faulty biology or faulty construction (Sjoberg and Gentry, 2007:13). This leaves no room for discussion on whether women can use their agency and autonomy in the same way as male perpetrators of violence, who are characterised as rational or logically motivated (Sjoberg and Gentry, 2007:14). Denying that women can operate this type of agency is a refusal to accept that women can *choose* to commit acts where they become 'life takers' not 'life givers' (see Åhäll, 2012 and Åhäll 2015).

The gendered dimension of the stigmatisation and marginalisation that FFCs experience can also be attributed to the historical link between violence and masculinity in conflict, as discussed in Chapter 4. This understanding relies on and reproduces a gendered binary, which frames men as the perpetrators of violence, and women as peaceful, nurturing and less aggressive or warlike (Enloe, 2000). Fatima's narrative illustrates this very point when she states, 'They would not have judged a man the same... men are praised when they use violence to defend or protect, but it is not always that way for women'. Such an understanding does not

consider ‘that combatants of both sexes may face enormous social pressure to commit violence and both sexes are just as likely to respond to such pressure in a similar way’ (Cohen, 2013: 388). This is the case where one is exposed to environments where ‘an aura of menace, repeatedly manifested through verbal abuse and acts of wanton cruelty was an integral feature of daily interaction... for some women and girls, the terror gave way to acquiescence and cruelty came to be trivialised’ (Denov and Maclure, 2006: 78). It also demonstrates the struggle for families and communities to acknowledge that, for FFCs, the transition from victim to perpetrator was not a linear process (Denov and Maclure, 2006: 79), or that they endured an uncomfortable paradox and in turn an uncomfortable sociocultural position (Burman and McKay, 2007: 319).

5.1.2 Sexual violence

As well as the violence they committed, some FFCs stated that the sexual violence they were subjected to led to negative experiences with social reintegration. For some FFCs, this was evident in that they sought to hide their rape experiences from their family or community, as Sarah explains:

> I was abducted and when the war ended, I returned to my community. My father told me to never tell anyone that I had been raped because no man would want to marry me... He was not alone, as other people told me this, and the men themselves wanted to marry a girl that was not stained. The fact that this happened to me by force didn’t excuse me. (Sarah[39])

[39] 38-year-old FFC based in Makeni, interviewed on 27 November 2019 and 29 December 2020.

For Sarah, having been at the receiving end of act(s) of sexual violence meant that she was seen as less valuable in society; it rendered her 'unmarriageable'. When asked to define what she meant by *stained*, Sarah explained that she was 'damaged goods'; her virtue was no longer intact as she had been violated and had practiced 'sex' outside marriage. This notion of reduced value and damaged goods was also expressed by Mariatu:

> They took my virginity during the war... after they raped me, I felt like I had lost my one prized possession... the whole time I was thinking who would marry me now? ...the rapes after that didn't pain as much as that first one... I remember it to date… to this day, I never told my family, and they never asked. (Mariatu[40])

Whilst Mariatu and Sarah's sentiments reveal the value placed on virginity when it came to marriage in post-conflict Sierra Leone, some research and reports on sexual violence during the conflict also reveal that there was value placed on virginity in conflict. As is evident in that combatants 'favoured girls and young women whom they believed to be virgins. This was evident not only by their actions but was also explicitly stated by them as they chose their victims' (Human Rights Watch, 2002: 28). In the conflict, different warring factions widely used the Krio term 'virginated' to depict FFCs or women who were no longer virgins. In some forces, FFCs physically checked and verified whether girls were virgins (Human Rights Watch, 2002: 28). The widescale use of rape during the conflict may have resulted in some families and communities placing even greater value on young women's virginity than before (Burman and McKay, 2007: 319)

[40] 34-year-old FFC based in Bo, interviewed on 19 November 2019 and 26 December 2020.

For some FFCs, being a victim/survivor of sexual violence during the conflict meant greater difficulties in entering into a marriage; whilst for other FFCs it meant the end of a marriage, as it was for Kadie:

> I was raped by different men during the war… rape is not a choice, but some men can't accept women that have been stained in that way. My own husband said that is why he didn't want to remain married to me when I returned from the war. His own family agreed with his decision, so our marriage ended that day… No one asked me what happened or tried to understand that it was not something I chose for myself. (Kadie[41])

Kadie's experience of being disowned and divorced by her husband can be attributed to the fact that for some men and families, rape equals infidelity or brings dishonour (Smith, Boyles and MacMillan, 2009: 9). This is particularly so when individuals/communities subscribe to the notion that 'women – particularly their bodies... are repositories of the community's honour' (Amnesty, 2004: 15). This is especially the case when the widespread use of the rape during conflict is understood as a strategy to emasculate or humiliate men in opposing communities or societies. This is because in these instances, women's bodies are seen as battlefields and if a woman is raped then the men around her failed to protect her from the most personal and intimate of physical attacks (Farr, 2009; Hynes, 2004; Turpin, 2003; Gottschall, 2004 cited in Alexandra, 2010: 19). As such, there is evidence of women (albeit not from the FFCs interviewed for this project) where wives are not abandoned after being raped as combatants, but are isolated or subjected to domestic abuse (Shanks and Shull, 2000). In countries where polygamy is practiced, as it is in some Sierra Leone communities, some men may take a second

[41] 40-year-old FFC based in Kenema, interviewed on 20 November 2019.

wife and relegate the first wife and rape victim to a subordinate position (Human Rights Watch, 2002:65). Married women's fear of being ostracised due to rape is shared by Marta:

> Well… when they captured me, the commander have sexual intercourse or dated me in the presence of my husband, which was against his wish... that's why they round the tyre on his neck and set fire to him to death. They tell us to come outside and sing while my husband was on fire and they said if I cry they would kill me too… I just have to console myself in that moment… When I returned, I was grateful that my husband was not alive, as I know that his family would not have accepted me if they knew that I had been raped, especially when I was with child... I am not even sure that my husband would have stayed loving me after he witnessed another man rape me... my child could have been called a child of a rebel. (Marta[42])

Marta's desire to hide her experience of sexual violence was so important that she found comfort in knowing that her husband could not relive or share those moments with his family. Her need to withhold her rape experience was also driven by the need to protect her child from being associated with the act, as that could have questioned their legitimacy. Marta was right to be concerned, as 'girl mothers and their children are often subject to resentment, due to the children's unknown paternity, or because their fathers are known to be rebels' (Carpenter, 2000 cited in Cullen, 2020:123).

The experiences of the women above are examples of what can happen when families and communities blame rape on the victim/survivor, rather than understanding the acts as a means of dismantling or undermining familial and communal relationships (Lahai, 2015:139, cited in

[42] 45-year-old FFC based in Makeni, interviewed on 28 November 2019 and 29 December 2020.

Cullen, 2020:117). Attributing rape against women and girls as the fault of the victim also reflects society's failure to acknowledge how the rape of women and girls during conflict demonstrates 'pre-existing socio-cultural dynamics' (Olujic 1998, 31 cited in Coulter, 2009: 127). These dynamics are a result of women being seen as failing to safeguard themselves in the way they act or dress, as was the case in Sierra Leone; of rape being understood as an act to promote power over women, not because they were passive but because they were seen as 'wild, dangerous and therefore needed to be controlled' (Coulter, 2009 : 117). The wildness of women and girls was arguably attributed to the fact that FFCs took boyfriends or were bush wives whilst not married during the conflict. This is despite the fact that FFCs explained that taking a lover or boyfriend[43] during the conflict was sometimes borne out of fear of future sexual attacks, as Mariatu explains:

> I had avoided getting a boyfriend before I was raped the first time, but once I accepted the reality of what had happened, I took a boyfriend... Because at least that way I would prevent different men from raping [me] all the time. (Mariatu[44])

This perspective is held, despite evidence also that taking a girlfriend was widely encouraged and practised by male combatants – claiming a woman 'created the illusion of a heroic, lifesaving acts on the part of the bush husband' (Cullen, 2020: 118). Moreover, attributing the taking on of boyfriends or bush husbands by FFCs or women completely ignores the fact that some families and communities were accepting of such arrangements, as in some cases it meant protection for them or access to food or money, as Abena explains below:

[43] In saying 'take a lover or boyfriend', it is important to note that decisions about such relationships (when or who is the sexual partner) is not always a matter of free choice by the FFC.
[44] 34-year-old FFC based in Bo, interviewed on 19 November 2019 and 26 December 2020.

> My family were not happy about my having a bush husband, but when they found that he was the leader of a group that would often protect our village, they accepted the situation. It also helped that the man I was with sometimes sent them food stuffs and they would give thanks… (Abena)[45]

This particular experience in many ways indicates that in some instances, FFCs or women taking a boyfriend / being a bush wife was only problematic when the community or family were not consulted or approved of the arrangement.

Whilst some FMCs were also subjected to acts of sexual violence (FAWE cited in Human Rights Watch, 2003:42), the sexual violence against women/girls was more visible. This is both due to the gendered norms in Sierra Leone that make it more accepted as a reality, and therefore more widely reported, and also due to the undeniable evidence supplied when children were born out of the experience – and thus the impact on FFCs' social reintegration was also more marked. FFCs live in a 'society where girls are valued primarily as wives and mothers, and where marriage is the best option for obtaining economic security and protection, being 'unmarriageable' often left girls feeling profoundly at risk'[46] (Denov and MacLure, 2006: 336) – the 'risk' being remaining unmarried.

5.1.3 Violence experienced by families and communities

Whilst the sections above point to the role that violence played in negative experiences in social reintegration, this section looks at how collective experiences of violence by FFCs together with their families/communities can lead to positive social reintegration experiences:

[45] 36-year-old female based in Kissi Town, interviewed on 18 November 2019.
[46] It is important to state that this narrative is not unique to Sierra Leone as other societies in the world have historically placed the value of unmarried women on their sexual purity for religious and/or cultural reasons.

> ULIMO soldiers that came were maltreating our people; sometimes they will hold a relative and bury them alive. They will come around and hold people under house arrest, and within a twinkle of eye, they will set the house ablaze. Imagine seeing your family locked up in a house and set fire on the said house. So, this thing once happened to a friend of mine, her husband was arrested, cut off his penis and they gave him to eat. After that day, I joined the army with her [Fanta]... when we left and when we returned, we had the support of the whole community, us taking up arms was seen as honourable. (Ramatu[47])

In unpacking the circumstances surrounding how she became an FFC, it becomes clear that for Ramatu, she wanted to help defend her community after witnessing yet another attack on a community member who was also a friend. For Ramatu, both when she left to fight, and when she returned, she had the support of her family and community, with her involvement in fighting forces understood as her defending the community. From her account, any violent actions she engaged in were perceived as different to the unprovoked violent acts on civilians by different warring factions that the community experienced themselves, and the transgression of her assigned gender role was not questioned, nor did it lead to stigmatisation or marginalisation. In many ways, this speaks to the fact that the existence of female combatants was, in some instances, accepted and encouraged as part of the unconventional roles, acts and activities that exist in conflict and not in peacetime. The lack of stigma or discrimination towards female combatants like Ramatu also demonstrates the importance that some families and communities placed on rebuilding social bonds and ties, over stigmatising and shaming individuals who had perpetrated violence to protect or fight for a community or family.

[47] 53-year-old FFC based in Jeru camp near Kenema, interviewed on 20 November 2019 and 11 January 2021.

It is also important to observe the role that a collective experience of violence can play in positive social reintegration experiences when an FFC was forcibly recruited:

> My father, along with other men in our area, was killed in front of our eyes because he refused to join the rebels or give them food or money. Everyone witnessed my being taken, so they knew that I did not join willingly... When I returned, they were all happy to see me. It was my neighbours whose fathers and brothers were killed along with my father that helped me locate my sister and grandmother and helped me rebuild this that you see here, which was my old family home... While we don't often talk about that day, I know that the pains I feel and the things I see about that day, they feel and see it, too... we understand each other because we will always share that. (Zainab[48])

This is because, as the above demonstrated, shared experiences of violence can lead to combatants and communities developing social bonds that unite them, above their general resentment of FCs. Put differently, when there is mass death because of a pandemic, natural disaster, or groups witness or experience acts of violence together (such as those created by acts of political violence, protest and conflict), 'shared suffering produces a strong and highly durable form of social glue, known as 'identity fusion' – often described as a visceral sense of oneness with the group' (Whitehouse, 2021: 2).

The following experience echoes the importance of family and community support when joining the conflict, but offers a different perspective on motivation:

[48] 42-year-old FFC based in Makeni, interviewed on 26 November 2019 and 29 December 2020.

> I joined the RUF like other people because I believed in what the group was saying. When they first entered Kenema, they came peacefully... they wanted to liberate the country and those politicians needed to give an account of their minerals. They even had a national anthem which contained all of this. They wrote the green book and then the Footpath to Democracy. My family supported my decision to join the RUF, as many of my family and community joined as well... When I returned, they never questioned me on what I shared, they were just happy to see me. They always saw my joining the war as brave, a sacrifice for a better world. (Adama[49])

Adama joined the RUF to fight for a change in government and liberate her country – demonstrating that, in her community, protecting and defending was not only a response to targeted acts of physical violence, but that there was a desire to bring about change. As such, her participation was seen as brave, and she was seen as a hero on her return (Özerdem, 2012: 64).

That families and communities could be united in protecting combatants and their families in their absence provides more evidence of the importance of social bonds:

> When the RSLAF merged with RUF (rebels), I tried to come back but I was turned away by the family and community. They told me that the Kamajohs had burnt down my family home and were looking for me so they could kill me. If I had stayed in town by them, I should have been killed. We used to drive in an armoured car with the military going up and down, so I was very popular... When I came back, my family members and

[49] 35-year-old FFC based in Kenema, interviewed on 20 November 2019 and 11 January 2021.

> community welcomed me because I didn't do anything bad to them... my community had taken my children in whilst I was away. (Aminata[50])

Violence – whether committed or subjected to – led to negative experiences with social reintegration for some FFCs. Some families and communities feared that FFCs would engage in violent activities in their communities. For others, there was gender-related stigma associated with the acts of violence that they had either committed or experienced, due to resistance towards accepting that women/FFCs are just as capable of perpetrating violence as men/FMCs, and stigma associated with being raped.

At the same time, this section has demonstrated how an FFC's motivation for joining the conflict can, in some instances, lead to a positive experience with social reintegration, such as when FFCs joined the conflict to defend or protect their family or communities and had received their support for this decision. In these situations, it was also evident that some families and communities overlooked the fact that FFCs had transgressed gender norms by committing acts of violence. The fact that gender did not necessarily play an important part in such situations demonstrates how some families and communities were more subsumed by the need for the community to come together and be reconciled, than by prejudice about women and violence. This is supported by the experiences of FFCs who were received back positively inot their communities if they had experienced collective violence along with these communities at some point in the conflict.

Finally, it is important to recognise how participation in social reintegration interventions that rely on FFCs sharing experiences can be fraught with difficulties, as some FFCs might not wish, be ready, or be able to articulate their experiences. Moreover, there might be other local

[50] 58-year-old FFC based in Jeru camp near Kenema, interviewed on 20 November 2019 and 11 January 2021.

practices where the public sharing of experiences with individuals outside that society is not encouraged (a point which is further unpacked in Chapter 6).

5.2 Reshaping and redefining identities and relationships

> When I first returned back from the war, I did my best to show everyone that I did not want to return to the bush. Everyone knew I had been with the rebels, so I did not pretend otherwise... In the bush, sometimes, we physically fought through a disagreement, or we would punish those that did wrong using violence, but I had to leave all that behind... My attitude saved me because there were many moments where I wanted to fight or argue but I had to resist those urges, I had to swallow it and stay quiet… I spent a lot of time watching how people were with each other and asked my family how to go about things, as there was always a protocol... Instead, if an opportunity came, I cut down anyone and anything to do with rebels, and eventually people saw that I wanted to be part of the future because I was committed to this new life. (Marta[51])

In this section, I discuss the need for active and mutual participation in rebuilding social relationships by FFCs and their families and communities. All parties must actively participate in the process of redefining and reshaping how they engage with each other. In all parties placing equal importance in this process, adjusting and negotiating, they move away from placing ownership or the burden of social reintegration on one party. This is especially true as, whilst FFCs can adjust or adapt their behaviour as individuals, for social reintegration to be

[51] 45-year-old FFC based in Makeni, interviewed on 28 November 2019 and 29 December 2020.

fully realised, their families and communities must also go through a similar process for there to be reconciliation.

Marta's assertion above demonstrates the adjusting and negotiating required of FFCs to transition from a combatant to a civilian. It is clear that for her, this transition was centred around her behaviour and attitude: she mentions having to suppress being argumentative or resolving quarrels with violence, as she had done as a combatant. Furthermore, in denouncing the rebels, she was making a public declaration that 'she was breaking factional ties as well as shunning any shameful or disturbing associations' (Basini, 2016: 136).

Whilst this transition could be realised through Marta breaking contact and communication with the group(s) she fought with (where combatant behaviour was normalised), she also consciously and actively made efforts to conform and adhere to 'reinforced behaviours considered socially acceptable such as being polite, respectful' (Basini, 2016:136). In taking the initiative, and deliberately observing and replicating socially acceptable interactions, Marta (and FFCs who take a similar approach) provides an example of how FFCs practice agency: 'the ability to influence intentionally one's functioning and life circumstances' (Bandura 2001, 1–26, 2006, 164–180 cited in Podder, 2017: 150) in post-conflict environments. Podder's (2017) work on cognitive theory on the four categories of agency in post-conflict environments can be sued to analyse and contextualise FFC's experiences. Her work identifies four categories which in no particular order, are *tactical agency*, *rational agency*, *moral agency* and *reflective agency*.

Tactical agency is opportunistic in nature and requires constant practice, quick thinking and decision-making. It is most appropriate for day-to-day situations that demand immediate responses with short-term implications (Podder, 2017: 152; Bøås 2013: 612). This agency is evident in Georgieta's statement below:

> The same way I had to think and act quickly in the bush I had to be when I returned to my family and community. In fact, I was like a chameleon because I changed the way I was to match the people I was meeting even if it was only for one time because when you haven't been in the same place for long not everyone be deserving of the same attention… (Georgieta[52])

Rational agency requires some level of forethought, thus the individual FFC must perform the following:

> [a] cost-benefit analysis of future outcomes through current deliberation about the results of prospective actions. It involves an element of self-regulation in conjunction with deliberative ability and, therefore, assumes the ability to construct appropriate courses of action and to execute the same. It highlights the ability or intention of the individual to influence one's functioning and life circumstances (Podder, 2017: 152).

Moral agency is based on the notion that one must revisit judgements or decisions based on the moral compass used in one's society/communities (i.e., how one understands good and bad in terms of behaviour, values and practices). Revisiting one's moral compass can lead to decisions that set out to mitigate previous misdeeds (Podder, 2017: 153), which can be a positive thing not just for the FFCs individually, but for those around them. Fatima conveys this when she says:

> When I returned back from the war, what I saw as wrong or right had to change because I was now in different circumstances and I had to change the

[52] 40-year-old female based in Kissi Town, interviewed on 18 November 2019.

> way I was with people around me. I had also done many things I myself was not proud of me and I wanted to make up for all that bad stuff I had done by being kind and doing good deeds for people, even strangers… (Fatima[53])

Finally, reflective agency is closely linked to moral agency, in that it concerns itself with 'issues of beliefs and value systems… linked to the property of self-reflectiveness. It involves a functional self-awareness, the ability to reflect on personal actions, thoughts, and the repercussions of or the inherent value of one's actions' (Podder, 2017: 153). Reflecting on the past may also result in FCs visualising an alternative future as a civilian; as such, they may make decisions that honour such a future, disengaging with their combatant identity, values, norms and behaviour as Taka explains:

> My faith helped me believe that all those things I saw and did were in the past, with the help of the pastor I came to understand that the past had not part in my future. Surviving the war was a second chance for me, so every day I decide to focus on a happy future where I have all that I have dreamt, hoped and prayed for…. (Taka[54])

In using agency to analyse the FFC experiences, this research suggests that the adjusting and negotiating required from FFCs is an *active* rather than a *passive* process. In situating these experiences into any of these four types of agency, we see how this adjustment and negotiation is not a one-off process, but done every day – and must be adapted to fit different scenarios and interactions over an undefined period of time. This is especially so if we recognise day-to-day

[53] 38-year-old FFC based in Kenema, interviewed on 20 November 2019.
[54] 34-year-old FFC based in Bo, interviewed on 19 November 2019 and 26 December 2020.

interactions as the backdrop to normality: 'the everyday is the site of the familiar where ordinary social interactions occur and daily routines happen' (Martin, 2016: 404).

In as much as this reshaping and redefining is driven by the FFCs themselves, in stating that she sought advice from family members, Marta points to the importance of external input and support from those around her. This demonstrates how the redefining and reshaping process of identity, values and norms for FFCs is dependent on being able to observe, seek advice or support from family and community. As such, this points to the fact that some aspects of this redefining and reshaping process requires the cooperation of their family and community – and possibly it is *even dependent on that community itself* having gone through a similar process of reshaping and redefining behaviour, values and norms. As Kelnan (2008) explains, undoing the mistrust and rebuilding relationships between both parties requires a transformation, as the 'conflicting parties need to undergo a collective identity change in the reconciliation process on which each party accepts the other's identity without regarding it as a negation of one's own' (cited in Sharif, 2018:7). Achieving this reshaping and redefining would first require each party to acknowledge the validity and legitimacy of the other's narrative. The next step would be for both parties to take on collective responsibility for past wrongdoings; this involves expressions of collective guilt and empathy for members of the other group (Noor et al. 2002 cited in Sharif, 2018: 7). Mutual engagement in this process is important, as often in the start of a post-conflict period, civilians hold the 'upper hand' in everyday interactions. FFCs are bound by the anticipation of prejudice from the latter (Hopkins and Blackwood: 2011: 218).

Whilst the identity change/acceptance process may result in reconciliation and/or acceptance of FCs by their families and communities, it is important to acknowledge that this process for families and communities is challenging and complicated. This reshaping and redefining is required in an environment where there has been social disintegration – the 'breaking of community bonds between individuals and the disassociation of the individual from community

beliefs, norms, rule of law, structures and goals' (Hazen, 2007: 2) – and where social divisions along economic, political and community lines are exacerbated. For some families and communities, this context can leave them conflicted about how they should interact with FFCs. For some, 'there is often a strange mix of a desire for justice and the prosecution of war crimes juxtaposed to the desire to forget the past and move on' (Hazen, 2007: 8). In Sierra Leone this was often the case, as former combatants were given blanket amnesty, and social reintegration interventions implemented sensitisation campaigns which promoted forgiveness and reconciliation (see Introduction, and see also Bolten (2012) and Ginifer (2003)[55]). Moreover, as will be discussed in Chapter 6, most families and communities practiced social forgetting.

The successful progression of the combatant-to-civilian identity is tied to the approval and acknowledgement that FFCs received from family or community members, as Jande explains below:

> One lesson I remember to this day is that change might be good for you as a person, for you have less load to carry, but no one lives in this world alone, and so it doesn't matter how much you change or prove to someone that you are changed, they have to want to accept you... they have to want to see that you are changed... they have to mean it when they tell you that they see it... This was the case for me when I returned; I was committed to a life different to that which I had lived in the bush, and I changed different things, but it was useless until people opened their minds to seeing me as

[55] Bolten (2012) and Ginifer (2003) capture the desire forget the past as their work reveals that some participants forgave or reintegrated with former combatants begrudgingly because of their faith or because the government said so; not doing so was also seen as objecting to peace.

> a woman who was capable of being a wife, mother, friend, and sister...
>
> (Jande[56])

The approval and acknowledgement of FFCs' efforts towards reshaping and redefining themselves is not just good because it is a step towards acceptance by their families and communities, but it also helps the individual/group of FFCs. External recognition can help affirm one's sense of identity (Hopkins and Blackwood, 2011: 217), and acknowledgement can offer encouragement and positive reinforcement to combatants that their efforts are not in vain. The importance of recognition/acknowledgement by others is also evident in that the consequences of not receiving it can lead to low self-esteem, reduced commitment to any form of transformation, or active participation in social networks. In some instances, it leads one to overconform and/or overcompensate one's commitment to this identity transformation, at the risk of isolating or supporting the segregation of other FFCs (Hopkins and Blackwood, 2011: 218). Marta referenced this latter point earlier when she stated that she distanced herself from other FFCs to the extent of publicly denouncing them: 'Instead, if an opportunity came, I cut down anyone and anything to do with rebels, and eventually, people saw that I wanted to be part of the future because I was committed to this new life.'

Sarah evidences the way that families can support FFC acceptance by the wider community:

> My father was so worried about people ignoring me, leaving me out of gatherings and calling me names in public. He went and spoke with the chief and paid some money for damages on my behalf. Going to the chief for help to resolve problems between community members is something our people have always done, even before the war… I am not sure who by

[56] 36-year-old FFC based in Makeni, interviewed on 26 November 2019.

> name, but I know other people did the same thing my father did. The chief made sure that I was not cast out; he asked people in my community not to leave me out and/or insult me… I know that people might have thought bad things about me, but them not saying it helped me… (Sarah[57])

In Sarah's case, her father's assistance was through giving the chief reparations, an arrangement which led to him facilitating reconciliation with the wider community, insofar as they did not publicly stigmatise and shame Sarah. The importance of family support with reconciliation is demonstrated by the fact that, for some FCs, 'stigma appeared to be more pervasive when family and others were not available to reassure the community that they were not a threat' (Basini, 2016:136). Whilst Sarah doesn't directly state that she was immediately reconciled or accepted by her community, the change in behaviour by her community helped her to settle in. Her experience also points to the subjective nature of reconciliation/acceptance because for her, community members not taunting her in public or excluding her from activities, was what she needed to feel safe and accepted.

In the same way that community leaders played an important role in supporting reconciliation and the social reintegration of FCs such as Sarah, the same can be said of religious leaders. This is evident in Taka's case below:

> I was kidnapped. Everyone thought that I had died, so when they were announcing for people to come collect their children and my name was mentioned on the radio, my brother and mother came looking for me. When they found me, they were just so happy that I was alive. Once they knew the group that I had been fighting with, they took me to church. The

[57] 38-year-old FFC based in Makeni, interviewed on 27 November 2019 and 29 December 2020.

> pastor there prayed for me in front of the church, and after that he came to visit our family often and talk to us about forgiveness and we needed to leave the past behind… (Taka[58])

Unlike Sarah, Taka didn't involve any monetary contributions to access support, but both their situations demonstrate how in post-conflict environments, families and communities repurposed acts of intervention by a community or religious leader which were used in pre-conflict times to assist with reconciliation. Whilst these experiences point to reconciliation or reintegration being a result of support or assistance from community or religious leaders, it is important to state that access to them would not have been readily accessible to all FFCs. Indeed, many would not have been able to seek or receive access or assistance for a variety of reasons, including the lack of a willing intermediary, lack of money (which reiterates the link between social and economic reintegration), or because the leaders refused to get involved due to personal reasons or community pressure.

Whilst some of the above experiences are relatable for FMCs, the experiences of FFCs differ, because their participation in the conflict was seen as transcending traditional gender norms, which was not the case for FMCs. For some FFCs, the process of reshaping and redefining was twofold: not only having to abandon combatant behaviour, but also adjusting to civilian pressure to assume a role that fits with traditional gender norms. This is because in cases like that of Sierra Leone 'being a soldier and carrying guns is a role that usually lies very far from the general perception of the proper role of women and associated model of femininity' (Coulter, 2008; Specht 2006 cited in Nilsson and Thapar-Björkert, 2013:112). Adama offers insights into this:

[58] 34-year-old FFC based in Bo, interviewed on 19 November 2019 and 26 December 2020.

> I found it hard when I first returned, there were many things I wanted to do myself, but my family kept advising me to allow the men in my family or community to do it for me... Instead, they wanted me to focus on being home-trained... I had thought that having fought shoulder to shoulder with men, we would be treated better after the war... we have proved our worth... for me, this didn't feel right. By returning and pretending I was not equal to men, I was returning to being a second-class citizen... women are second-class citizens in our society… (Adama[59])

This second layer of reshaping and redefining for Adama is evident in her being advised to take on the traditionally assigned gender role of homemaker, and relinquish her independence by allowing the males in her community and/or family to provide for her. She struggled with this, perceiving that this behaviour meant she was not equal to men: 'a second-class citizen'. This might be a particularly difficult adjustment for some FFCs, who had learned different survival skills and interacted with men in situations and environments where gender might not have mattered as much as individual characteristics and skills – for example, one's ability to handle a weapon. As a combatant, FFCs experienced some power and control, especially when they were wielding weapons. Moreover, they would have had to face gender-specific challenges:

> overcoming feelings of inferiority by developing confidence in their ability as soldiers, physically and mentally... developing a fighter's body language and social styles that followed more masculine models in order for them to gain combatant status... gaining acceptance from male combatants and grappling with male chauvinism (Negewo-Oda and White, 2011: 174).

[59] 35-year-old FFC based in Kenema, interviewed on 20 November 2019 and 11 January 2021.

For some FFCs, reverting to traditional gender norms would mean going through a process of masking behaviour that – as combatants – they had taken time to develop and exhibit. The term 'masking' is most appropriate, as 'unlearning' takes more time; additionally, some FFCs might want to hold on to those skills and characteristics for alternative contexts, even if they cannot or do not practice them daily. The transition from combatant to civilian is neither linear nor straightforward; FFCs will occupy an ambiguous position or liminal space of being neither combatant nor civilian for a period of time.

The difficulty that FFCs face with the transition from combatant to civilian (at least at the individual level) can also be situated within the experiences of military-to-civilian transition that veterans experience. Veterans experience a period of being neither civilian nor military, acquiring civilian status only when they have reached 'satisfactory levels of functioning at home, at work, in relationships and in the community' (Sayer et al., 2011: 3 cited in Bulmer and Eichler, 2017: 166). However, this transition is not linear, nor can it be attributed to a specific timeframe, as the process is often complex and convoluted: 'the very liminality of 'unmaking' militarised masculinity troubles and undoes neat categorisations of military/civilian and their implied masculine/feminine gendering' (Bulmer and Eichler, 2017: 162). For female veterans, this is evident, in that they 'must struggle with what it means to be female in a society where civilians are perplexed by them and don't know whether to treat them 'like one of the guys'... [or] like a lady' (Demers, 2013: 505 cited in Bulmer and Eichler, 2017: 169). This highlights that, in some instances, it is not so much 'military gender norms, but civilian gender norms that make the experiences of female veterans [and FFCs] invisible' (Bulmer and Eichler, 2017: 172). Bulmer and Jackson (2016) argue that 'feminists need to foreground the idea that, to many veterans, the link between masculinity and military is not an idea but an experience, a practice, an identity, and an embodiment' (cited in Bulmer and Eichler, 2017: 171). As such, militarised masculinity permeates not just the combatant/military-to-civilian transition process

but may exist long into the civilian identity, for some, even a lifetime (Sylvester, 2012). This point was evident in the experience of Aminata, who shared:

> I am not involved in any form of problems or issues… Above all, I'm part of anything that will help this community… Even very recently, when someone got missing in this town, we had more than fifty men in this town. I was the only woman that was included among them for us to search for the person. So, you see, the Paramount recommend that I should be part of the search team. The chiefs always invite me when discussing safety and security because they knew that I am very active when it comes to community issues; even at this age, they still recognise that. I'm always called upon whenever anything happens in this community, whether good or bad... When I didn't get into the army, I left my life of being a soldier behind and became a mother and wife; but in these moments, I am reminded that they respect that I had been a soldier in the past and that is what they connect with me. (Aminata[60])

This process of adjusting and negotiating civilian gender norms is not the same for all FFCs; neither are the mechanisms or systems, as they vary by community and family. In Zimbabwe, for example, FFCs were sent for counselling on how to perform household chores, behave and conduct themselves in a feminine manner – as not doing so would render them unmarriageable (Sadomba and Dzinesa, 2004: 57). The efforts to feminise these FFCs went to the extent of telling them how to dress, with those who dressed like soldiers (i.e., wore trousers) warned to 'clean up their act' and behave like 'proper' ladies' (Parpart, 2016: 59). Whilst in Sierra Leone such extreme policies weren't adopted, the fact that most of the economic reintegration

[60] 58-year-old FFC based in Jeru camp near Kenema, interviewed on 20 November 2019 and 11 January 2021.

programmes available to FFCs trained them in skills or jobs traditionally assigned for women in their society (see Chapter 4) points to a similar (narrow and essentialist) understanding of feminism. FFCs stated that embracing traditionally female-assigned gender roles, norms and values in their families or communities helped their reintegration. As Jande explains:

> ...I focused on not being quarrelsome, [I] became peaceful and didn't challenge the men in my family, and did what was expected of me as a woman in the home... It was hard at first, but in the end, I got there... I also knew how womanly I was would be important if I was to get married... (Jande[61])

Jande's experience also points to another way we can understand the gendered nature of the personal reform that FFCs undertake. In saying that she stopped 'being quarrelsome', instead needing to be the source of peace, she points to the qualities and norms that have historically been understood as quintessential to femininity. More specifically, these qualities of being submissive, quiet, and peaceful – or put differently, the 'traditional feminine ideal of subservience, and acquiescence and self-restraint' (Coulter, 2009: 212) – are in direct contrast to the behaviour required of a combatant. Jande's assertion that her behaviour would determine whether she married is founded in the understanding that some men (or their families) wanted to marry submissive women. For FMCs/men, a submissive woman would mean that they regain some of the power or sense of masculinity lost with the end of the conflict. For families, a submissive daughter-in-law would align with traditional gender norms and values (Barth, 2002:25; Coulter, Persson and Utas, 2008: 35).

Beyond this, a few FFCs conveyed how their families or communities expressed doubt over their ability to perform the role of a homemaker or be feminine, and how these doubts affected

[61] 36-year-old FFC based in Makeni, interviewed on 26 November 2019.

their reintegration. These doubts were largely premised on families and communities understanding FFCs' prolonged absence from society, and having led lives that disregarded or did not observe the values and norms practised in that society. As such, FFCs would need to adjust to the acceptable values, morals and code of conduct of their community (Özerdem, 2012: 62). For FFCs that were unmarried mothers, this lack of understanding of the values and norms practised in that society was evidenced in their becoming mothers outside the responsibilities of marriage, and the rites and rituals accompanying motherhood or marriage within society (Burman and McKay. 2007: 319).

For FFCs recruited into the conflict as child soldiers, there was also the issue that, whilst they performed roles assigned to women in their society at the campsites (such as domestic chores, having sexual relations with the male combatants and raising children), they 'had missed girlhood developmental and cultural transitions' (Burman and McKay. 2007: 319) and their 'normal girlhood was inverted and distorted' (McKay, 2006). FFCs missed the community rites and rituals that would have assisted them from girlhood to womanhood. For some families or communities, the fact that these FFCs went through all these experiences without the guidance of other females from their families or communities – who understood the nuances of their culture and practices – meant that whatever training they had received was inadequate.

The fact that these roles had been assigned to, and practiced by, FFCs in the bush (thus the term *bush wives*) and not in towns and villages added a further element, only evident when unpacking the term *bush* and its cultural connotations. In Sierra Leone culture, the term *bush* refers to 'the wild, making it the opposite of rural life as it's normally lived. It helped depict the rural areas (villages or small towns) as domestic spaces whilst the bush or wild was undomesticated' (Jackson, 1977: 34). Any behaviours or roles – that might otherwise be associated with domesticated spaces – that were done in the *bush* were spoiled and not suitable for society. In

patriarchal societies, the challenge posed to traditional gender roles by the different positions that women/FFCs take on during conflict is perceived as a threat to social and cultural norms:

> The ideological rhetoric is often about 'restoring' or 'returning to' something associated with the status quo before the conflict, even if the change actually undermines women's rights and places women in a situation that is even more disadvantageous than it ever was in the past (Pankhurst, 2003:161).

Whilst returning to pre-conflict gender dynamics, norms and values might be a default for some families and communities – as that is their most recent reference to normality – the process of establishing what is 'normal' in a post-conflict environment is complex. There is no single definition of 'normal', because it is a subjective term/concept that changes over time, space and environment. At best, 'normal' is guided by principles that solicit a reorientation/disposition based on morals (Macek, 2009: 5 cited in Martin, 2016: 403) or ethics. For some, this is tied to religion, class, geographical location, gender or race; for others, it is the law, and for others still, it is what they believe as an individual or group. In every case, normality is the 'social processes in which the structures of the everyday environment are established, reproduced and negotiated' (Koloma Beck 2012, 53 cited in Martin, 2016: 403). In post-conflict environments, '[i]ndividuals do not 'return' to a previous 'normal' state but rather transition to a 'new normal' wherein war-related experiences become part of everyday realities and discourses' (Martin, 2016: 404). This 'new normal' point not only situates the social reintegration into the everyday, but shows that the everyday is an opportunity for norms, values and gender roles to be reconceptualised. At the same time, it acknowledges that there will always be different interpretations of normality based on one's experiences of the conflict – which in this instance speaks to the importance of everyone working together to establish new or to rebuild old relationships.

Therefore, we can see different types of reshaping and redefining of individual and group social *and* gender norms, roles, behaviour and values, that both FFCs and their families and communities need to embark upon for social reintegration – and how both are equally important to the process. Whilst not exhaustive of the Sierra Leone experience, the above also offers an insight into some of the challenges faced by FFCs who wanted to reshape gender dynamics in the post-conflict period. The role of social reintegration interventions for such FFCs would be to initiate/support structures and mechanisms that challenge the shaming or stigmatisation of FFCs who have transcended traditional gender norms and values during the conflict. Doing this would require families and communities to embrace alternative gendered practices that existed during the conflict, rather than to nullify them or treat them 'as temporary exceptions rather than challenges to established gender practices' (Parpart, 2016: 62). Not doing so would in many ways be a lost opportunity to 'rethink and reshape gender stereotypes and hierarchies' (MacKenzie, 2009: 258).

A good starting point for such a process would be to challenge the notion of 'returning to normality that imposes a hierarchical gendered order' (MacKenzie, 2016: 146) through the facilitation of dialogues and spaces at all social levels that encourage the reconceptualisation of gender norms, values and dynamics, especially those associated with women/FFCs. Following the feminist literature and critical veteran studies scholarship discussed earlier, a reconceptualising of gender norms, values and dynamics could be undertaken by making room for FFCs to occupy the liminal gender identity they find themselves encompassing at the end of a conflict. 'Liminality means that the status of individuals is socially and structurally ambiguous, neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention and ceremony' (Turner, 1969: 95 cited in Negewo-Oda and White, 2011: 164). An illustration of this would be Aminata's situation, where every day she takes on her traditionally assigned role in her family as a care provider, but every so often she takes on

the role that requires her to tap into her skills and experience as a soldier/combatant – when her support and advice is needed on security matters in the community. From a different perspective, embracing the notion of FFCs occupying this liminal gender identity supports the symbiotic relationship between social and economic reintegration, as redefining and reshaping how gender is conceptualised during social reintegration would encourage the same process for economic reintegration. An illustration of what this might look like for other FFCs in post-conflict environments would be for them to have access and opportunity to engage in economic reintegration training for careers in sectors that transcend traditional gender norms, i.e., are predominantly male.

5.3 Burden or provider?

> I am hardworking and have always made sure I have some money, no matter how small. This way I didn't need anyone to help me take care of myself when the war ended or to this day. In fact, family members are always asking me to support them with money and even my neighbours they ask me to support their *osusu*.[62] In doing *osusu*, I have been able to earn more money and people respect me... Because of this, no one dares to say anything to me about being in the bush. (Ramatu[63])

For some FFCs, positive social reintegration experiences were a result of being able to financially support themselves and/or their families, which speaks to the symbiotic relationship between economic and social reintegration. For Ramatu, her ability to financially provide for

[62] *Osusu* (also known as *isusu*) is a form of micro financial capital accumulation found in Africa and Latin America. In Sierra Leone it is where, for example, ten people put Le 5,000 in a pot and then one of the ten takes the resulting Le 50,000 for his or her own use, promising to put in Le 5,000 at the next group meeting to continue the process.
[63] 53-year-old FFC based in Jeru camp near Kenema, interviewed on 20 November 2019 and 11 January 2021.

herself and help support her family and community led to her feeling respect and acceptance; her family and community did not speak about or use her experience as a combatant in a negative way. Her status in the community is also evident in that people seek her out for help and want to do business with her instead of shunning or stigmatising her. The fact that having money informs the relationships and social standing Ramatu has in her society is arguably because

> There is dialectical relationship between material wealth and the quality of social relations in African countries. Women who have nothing and can provide nothing are often stigmatised and marginalised in the family. A woman with provision, on the other hand, is more likely to be treated well (Coulter, Persson and Utas, 2008: 38).

Coulter (2011) contextualises the intrinsic link between an ability to earn a living and the quality of her social relations, when she states that FFCs who had no means of earning a living or financially contributing to their household or family were stigmatised and marginalised, classed as a dependent or a burden. On the other hand, FFCs that had provisions were more likely to have positive social reintegration experiences; they are identified as a provider (Coulter, 2009: 194). This point is echoed by Rosetta when she states:

> My having money to take care of myself and others, especially my family, meant that they didn't bring up any unhappiness they had towards me because I was in the war… But I often saw that if you don't have money and you need help to eat or feed your *pikin*, they don't treat you well, and their anger always

> makes them talk bad to you and about you. To me, their insults always go back to me being in the bush… (Rosetta[64])

This speaks to the temporality that can exist in the relationship between economic and social reintegration. In stating the ill-treatment that Rosetta received when she could not contribute financially, she demonstrates that there is a willingness to overlook her wartime experiences as her current actions are benefitting her family and community. However, it is important to note that again there is tension (as referred to earlier in the section on gendered care responsibilities in Chapter 4) where there is potential for an emasculating effect, whereby men feel threatened by the new economic independence of women who had formerly been limited to a traditional role of caregiver/wife/mother and reliant on men for income. It is therefore plausible to see how in some instances, women might feel that in order to protect their relationships they can earn some money but not too much – and if they overearn, they falsely declare in public settings that their husband or boyfriend earns more. This tension notwithstanding, we must also note the caveat that the symbiotic relationship between economic and social reintegration is only positive if the economic reintegration is long-term and not short-term:

> My grandmother initially received a package to support with my care as at the time, I was classed as a child soldier. She passed on this package to my Aunty when she relocated me to Makeni. All was well at the start, but once the money ran out and the further assistance that was promised did not arrive, they were insulting me, saying that I was a child of the bush and I was bringing misfortune to their family because of the evil I had done during the war… The only way I would get peace is when I brought money back home

[64] 63-year-old FFC based in Bo, interviewed on 19 November 2019 and 11 January 2021.

> from the petty trading I was doing… They were only kind to me when I could help them with money… (Seratu[65])

Seratu's experience also brings in another dimension, as it points to the problematic nature of reinsertion[66] payments for FFCs who were classed as minors at the time that the packages were given to families. Sometimes, families and/or communities had mixed / ulterior motives for taking in a FFC; the driver was financial assistance rather than a desire to support the minor. In these instances, it is clear that reinsertion packages are only helpful if accompanied by longer-term efforts, such as economic support paid gradually, or education or training that would support a sustainable income (Jackson and Beswick, 2018: 166) (see also the economic reintegration discussion in Chapter 4, referring to the need for training to provide sustainable income rather than a temporary solution).

Clearly, the temporal/volatile nature of the positive symbiotic relationship between economic and social reintegration is not unique to FFCs. For example, Bolten, 2012 writes of how, for some FMCs, settling down and making strides towards social reintegration was dependent on their ability to contribute financially to their household or their communities. Once the 'financial flush of reintegration' (Bolten, 2012: 501) wore off, and FMCs couldn't secure a new means of earning a living to support their household, then sometimes their wives, girlfriends or family members abandoned them, and 'civilian willingness to integrate them – even for their own purposes – vanished' (Bolten, 2012: 501).

However, there is an important difference in the experiences of FMCs and FFCs, in that whilst in some families or communities, an FFC's ability to financially support herself or her family

[65] 32-year-old FFC based in Makeni, interviewed on 27 November 2019.
[66] see definition in introduction.

is praised, it is simultaneously frowned upon, and in some instances resisted, particularly if the woman is seen to become too independent / earn more than men. Ultimately, women are also expected to be care providers, an understanding that is grounded in historical and patriarchal views that males should occupy the breadwinner role. In contrast, FMCs seeking financial freedom sit on the opposite side of these social norms and, as explored in Chapter 4, they are encouraged and expected to be the financial providers. These dynamics can lead to tension[67] if women/FFCs become breadwinners or are employed and their partner is not (see Chapter 4).

The discussion on the relationship between economic and social reintegration cannot be concluded without unpacking how this symbiotic relationship can be an outcome of or exist within negative attitudes, behaviours or environments which can be detrimental to women's livelihoods, as it can lead to unhealthy relationships – as Mariatu explains below:

> Sometimes men think that they can treat you anyhow because they provide for you and your family. Even having a *pikin* for him will not stop him treating you bad.[68] When I told my family that I was leaving my boyfriend because he was not treating me well because he was caring for me, they were pleading with me to stay with him… Once I left him, and I was no longer able to support them, the insults about me having been with men in the bush started… yet when they were eating the food no one was saying such… they were giving me the respect they give a married woman. (Mariatu[69])

This also points to the hypocrisy that exists within some families and societies when it comes to the behaviour that women are encouraged to put up with in the name of receiving financial

[67] Chapter 4 specifically points to the violence that can occur.
[68] When asked to elaborate on what 'bad' meant, Mariatu went on to explain that it was physical abuse.
[69] 34-year-old FFC based in Bo, interviewed on 19 November 2019 and 26 December 2020.

support. This is evident in that Mariatu was encouraged to stay in an abusive relationship so that her family could continue to receive financial support; in turn, she would remain part of the family. The fact that she had a child with her boyfriend means that this version of sexual intercourse outside marriage was condoned/encouraged, while her (presumed) sexual relations in the bush were the source of insults.

Coulter (2011) notes that for FFCs who sought financial support from boyfriends or lovers,[70] the families' response to such activities after the conflict depended on the family's situation and position in the social hierarchy. This is due to the fact, in instances where the FFC is the only individual providing financial assistance, a change in that arrangement would be detrimental to the livelihood of the whole family; however, where the FFC was not the sole breadwinner or the financial support was not consistent, family members were more likely to bring up an FFC's participation in the conflict when expressing their disappointment (Coulter, 2009: 202). Whilst it was not the case for Mariatu, one can see how FFCs in similar situations might pursue relationships where they exchanged sexual favours for financial support. It has been said that in some post-conflict environments, 'prostitution may be a woman's best economic option' (Bennet et al., 1995; Highgate 2004: 43 cited in Coulter, Persson and Utas, 2008: 38).

Whilst not exhaustive of the Sierra Leone experience for FFCs, the above section reiterates the symbiotic relationship between social and economic reintegration outlined in Chapter 4. In unpacking experiences where families and societies continuously favoured economic independence/the ability to financially contribute to the family, household or community as a prerequisite to social reintegration, the section echoes Ozederm (2012), who argues that there is a need for social reintegration to be given the same prominence or priority as economic

[70] An arrangement which is different from prostitution and widely accepted in Sierra Leone communities.

reintegration. By examining the precarious positions in which FFCs may find themselves – including threats to their own physical and emotional well-being through abusive relationships – support for the need for social reintegration becomes clear.

In evidencing how that the symbiotic relationship between economic and social reintegration can be temporary or volatile, this section demonstrates how the relationship can also be negative. Above all, it emphasises how not being included in economic reintegration programmes that ensure a sustainable income at the end of the training can be detrimental to FFCs, not just in their ability to earn a living but also their social reintegration.

5.4 Conclusion

This chapter has developed a nuanced understanding of FFCs' social reintegration experiences, examining three factors identified as playing a significant role in the process: the violence that was enacted by or on FFCs; reshaping and redefining identities and relationships; and the symbiotic relationship between economic and social reintegration. The first section delved into experiences of violence from three different angles: a) the violence perpetrated by the FFCs; b) sexual violence experienced by FFCs; and c) the violence to which families or communities were exposed. Whilst FMCs can relate to all three, the chapter demonstrated that the violence perpetrated by the FFCs, and sexual violence experienced by FFCs present additional challenges for FFCs because of their gender, which leads to their experiencing gender-specific marginalisation. The section did this by interrogating the historical 'binary opposition between peaceful women and violent men' (Utas, 2005:405). Overall, the section demonstrated how social reintegration could also be an avenue to advance gender equality, as it can help families and communities to reconceptualise how they understand gender and violence in conflict, through interventions such as sensitisation programmes.

The second section asserted that for social reintegration to be achieved, FFCs, their families and/or communities both play an important role in reshaping and redefining societal values and norms on an individual and group basis and must mutually engage in the process. For FFCs, this reshaping and redefining process involved practising agency and adjusting behaviour to reflect the communities they have settled into. For the families and communities, the reshaping and redefining involved adjusting mindsets and behaviours towards FFCs, a process which would support reconciliation. This point was illustrated through the different ways that families and communities repurposed processes for reconciliation that existed in pre-conflict times such as religious cleansing ceremonies or intervention by a community leader.

In unpacking how FFCs reshape and redefine themselves to reintegrate into their communities, the section also argues that gender brings an additional dimension. This is because FFCs underwent a redefining and reshaping process that focuses on ensuring they adhere to their traditionally assigned gender roles. This is a process which can be challenging for FFCs who experienced gains with regards to gender equality during the conflict that they wanted to maintain afterwards. In this instance, social reintegration interventions were identified as key to facilitating how gender, gender roles and values are reconceptualised in post-conflict environments. In doing this, the chapter advanced one of the main arguments of this thesis, which is that post-conflict reintegration programmes need to interrogate gender differences (in terms of conflict experiences, expectations of what their post-conflict realities will be and the challenges they will face) before and during the conflict, as well as in the post-conflict period.

The third section argued that there exists a symbiotic relationship between economic reintegration and social reintegration. This point was demonstrated through the experiences of FFCs, where their economic status (breadwinner or burden) informed positive or negative social reintegration experiences with their families or communities. It was also demonstrated by the fact that, when prospects of economic reintegration aren’t forthcoming, some FFCs have to

resort to activities or relationships for financial support and don't have financial independence, either of which means that they revert to pre-conflict gender norms, relying on men for financial support, or resuming roles in the private sphere that fit into traditional gender norms, roles and values assigned to women. In doing this, the section supported one of this thesis's arguments: economic and social reintegration have a symbiotic relationship, and both interventions need to be pursued with the same amount of effort and commitment.

The next chapter continues to interrogate the reintegration experiences of FFCs, focusing on the role of silence and voice. Examining the role of silence offers an alternative approach to that already offered in Chapters 4 and 5 – where FFC participation in both economic and social reintegration programmes requires them to verbalise their experiences, or publicly own their combatant identity – and elaborates on some of the assertions in Chapters 4 and 5 with regards to experiences of shame and stigma resulting from FFCs' conflict experiences being known to family or communities.

Chapter 6: Silence and Voice

Chapter 4 demonstrated how, for FFCs to participate in economic reintegration, they must officially identify and provide evidence that they had been a combatant – a process which would be done at the disarmament stage of DDR. In this process, FFCs had to reveal combatant identity and experiences recognised/acknowledged as fitting the combatant narrative, as defined in the structures for implementing post-conflict programmes. Chapter 5 highlighted how FFCs sharing conflict experiences can support their social reintegration. Doing so was essential in identifying the support and mechanisms that combatants, families and communities needed to rebuild their social relationships, and reshape and redefine gender norms, values and relations. Both chapters also revealed how reintegration (economic or social) requires FFCs to share their combatant identity and experiences within a specific timeframe and to a particular audience. As such, both chapters demonstrated the value placed on FFCs verbalising their combatant identity and conflict experiences and actively participating in UN led reintegration programs or community based social reintegration programmes or activities.

Chapter 5, however also revealed that some FFCs employed silence to aid their social reintegration, as they felt doing so would prevent the stigma or shame that would be levelled at them if they revealed their identity or experiences. Given that employing silence meant that some FFCs couldn't actively participate in official economic and social reintegration programmes, this chapter unpacks their experiences in greater detail, and asks: ***What can FFCs' employment of voice or silence reveal about their reintegration experiences?***

The chapter starts by addressing how, in post-conflict environments, silence must be conceptualised as a *language* by examining how FFCs employed it. The chapter explores this first by analysing the experiences of those using silence because they couldn't find the words to convey/relay their experiences, as they were too painful to articulate or verbalise. It then goes

on to unpack how some FFCs employed silence due to external pressures from their families and communities to avoid stigma and shame. Finally, the section discusses how silence can be understood as a language used to communicate resistance and empowerment.

Following this, the chapter unpacks how time[71] and audience[72] can inform FFCs' transition from employing silence to voice, as they share conflict experiences or combatant identity. It is revealed that both time and audience can assist the transition from using silence to voice as a language, without invalidating or relegating silence as the powerless or uninformative other.

The chapter concludes that how voice and silence are conceptualised in literature, practice and locally can determine how FFCs' conflict experiences are understood, and ultimately, what support FFCs receive, especially with reintegration. It also concludes that reintegration interventions have a positive role to play in FFCs' lived experiences, primarily if they are implemented for an extended period – this is a point which speaks to the importance of sequencing (ordering interventions) and flexibility (when people can engage) in programme design. When FFCs transition from silence to voice, they also deserve to receive the same psychological, social and economic support, in the same way as those that engaged in the programmes earlier in the post-conflict period also receive this support.

6.1 Silence as a language

> In the years after the war ended, I didn't speak about what I had gone through … I also know that even if someone had asked me, I would not have the words

[71] In this research, the time period under consideration spans 18 years (from the point when the conflict ended and reintegration programmes started, until the year that the first interviews were conducted (2019)). FFCs stated that they employed silence for an undefined number of years after the conflict ended; the transition to voice was over a continuous period.

[72] FFCs didn't name specific individuals/groups as the target audience, as they made equal reference to the reception that different people or groups of people (or audiences) would have to their narratives.

> to use… trying [to] caused pain in my chest that was too much... All that I did, that was done to me… all that I saw… I could see it all whenever my mind wandered or closed my eyes… (Khadija[73])

Khadija's statement presents the first way in which some FFCs employed internally-driven silence – she didn't have or couldn't find the words to convey her conflict experiences. For Khadija, any efforts to verbalise her experiences caused her physical pain and emotional distress. This assertion can be situated in what Butalia (2000) conceptualises as the 'unspeakability' of pain; Scarry (1985) and Daniel (1991) use the term the 'unshareability of pain'. Both can be defined as when pain manifests itself by rendering the individual unable to express those experiences using words. Gendron (2011) provides more insight into the unspeakability or unshareability of pain as moments that occur when individuals are unable to express violent or traumatic events in known terms or words, undergoing a crippling effect every time they attempt to do so (Gendron, 2011: 2). In effect, it is an internal battle with self: a struggle and a longing to articulate experiences of violence which one has witnessed or perpetrated but being unable to attach words (Bakare – Yusuf, 1997 cited in Motsemme, 2004: 915). This notion of an internal battle is particularly relevant in the above instances, as FFCs view their silence as a state that they didn't actively choose, but instead one that was forced upon them by their bodies and, to some extent, their minds.

The unshareability of pain manifests itself as trauma – the experiences do 'not simply resist verbal language but actively destroy it, bringing about an immediate reversion to a state anterior to language' (Scarry, 1985: 4). Hoffman captures some of the ways that this state anterior to language can be identified: it is when one exhibits sounds in nightmares, or utterances, through

[73] 44-year-old female based in Kissi Town, interviewed on 18 November 2019.

sighs, tears, acute aches, facial expressions, gestures, body language, and haptics, as well as verbal language through proxemics and paralinguistics such as loudness or tone of voice (Hoffman, 2004: 9, 10).

This state anterior to language applies to Seratu's and Meru's experiences:

> I used to cry and howl whenever people spoke of the war... the pain was very sharp... it seems like yesterday... It's only now that words come with my crying. (Seratu[74])

> My children were born after the war… They don't know the details, but they know that the war had not been good to me… it is all over my body… I have many scars. It is in my dreams as my cry or screams wake them. They can see the sorrow in my eyes when I go quiet or go into myself when people mention the war. (Meru[75])

Khadija adds, 'even if someone asked me, I would not have the words to use', and Bea asks, 'how could I talk when myself I was still trying to understand what had happened?'. These comments suggest that just changing the environment or providing external support to assist FFCs in verbalising their experiences would be ineffective. This is because it is clear that an individual's ability to convey thoughts or feelings through words is not 'a natural impulse for all human beings' (Motsemme, 2004: 915). As such, FFC silence must be understood as more than just about this group's lack of a platform or person to speak out to; rather, it is a state of involuntary impairment. Sylvester (2018) contextualises this, stating the need to be cautious when assigning importance to voice or giving people a platform to speak, as it implies that

[74] 32-year-old FFC based in Makeni, interviewed on 28 November 2019.
[75] 38-year-old based in Bo, interviewed on 26 November 2019.

something can always be articulated. This gives rise to an understanding that 'to speak is to be visible, recognised, willing and affecting with silence embodying each of the opposites' (Sylvester, 2018: 20) – and potentially leading to women/FFCs being seen as having, or wanting, something to say, but *failing to do so because their environment restricts them*. Instead, this chapter understands this *lack* of voice experience as 'women articulating their language of pain and grief through the language of silence' (Motsemme, 2004: 910).

In reinterpreting silence as language used to convey thoughts, feelings and experiences, it becomes an alternative means of expression, and just as important as verbal articulation (Parpart and Parashar, 2018). In this way, we go beyond labelling silence as the opposite of voice, and challenge valorisation of verbal language as the 'primary means through which a person can enter into the social and intellectual life of the community, and ultimately into connection with themselves' (Motsemme, 2004: 915). This offers the opportunity of going beyond seeing those who can't express themselves through voice as helpless or without agency.

Whilst some FFCs transitioned to a space where they could articulate their experiences, some noted that they also had to contend with employing silence because of their families, communities or leaders and other FCs – what Selimovic (2020) terms silence resulting from external factors. One reason FFCs identified as leading to this imposed silence was the fear/threat of stigmatisation (a point also explored in Chapter 5):

> In the years after the war ended, I didn't speak about what I had gone through because we were also afraid that people would treat me differently if they knew… (Khadija[76])

[76] 44-year-old female based in Kissi Town, was interviewed on 18 November 2019.

Some of the experiences above point to FFCs' families and/or communities being complicit in encouraging or enforcing silence, to the point that FFCs didn't share their combatant identity or experiences of violence with them. Whilst in most instances, the stigma/shame was directed at the individual FFC, stigma was sometimes also extended to their families, who were ostracised or marginalised by their communities. As Chapter 5 details, such ostracisation rests on gendered understandings of feminine 'morality' or 'chastity' and the role of men to protect them/it. When there is failure to protect women, the masculinity of the men is brought into question (Pankhurst, 2009: 156). In these instances, social expectation can therefore mean that women/FFCs' stories remain untold, and silence is imposed on women under the guise of a strategy that protects shame and stigma from loved ones (Selimovic, 2020: 10).

For leaders and combatants from warring factions, encouraging or enforcing silence on FFCs' conflict experiences is considered in the larger political context and public strategies that 'define the space of what can be said and what must be withheld… as part of the politics of selective memory in legitimating a new hegemonic narrative, or in more fragmented ways promoting conflicting narratives' (Eastmond and Selimovic, 2012: 506). As explained in Chapter 5, this narrative can be applied to Sierra Leone when some factions denied the existence of FFCs amongst their groups, or where FFCs were labelled as 'victims' rather than combatants – both of which contributed to limited FFC engagement with DDR. In post-conflict Sierra Leone, some national leaders enforced/encouraged this silence as a strategy, identifying that discussing conflict experiences that delve into acts of violence or sexual violence was a spoiler of peace. In these instances, 'women's silence is often treated as a pre-condition for the fragile peace to hold' (Davies et al., 2016: 467).

Feminist researchers such as Enloe (1993, 2000), Cockburn (2010) and Sylvester (2013) have written on gendered silence and the historical absences, limited or marginalised accounts of women's conflict narratives. Moreover, they have shown how, in post-conflict environments,

this silence often interacts with patriarchal structures to produce gendered power relations where women are subordinate. When it comes to sites of transitional justice, such as truth commissions, feminists have revealed the deep and pervasive gendered silences that lead to the marginalisation of women and how their experiences can become 'empty and static subject positions that don't fully reflect various roles and experiences of FFCs… women are never seen as active agents in the resistance to injustice, just passive victims' (Selimovic, 2020: 4).

In capturing these experiences and analysing them in this manner, this section contributes to feminist scholarship which analyses the many ways women/FFCs can employ and experience silence (see Parpart and Parashar, 2018; Sylvester, 2018; Parpart, 2010; Selimovic, 2020). Burman et al identify the public and political silencing of women as detrimental to gender equality and an aspect of female subordination, in the same vein as exploitation of female labour and the devaluation of female domestic roles (Burman et al, 2001: 73-74). This section has also evidenced the importance of ensuring that the context needs to be considered when discussing women/FFCs' silence. Ligiéro et al. support this assertion, stressing how demarcated gender roles and practices can combine with cultural norms and expectations to silence women about sexual violence (Ligiéro et al., 2009: 73).

Whilst the above has arguably demonstrated how silence can be disempowering, can be imposed on FFCs/women and can have negative consequences for FFCs, it is also important to acknowledge that 'the notion of imposed silences detracts from the possible utility of silence, as well as from its agentic dimensions' (Johnson, 2011: 60 cited in Clark, 2020: 357). Parpart, for example, discusses silence as 'empowered choices/agency for women in an often masculinist, dangerous and conflict-ridden world' (Parpart, 2010: 1). In doing this, she advances that voice cannot always be equated with agency and empowerment, and silence with oppression and disempowerment. Instead, she asks for a broadened understanding of women's silence as 'in some contexts, silence can be a more potent form of resistance than loud voice'

(Tappo and Parashar, 2018: 124). This is especially as silence can be 'a shared understanding that need not be voiced, and in this sense, silence can be a form of power, and the need to speak, to voice, represents a loss of power' (Fivush, 2010: 89 cited in Tappo and Parashar, 2018:124). As such it is important that some women's silence be conceptualised as a strategy they employ to shift power in their interpersonal relationships or to resist authority at different societal levels. In this research, employing silence as resistance to authority is evident, in that Titi deliberately chooses not to share her conflict experiences with any figures of authority, as she explains below:

> It no be so that some men will use my story to push the story they want about women like me and what we have been through to advance their own agenda in politics... Politicians have come and asked how they can help and even have us join their campaign and poster and still do nothing to assist us when they win election… So now I don't just open my mouth for them… (Titi[77])

In many ways, her doing this is Titi's way of preventing her private grief and personal experiences from being 'enlisted in a greater collective project. Thus hegemonic discourses may be questioned through silence' (Selimovic, 2018). Titi's desire to employ silence can also be understood as being motivated by a desire to keep her memories to herself, to ensure no one can misconstrue or capitalise on personal testimony. This is important, as there is historical evidence that 'testimonies once told publicly become a commodity' (Castillejo-Cuellar, 2005: 159-180 cited in Selimovic, 2020: 11).

[77] 55-year-old female based in Kissi Town, interviewed on 18 November 2019.

Silence as resistance is also evident in narratives where silence is employed as a means of reclaiming power by a victim from an assailant, as Adama explains:

> I will not give those men the satisfaction of knowing that what they did to me changed me for the rest of my life… Talking about what happened to me means their faces and their acts still occupy space in my mind and I will not allow that… I am more than the bad things that happened to me…(Adama[78])

The above is also an example of an FFC whose silence was a way of making peace with the act and withholding power from the person who committed the act against them, in terms of the perpetrator knowing that the act psychologically or physically affected and might still affect the individual (George and Kent, 2017: 522-527). This experience can also be conceptualised as their trying to ensure that their experience doesn't contribute to:

> an over-emphasis on the relationship between shame and silence which reinforces a fate worse than death perspective that casts survivors of sexual violence as permanently marked, polluted and damaged by their experiences and simultaneously reinforces patriarchal regulatory codes over their survival (George and Kent, 2017: 522).

It is also important to note that the 'worse than death' narrative ignores some women/FFCs' efforts to redefine 'their exposure to sexual violence in more agential ways, for instance, as a transaction to ensure their survival or access to essential goods, [or] protection for their families' (George and Kent, 2017: 522) – as was the case for Mariatu (in Chapter 5), where she stated that she took a boyfriend after being raped by him, to protect herself from further attacks.

[78] 35-year-old FFC based in Kenema, interviewed on 20 November 2019 and 11 January 2021.

More than that, I would also argue that silence about sexual violence can in some instances be an *expression of resistance*, in that it means narratives about women and FFCs' conflict experiences don't just focus on these acts, but that there is attention given to other enabling silenced aspects (Clark, 2020: 370). This is especially the case in this context, as post-conflict programmes and transitional justice initiatives (especially the TRC) tend to focus on the stories of suffering, rather than strategies of coping and positive adaptation, which leads to 'decontextualised and diluted narrativity' (Ryan, 2010: 317). As Lynch notes, in TRCs, the focus on a victim narrative for women (or, in this research, FFCs) can lead to an overly homogenous account of their experiences (Lynch, 2018: 185), which ignores the interconnected social categorisations of age, class, and ethnicity, and reveals nothing about the relationships between women and men (Cornwall 1997: 8 and 9 cited in Lynch, 2018: 185).

At the same time, it means that experiences like that of Adama, below, are not prominently featured, as her combatant experience is not one that only fits the victim narrative:

> … because I was educated and responsible for a lot of administration and communication between the team. My work was very important to how the leaders of RUF strategised their attacks. (Adama[79])

Adama's experience dovetails with feminist arguments about the need for scholarship and practice to also include narratives by FFCs, as doing so reveals the different positions that FFCs may occupy in conflict, and what is marginalised/excluded when the dominant narrative is foregrounded. Moreover, strides would be made to 'illuminate the dynamic dimensions of the relationship between victimhood and agency' (Rosland, 2009: 298). This point was put across in Chapter 2, citing feminists like Sjoberg and Gentry (2007), who argue that women/FFCs can

[79] 35-year-old FFC based in Kenema, interviewed on 20 November 2019 and 11 January 2021.

also be perpetrators of violence (sexual violence included). This point is also supported by the fact that focusing on the victimhood of women/FFCs leads to gender silencing for men's experiences that don't fit the hero or protector narrative, because it promotes 'social ideals about gender' (Weiss, 2010: 277). Focusing on the victim narrative for women when it comes to sexual violence 'can contribute to silencing men and boys who have suffered sexual violence or abuse' (O'Leary and Barber, 2008, cited in Clark, 2020: 362).

Silence as an expression of FFCs' agency is also evident in this research, in that it is identified as empowering. For some FFCs, this was because they employed it as a coping strategy for the precarious every day. They engaged in silence in empowering ways to communicate respect and trust in everyday social interactions. This was evident in Chapter 4, when some FFCs shared how they had to adapt their behaviour once they returned to their communities to ensure that they aligned with civilian values and norms, even when they disagreed. Locating silence as a strategy for coping with the precarious everyday requires us to consider the cultural context. Parpart and Parashar (2018) ask us to consider how gender norms, values and relations, and masculinities and femininities are conceptualised in each context. This is particularly important, as women are not usually invited to / do not often speak in public forums in many parts of the world. In these instances, we need to see past this disempowerment, and see that in these spaces women also exercise some agency, by employing strategic performances that might go against their conceptualisations of gender roles to ensure that they remain part of their family or community (Parpart and Parashar, 2018: 2).

The same could be said when FFCs reshape and redefine their behaviour and interactions to fit into the gender norms, values and relations of their society, contributing to efforts towards creating new normality. In doing this, they have actively facilitated the restoration of the social fabric; the ability to form and sustain relationships is important to a viable local life (Eastmond and Selimovic, 2012: 502). For some FFCs, supporting the restoration of social fabric through

a return to gender norms, values and relations in their society meant that they had to put their role as mother and caregivers before their own needs, as Meru explains below:

> I want to deal with this thing so I can live my life, and I also don't want my children to take these bad ways onto themselves ... I want to share, but not with them, as the things that happened to me are my own to carry. (Meru,[80])

Experiences such as Meru's arguably demonstrate what Das (2000) defines as 'women's work': the efforts or strategies that women employ to '(re) create the normal' within families and communities that are experiencing or coming out of violence, enacted in the realm of the everyday and the private space (cited in Motsemme, 2004: 920). This is because Meru's experience corresponds with how 'women's work can be found in testimonies where silence may have been used by mothers to create the illusion of stability, consistency and matter-of-factness particularly for their children to maintain some kind of moral order in their homes' (Motsemme, 2004: 921). This last point also speaks to the emotional and affective labour required (Hochschild, 1983) by women/FFCs for the continuation of society and social reintegration. This labour, as discussed in Chapter 4, leads to depletion through social reproduction (DSR) as defined by Rai, Hoskyns and Thomas (2014). More than anything, these efforts show that social strategies of silence can also reveal 'the interdependency between people in many communities and the need to maintain and nurture social relations and reciprocal arrangements, sometimes as a means of survival' (Eastmond and Selimovic 2012: 504).

In Sierra Leone, for some families and communities, silence was part of everyday informal or formal ritual events, which held significant meaning reflecting local cultural frameworks

[80] 38-year-old based in Bo, interviewed on 26 November 2019.

employed by FCs and civilians during the conflict. Silence was promoted and practised through *social forgetting*, a process which encouraged members of society not to dwell on their conflict experiences but to focus on the concerns of the future. The sensitisation programmes run as part of the social reintegration interventions arguably supported this by fostering forgiveness between FCs and civilians (Ginifer, 2003: 45-47). As such, both processes were instrumental in dissuading people from pursuing retributive justice by themselves, given that there were no local or national prosecutions for war crimes alongside the Special Court of Sierra Leone.

Whilst this section shared how FFCs employment of silence can be imposed on them by external factors, this section also revealed that silence can be used to communicate, and is a language that can be equally powerful as voice. This was evident in that for some women/FFCs, silence was enabling and was a language that they conceptualised or used to convey resistance and/or empowerment. In these instances, silence was used to challenge, reject, validate, or discredit narratives or acts. As such, the section highlighted that gendered and socioeconomic or cultural dynamics must be understood, in order for us to fully unpack FFCs' silence in post-conflict environments.

6.2 Time and audience

> I was so good at managing myself around people that, at some point, I thought those things happened to someone else… but as time went on, it got too tiring… I lived a lie because I never fully shared who I was or what I had been through… I realised that my silence was no longer helping me … I

> started sharing my own… it was hard, but it was good not to pretend or hide anymore. (Fatmata[81])

Fatmata's assertion provides insights into her transition from employing silence to voice and how time was a factor in that process. It reveals how concealing her combatant identity/conflict experiences affected Fatmata's well-being, and she revisited her decision to conceal her identity. In this instance, revealing her identity – an act that she once viewed negatively – became positive as time progressed. More than that, her experience supports the argument made in the previous section that silence and voice can have equally positive and negative outcomes for the same individual, and experiences of either or both don't invalidate the other.

Experiences of transitioning from employing silence to voice have been explored by scholars, such as Branscombe et al. (2011), Schnur (2004) and Vrij, Nunkoosing, Paterson et al. (2002), who suggest that whilst concealing one's combatant identity reduces discrimination or stigma, it can have negative consequences for the self in the long run (cited in Cuénoud González & Clémence, 2019: 945). Newheiser and Barreto (2014) argue that these negative consequences manifest in persistent feelings of unbelonging, while Major (2006) argues that it can lead to high psychological distress. Employing a strategy where FFCs constantly navigate how much they reveal about their conflict experiences means they expend much energy towards controlling their behaviour, lies and interactions (Barreto et al., 2006 and Smart and Wegner, 1999 cited in Cuénoud González & Clémence, 2019: 945). These sentiments were expressed by a few FFCs in Chapter 5, when discussing the reshaping and redefining they had to go through in their effort towards social reintegration.

[81] 40-year-old FFC based in Makeni, interviewed on 27 November 2019.

Fatmata's catharsis, which came with sharing her conflict experiences after time had passed, was also expressed by Seratu:

> Some people spent many years after the war talking about the war with their families... but for me, it was too early. I was not ready... I'm not sure if talking helped them, but now I know it helps me unburden the load I carry in my heart because I sometimes have visions... but I no get chance to talk that often... thank you for caring enough about my story. (Seratu[82])

Hayner supports this point:

> Most studies of healing from political violence measure the positive effects of psychological support over some time; they show that when victims are given a safe and supportive environment to talk about their suffering, most eventually see positive results. Typical symptoms of repressed trauma, such as nightmares, emotional problems and sleeplessness, often recede. (Hayner, 2010: 147)

On the other hand, it is also important to acknowledge that healing through talking is not new to these FFCs; it was widely practised in different communities when the conflict ended. In some Temne-speaking regions, when FCs returned home, they were only allowed to speak about the conflict experiences publicly as part of the confession and offering process, where they were asked to tell their truth, before they participated in group rituals or church ceremonies to cleanse them of their past and to reconnect them with God and their ancestors, and in turn their communities and families (Shaw, 2005: 9). In encouraging the FCs to be truthful to ensure

[82] 32-year-old FFC based in Makeni, interviewed on 27 November 2019.

complete confession and repentance, local mechanisms were used to promote healing through talking. In this instance, and unlike the TRC, this was done in the intimacy of a community with family members and no outsiders. It is clear from this that, whilst FFCs didn't state that they would like to share their experiences with specific individuals, they understood the concept of healing through talking. Their ability to share their conflict experiences many years later is also a testament to the fact that communities within Sierra Leonean society practised forgetting, where 'they didn't erase personal memories, but they contained them in a form that would enable them to recover their lives' (Shaw, 2007: 194).

Whilst all the experiences above speak to an individual's catharsis (through employing voice and sharing experiences / revealing combatant identity), these cathartic effects also extended to their families and communities.

> I know that it was painful for me to talk about what happened and it was also painful to hear what others went through … I remember crying and comforting each person but we all felt better for removing the weight of our sorrows and pain. As my mother always says a burden shared is a burden halved and it is true for my family… Sharing helped us heal and become closer as a family because we supported each other better because we did that. (Aisha[83])

The above also speaks to the fact that in some instances, silence 'is detrimental to social and individual healing in countries emerging from violent conflict, a view backed up by the psychomedical discourse on war trauma, which underlines the necessity of victims speaking out for the healing process to be useful' (Eastmond and Selimovic, 2012: 503). In placing such

[83] 40-year-old FFC based in Bo, interviewed on 18 November 2019 and 27 December 2020.

importance on transparent disclosure as an essential element of intergroup reconciliation, one can see how public truth-telling / the sharing of conflict experiences / combatant identities is promoted alongside the social reintegration process (Flournoy & Pan, 2002; Staub, 2006 cited in Cuénoud González and Clémence, 2019: 953).

There is also a need to appreciate that 'prevalent and systematic concealment can contribute to the maintenance of negative representations about the combatants even after the peace process, thus perpetuating their discrimination' (Cuénoud González and Clémence, 2019: 953). This is because, in the same way that sharing conflict experiences/combatant identity can lead to catharsis, it can also help with reconciliation. Moreover, given that acceptance, as it is conceptualised within social reintegration literature (specifically reconciliation), requires all concerned parties to present themselves 'without concealment or simulations' (Schnabel Nadler, 2008 and Schnabel et al., 2009 cited in Cuénoud González and Clémence, 2019: 953), concealing one's combatant identity or conflict experiences is therefore not reflective of that spirit. This is mainly because concealment means FCs' families or communities are not fully informed about the individual they accept back into their community.

In transitional justice literature, silence in these instances has often been understood as a form of denial detrimental to the reconciliation process. Talking and revelations can 'give rise to gender-specific needs that are unlikely to be addressed without the participation of women' (Bell and O'Rourke 2007: 30 cited in Lynch, 2018: 187). In this vein, I agree with Cuénoud González & Clémence, who argue that 'as long as the three-quarters of the demobilised combatants have to conceal their former identity and their past to be accepted, we cannot talk about a real reintegration, and it is unlikely that a reconciliation process can begin' (2019: 953).

Besides demonstrating the role of time in the transition from silence to voice, Seratu and Khadija's experiences also point to the importance of their audience's reception. Both indicated

that they still don't get opportunities to share their experiences with those around them. This inability to share can be understood as an instance of what Shaw (2005) refers to as 'social forgetting'. Social forgetting discourages public discussions about conflict experiences, as doing so is seen as encouraging the return of the conflict. Instead, families are encouraged to only discuss conflict experiences inside their homes; this directive is enforced by community leaders, individuals, and families, to encourage communities to get on with their lives (Shaw, 2005: 9). The lack of opportunities to share conflict experiences may be explained by different family and community members having internalised the practice of not speaking about them outside their homes, which was encouraged by some community leaders. As such, the fact that Seratu and Khadija (and all the FFCs in this research) were talking to me shows how, with time, some FFCs abandoned the notion of not speaking about their conflict experiences with an audience outside of their communities. This shows that any practice of truth-telling needs to provide long-term therapy opportunities for those who want it, not just one-off *ad hoc* moments (see Hayner, 2010: 147) but in the future. FFCs may want to engage in such processes many years after the conflict concluded, as Khadija explains:

> I still have nightmares... I see everything in my sleep, and I have no one to talk to about this, because most people want to forget the war. But how can I forget when I live and sleep with what happened in the war...? Talking to you takes me back there, but I welcome it because I feel I have eased myself by sharing all this. (Khadija[84])

Khadija's experience points to the lack of an audience regarding people around her. However, I would also argue that, even if support is given, it would benefit her if the audience were *active*

[84] 44-year-old female based in Kissi Town, interviewed on 18 November 2019.

listeners. This is because the way the listener interacts with the speaker (in terms of the questions they ask, the manner, tone and effort they put into that interaction) informs the answers that will be offered. At the same time, the listener needs to cognisant of how, why and what is being said (voice) or not being said (silence). This point applies to public *and* intimate private interactions, because both involve some level of performativity by the respondent. After all, 'neither politics nor performance can take place without actors who perform and spectators who receive, evaluate and react to these actions' (Rai and Reinelt, 2014: 1). As such, an audience that is willing to listen attentively and react to what is being shared in a supportive manner can be influential in how much information is transferred and/or how transformative that process can be for the respondent.

This supports the argument that time is often a factor in FFCs' shift from silence to voice, insofar as it provides them the opportunity to pause to process their experiences and feelings, self-reflect on what it means to them, and identify how, when and with whom they want to communicate their conflict experiences (Front, 2008 cited in Gendron, 2011: 3). It demonstrates the importance of acknowledging the 'temporality of silence that interplays with changing spaces for agency of the subject, especially the move from silence to voice' (Selimovic, 2020: 13). In other words, what might be unspeakable at one point in time can cease to be unspeakable in another time; and it takes a combination of factors to ensure that the space the speaker occupies is conducive for them to transition from employing silence to voice (Selimovic, 2020: 13). Eastmond reiterates the temporality of silence, suggesting we need to embrace the notion that employing silence about painful conflict experiences is an ever-evolving process, and can mean different things in different contexts, across different generations, as turbulent experiences are revealed through people trying to make sense of the past and imagine the future (2016: 20). This section also demonstrates the importance of audience reception to time, arguing that audience reception plays a significant role in influencing with whom one engages,

whether that is through silence or voice, and whether one transitions from silence to voice or vice versa.

The following section will continue to unpack the argument that time and audience reception play an essential role in FFCs' reintegration experiences, demonstrating how both can inspire FFCs to redress misconceptions regarding their identity and conflict experiences.

6.2.2 Contributing to conflict narratives

> Me, I want to share my own... if I don't speak, people will only ever know what others have said about us. I know many things are written in books and on these computers… If people are going to speak on it, the record needs to be correct... it is not correct until we all speak. (Rosetta[85])

> When people think or talk about the war, they only think of the men that fought… not the women, which is wrong… I was there, and so were many other women, yet we are forgotten about. (Titi[86])

Some FFCs' transition from silence to voice is rooted in a desire to have their experiences captured in narratives on conflict and combatant identities; this desire arguably stems from their feeling invisible, erased and forgotten (Mertus, 2000). Such motivation is not misplaced, as many conversations I had about my research in Sierra Leone, especially in Freetown, often led to my challenging local perceptions that FFCs were only involved in a marginal capacity, if not in a supportive role. One such interaction was with a government official[87] who worked on

[85] 63-year-old FFC based in Bo, interviewed on 19 November 2019 and 11 January 2021.
[86] 55-year-old female based in Kissi Town, interviewed on 18 November 2019.
[87] On the 17th of November 2019 in Freetown, Sierra Leone.

implementing the economic reintegration programmes (DDR and beyond); he looked baffled at my request for assistance in identifying FFCs to engage in my research:

> I know there are many FMCs; you see most of them outside riding their *okadas*[88] but FFCs, but I wonder if you will find any. I don't even think they exist… but war widows, amputees and FMCs, I can help you with those…

The above offers evidence towards the assertions put forward by some FFCs that the visibility of FFC experiences, their existence, or an understanding of their lived experiences has yet to be known or publicly acknowledged by the Sierra Leonean government.

With all this in mind, the above assertions sit firmly within feminist work; FFCs want to take ownership of the narrative written about them. They also challenge the conceptualisations of the bearers of information/knowledge on the FFC experience, both in conflict and the post-conflict environment. For the conflict experience, this is particularly important for FFCs in Sierra Leone, as engagement with DDR was primarily by FMCs, which in some instances relegated the FFC experience to a supportive role or outright denial of their participation, as discussed in Chapter 4. For the TRC, approximately a third of the statements were given by women, with less than 1 per cent of the approximately 8,000 statements given by FFCs (Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission report, 2004). As a result, FFCs' experiences were not prominent in the testimonies recorded by the TRC, nor in the report that was written.

Moreover, for the FFCs in this research, sharing their experiences is an opportunity for them to challenge the reproduction of narratives about FFCs' conflict experiences that contributed to their being ineligible for DDR (as discussed in Chapter 4) and to their being stigmatised or

[88] An *okada* is a motorcycle taxi commonly used in West Africa.

ostracised as they went through their social reintegration (as discussed in Chapter 5). Beyond that, some FFCs wanted to share their post-conflict experiences so that society has a better understanding of some of their life trajectories, as Adama explains:

> Many people have bad ideas about what those who fought in the war did with their life after. I came out of the war with some sewing training, which has supported me to this day… I returned and finished school; I am a respected teacher, married and have children… Sometimes I feel to share my story because I want to challenge what people think about women who fought in the war. (Adama[89])

Given that the previous chapters have revealed the challenges that FFCs faced regarding social and economic reintegration, Adama speaks as an FFC who overcame various challenges, and has a life that she feels many would not expect, but would respect. Her story demonstrates a positive FFC post-conflict or reintegration narrative (as she is educated, married, has children and is well respected in her career and community, because she is a teacher) and she felt that sharing it would go some way in redressing negative connotations or misconceptions people might have about FFCs.

The role of the audience is also evident in contributing to FFCs sharing their conflict experiences and combatant identity so that they can be included in conflict narratives. Rosetta[90] conveys this, 'I know there are many things written out there in books and on these computers', and Kadie[91] when she acknowledges that she would engage the media, 'I would be the first to stand in front of the radio or TV'. In these instances, the issue becomes about ensuring that their

[89] 35-year-old FFC based in Kenema, interviewed on 20 November 2019 and 11th of January 2021.
[90] 63-year-old FFC based in Bo, interviewed on 19 November 2019 and 11 January 2021.
[91] 40-year-old FFC based in Kenema, interviewed on 20 November 2019.

efforts to reconceptualise or ensure their narratives reach a broad audience. This point is supported by reception theory:

> the audience doesn't need to be present in the space where ceremony and ritual are performed to affect the performance. The audience outside of the space is assumed to be witnessing the performance as much as those who are present – through media, news, reports and word of mouth (Rai and Reinelt, 2014: 160).

The desire to use media to reach an audience beyond the shores of Sierra Leone is significant for FFCs because, when reporting on conflicts, the media has sometimes been used to promote or reiterate traditional gender stereotypes, norms and values and underrepresentation of women (Berrington and Honkatukia 2002; O'Neill and Mulready 2015; Venäläinen 2016a,b cited in McFeeters, 2021: 293). Understood this way, FFCs using media to share their experiences is appropriate, as they are using the same medium to tackle widespread misinformation: 'media is powerful; it not only mediates reality but also has a role in the construction of that reality. Furthermore, discourse constitutes knowledge through its representations and narratives' (Foucault, 1972; Hall, 1997 cited in McFeeters, 2021: 292).

Aminata shares a different way that audience reception informed her decision to share her conflict experiences publicly and proactively:

> ...these young ones, especially those born after the war, don't know, and I make it my job to remind them that war is the last thing they should do because it harms… They listen to me because I have the bullet wounds to show for what I speak of… We encourage the young ones coming up to go to school and to be productive; most of the young people who went and joined the rebel were misled, and some were jobless, so they saw the war as a source

> to make ends meet. We also encourage parents to take care of their children and not allow them to become thieves. Parents must share their war experience with their children and ground their children… (Aminata[92])

It is clear that Aminata is driven by a need to ensure that, in understanding how difficult her conflict experience was, the younger generation is discouraged from choosing that route in the coming years. In encouraging other parents to talk about their conflict experiences and dissuade them from engaging in crime and instead promoting education, Aminata is supporting the work done through peace education. This is because, in Sierra Leone, peace education is used in schools and public platforms to:

> promote the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values needed to bring about behaviour changes that will enable children, youth and adults to prevent conflict and violence, both overt and structural; to resolve conflict peacefully, and to create the conditions conducive to peace, whether at an intrapersonal, interpersonal, national or international level. (UNICEF, 1999:9)[93]

As such, we need to consider how the larger political context can influence a desire to share conflict experiences in post-conflict settings, especially if it threatens a reimagined future (Eastmond and Selimovic, 2012: 506, 518).

Aminata's assertion is fascinating, as, in the previous chapter, she shared how she had sought to retrain and join the SLA after the conflict, and how she took pride in the respect she received for being a soldier in the army. This demonstrates how she is selective in what memories she conjures to convey the message above. It also shows how memory construction is political, as

[92] 58-year-old FFC based in Jeru camp near Kenema, interviewed on 20 November 2019 and 11 January 2021.
[93] https://www.e-ir.info/2012/05/02/peace-education-in-sierra-leone/ (accessed 13 October 2022).

one can't neatly separate what to forget and what to remember (McGrattan and Hopkins, 2017: 493). The unpleasant experiences Aminata displaced were resurrected to discourage the reoccurrence of conflict and conflict experiences like hers. This last point also speaks to the notion of 'strategic telling' explored earlier in the chapter. This is because Aminata is selective about what she shares with different audiences, as what she would like each of them to understand will differ. In this case, the target audience is comprised of the generations born after the conflict. This contributes to scholarship on voice and silence, suggesting that for FFCs, the decision to employ either/both considers the future and not just the past.

This section demonstrated that the passage of time allowed FFCs to reflect on their silence, and whether it contributed negatively or positively to the narratives about them in society; it also informed their decision to voice their experiences publicly. This is because time passing allowed FFCs to build/re-establish relationships to the point where they could assess how they should share their experiences, always keeping in mind who was on the receiving end, and what they might do with that information (audience). This research contributes to scholarship that conveys narratives on FFCs, informed by FFCs. Moreover, it helps to ensure that their experiences continue to be documented, and that they are kept from being non-existent or less important than that of FMCs. There is a need to acknowledge (again) that silence is 'embedded in cultural categories and related to complex ways to power and agency because whether it makes sense to speak or to remain silent depends on what the social stakes are for a particularly positioned actor in a particular context' (Eastmond, 2010: 8). The next section will unpack a third motivation behind the shift from silence to voice, informed by what some FFCs observed could result from them sharing their experiences.

6.2.3 Monetising truth-telling

> I used to conceal the fact that I was in the war, but now I see that was a mistake... the male fighters got their settlements, war widows got payments, those that were amputated got a settlement, and some are still getting this to date… me, I got nothing… if I had spoken up and maybe if others had too, the government might have listened to our plight… how can I expect someone to help me if they don't know I suffered and what I need help with. (Mary[94])

In the above lament, it is clear that the need for financial assistance partly drove Mary's motivation for sharing her conflict experience or combatant identity. It is also partly driven by the sense of injustice that others had or were still receiving this financial support, and she was not. These feelings are not unique to Mary; other FFCs (including those who managed to get on the DDR programme) expressed their disappointment with the limited funding available as FFCs, compared to war widows, those who were disabled or FMCs. The expectation that truth-telling or publicly sharing conflict experiences will result in financial gain is also not unique. As Millar (2010) and Shaw's (2010) work on the TRC and local understandings of truth-telling in Sierra Leone found, there was/is an unspoken yet widely held assumption within communities that truth-telling or publicly sharing conflict experiences should result in financial assistance or support.

For example, Millar came across individuals who negatively evaluated the TRC and called it provocative because it didn't offer them the help they needed – which was financial assistance (Millar, 2010: 491). This is because Sierra Leonians understood the primary outcome of sharing their conflict experiences as financial assistance; catharsis would be a secondary outcome.

[94] 54-year-old FFC based in Bo, interviewed on 18 November 2019 and 27 December 2020.

Millar attributes part of this misinterpretation of the TRC's function and role as being a result of the words *help, remember, consider* and *encourage,* used when promoting the work of the TRC, which held within them connotations that misled the locals into thinking that they would receive financial support. He evidences this by giving different scenarios where these words were used between people in the everyday context of Sierra Leone and showing how they directly translate into the provision of money or financial support. Millar goes on to show how this misinterpretation was only evident amongst *non-elites,*[95] who did not correctly understand the function of the TRC, unlike the *elites,*[96] who understood how these words were used in the West. He also states that the elites understood the importance of psychological healing and the function of the TRC through their academic knowledge, reading and training, as some of them would have been employed by the TRC (Millar, 2010: 491).

Similarly, Shaw (2007) found that most people in Sierra Leone testified with the expectation that the TRC, the Government or the international community would help them rebuild their lives through financial support. The TRC was widely viewed as a source of finance and opportunity, given that it was known to have international funding and the visibility/associations of the foreign commissioner, consultants, and the white logo on Land Cruisers (Shaw, 2007: 197). For the majority of people that participated in the truth-telling process, 'testifying did not consist of the replacing silence with voice, but of being silenced by the TRC's model of redemptive memory' (Shaw, 2007: 202). They felt that their requests for help in the form of financial assistance (which they communicated in their truth-telling) were ignored.

[95] Those that were uneducated lived in rural environments and had limited knowledge of the English language.
[96] The educated; lived in a city or town; were well versed in the English language; knew or had exposure to different peacebuilding NGOs; had power through politics, or influence through a community or religious leader role.

Even when individuals acknowledged that the truth-telling process had assisted them with 'clearing their chest or cooling their hearts' (Shaw, 2007: 204), they still felt that they could only sustain this feeling if they received financial support. Whilst these individuals had internalised the TRC's message of the harms of directed forgetting and were actively practising the coaching they had received, participating was all built upon an assumed foundation of receiving financial assistance (Shaw, 2007: 204). In expecting to receive financial assistance, these FFCs transformed the TRC's 'memory work into a new art of forgetting. However, they lacked the material resources that would allow them to sustain this art' (Shaw, 2007: 205).

Whilst none of the FFCs who engaged in this research had participated in the TRC truth-telling process, sharing their experiences in the hope of receiving financial assistance is a strategy that some employed – as demonstrated by Mary at the start of this section and Fatima below. Despite my explicit clarification that I would not provide financial aid at any point in my research or afterwards, she commented:

> I am happy to be talking to you... I want people to know what I went through... keeping to myself has brought me nothing... I hope you reach many people, and they will help me with some small money to start a business. (Fatima[97])

For FFCs, the importance of audience is also evident in that they indicated the desire for their experiences to reach a broad audience at one point or another. Their audience was more than just the individual with whom they shared their experiences, but also the audience that that individual would be able to reach. This echoes the point made earlier by Kadie, where she stated that she would share her experiences using any medium (radio or television) so long as it reached a wider audience who would be able to help her and other FFCs financially. The above

[97] 38-year-old FFC based in Kenema, interviewed on 27 November 2019.

reinforces the points made in Chapters 4 and 5, reinstating the mutual relationship between economic and social reintegration. For these FFCs, receiving financial assistance would go a long way towards compensating them for their combatant roles and contributing to their future.

Here, though, this speaks to the importance of audience and reception, by explaining why some FFCs in this research employed silence and/or voice when it came to truth-telling for reintegration programmes or beyond. It also begs the question: would the FFCs that raised financial gains as a motivation have been happier to continue employing silence if their socio-economic situation had significantly changed before I met with them? Whilst this is a valid question, reducing all FFC participation in the truth-telling process to being driven only by the hope of financial support would be doing them some discredit. This is particularly true for those who experienced the cathartic effects of sharing conflict experiences. As such, whilst for some FFCs receiving financial support was a motivation, it was *one of many other motivations*, not the sole driver.

This section has argued that from FFCs' lived experiences, we can learn that time and audience reception influence how and when FFCs employ silence and voice when sharing their experiences, and engaging with reintegration programmes. It unpacked three motivations behind FFCs transitioning from silence to voice when sharing their conflict experiences and combatant identity. Whilst all reasons pointed to a personal gain of some sort for the FFCs (healing through talking, changing narratives, and financial gains), all three motivations spoke to the importance of time (what has happened to them over time and what is happening at that moment) and audience (what questions are being asked, who is asking, what information will be shared and with whom). For some FFCs, time allowed them to reflect and gather their thoughts, to ensure that they were aware of the consequences/benefits of using their voice and to be strategic about when they used it and to whom. Central to this consideration was the role of both *time* and *audience*, demonstrating how the transition from silence to voice doesn't

invalidate or relegate the previous employment of silence as the powerless or uninformative other (Parpart and Parashar, 2018).

6.3 Conclusion

The chapter demonstrated how the language of silence plays an equally vital role as voice in how FFCs experience and manage social reintegration. It did this by interrogating how and why some FFCs employed silence, and how doing so can be internally and externally driven. In analysing the experiences of FFCs who employed silence or voice as rational strategies and purposeful decisions, the chapter moved away from the binary allocation of conceptualising silence as having a negative impact, and voice as a positive impact on FFCs' reintegration effort. Moreover, the chapter moved away from the binary of silence/voice, not by arguing for the denunciation or promotion of voice or the narratives of FFCs that shared their experiences or embraced their combatant identity, but by 'highlighting how silence within a violent every day can also become a site of reconstituting new meanings and can become a tool of enablement …' (Motsemme, 2004: 917).

This chapter also argued that from FFCs' lived experiences, time and audience reception were shown to influence how and when FFCs embody silence and voice during their social reintegration. The section showed that *time* allowed FFCs to reflect and gather their thoughts, ensure they were aware of the consequences/benefits of using their voice, and be strategic about when and to whom. Moreover, the transition from silence to voice does not invalidate or relegate the previous employment of silence as the powerless or uninformative other. However, time can change what was once negative into a positive and vice versa.

Ultimately the chapter demonstrated why social reintegration interventions should be implemented for an extended period, particularly as social reintegration has historically been conceptualised as a process with no timeline. There have yet to be established any clear official

processes/mechanisms to monitor and review reintegration beyond two to three years after programmes have concluded, as was the case in Sierra Leone. The chapter argued that just because FFCs employ silence, it does not mean that they do not want to engage with the various interventions on offer – it may be that experiences are unspeakable or unshareable, and that FFCs need time or a change of audience before sharing their experiences or combatant identities. In other instances, FFCs were strategic about when they used their voice and to whom. Moreover, it revealed that when FFCs transitioned from silence to voice, they would need support in the same way those who shared their experiences received support when interventions were being implemented.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

The final chapter of this thesis starts by presenting the main arguments, reviewing the key findings thematically, and reiterating the academic contributions this thesis makes to scholarship. Following this, the chapter will examine avenues for future research on the post-conflict reintegration of FFCs, and concludes by summarising the implications of the findings from this research on reintegration programmes that are implemented as part of UN-led DDR.

7.1 Review of key findings and academic contributions

The aim of this research was to interrogate the reintegration experiences – both economic and social – of FFCs in Sierra Leone, 18 years after they put their guns down. In interrogating the FFC experiences with reintegration beyond the implementation of UN-led reintegration programmes in Sierra Leone, this thesis contributes to new knowledge, as it is the first of its kind. In interrogating the long-term reintegration experiences of former combatants this research responds to calls from scholars like Berdal and Ucko (2010) about the need for long-term research on reintegration experiences. This thesis used primary data collected from interviews with FFCs, capturing the experiences of those that engaged with UN-led DDR programmes and those that didn't, to respond to the main research question ***How far and in what ways does post-conflict reintegration (both economic and social programs) provide an opportunity to re-conceptualise gender norms, values and roles?*** which was unpacked through the sub - questions:

1. In what ways and to what extent did economic reintegration programmes support FFCs' ability to secure employment in Sierra Leone?
2. What can FFCs' experiences reveal about their efforts towards rebuilding relationships with their families and communities? What do FFCs identify as hindering or supporting their efforts towards rebuilding their social relationships in Sierra Leone?

3. What can FFCs' use of voice or silence reveal about their reintegration experiences in Sierra Leone?

The main findings of this thesis centred on these questions and the key academic contributions are summarised below.

The conceptualisation of gender norms, values and roles in post-conflict environments

This research demonstrates how the conceptualisation of gender norms, values and roles in post-conflict environments plays a significant role in FFCs' reintegration experiences. For economic reintegration (see Chapter Four), this was evident in how gender norms, roles, and values informed what skills training, support and facilities were set up, and who engaged in the programmes. For FFCs, such decisions impacted whether they engaged, how they engaged, and whether they completed the programme and secured a sustainable means of earning a living. More than that, it meant that their potential (in terms of possible skill development or employment fields) was restricted to the traditional gender norms, roles and values assigned to women in their society.

In discussing the economic reintegration experiences of FFCs, the thesis contributes to scholarship on women's work and precarity in post-conflict environments. The thesis did this by engaging with literature from feminist IPE on post-conflict environments by Hoskyn and Rai, 2007; Rai, Hoskyns and Thomas 2014; Rai, True and Tanyag: 2019; Barth, 2002 and True, 2012 to name a few. This is because it revealed how, if economic reintegration programmes do not take into consideration and try to mitigate the restrictions that the burden of social care imposed on FFC's ability to fully participate in skills training programmes, economic reintegration programmes will uphold gender inequality. Without such consideration, programmes will continue to provide a narrow range of skills training, which means that women

not only revert to traditional gender norms or roles, but the programmes also fail – in the most part – to offer long term and sustainable economic security for them.

For social reintegration (Chapter Five), the conceptualisation of gender norms, roles and values related to conflict experiences informed FFC reintegration experiences. FFCs who had undergone and/or perpetrated acts of violence experienced additional shame and stigma because of the way gender and violence were conceptualised in Sierra Leonean society, which saw their participation in the conflict as transgressing gender norms, values and roles. It was also evident how in some cases, families and communities pushed for a return to traditional gender norms, roles and values, prioritising women's positions as mothers, carers and wives. In conveying FFCs' experiences of social reintegration, Chapter Five captured the role played by gender in post-conflict environments, and how social reintegration can support how gender norms and values (especially those for women) are conceptualised in post-conflict societies, something that has been relatively neglected. The thesis advances that social reintegration is achieved more effectively when stringent gender norms are loosened, and when there is greater equality between men and women.

This thesis answered the main research question by demonstrating the different ways that post-conflict reintegration (both economic and social programs) can be an opportunity to re-conceptualise gender norms, values and roles. For economic reintegration, this can be through FFCs engaging in diverse skills training opportunities that can lead to sustainable formal or informal employment and transcend traditional gender roles/expectation/dynamics. For social reintegration, this can be through supporting interactions and activities that encourage and support FFCs actively sharing their diverse conflict experiences, which will inform how they and their families and communities reshape gender dynamics, values, and norms in their new normal. This thesis also demonstrated this point by evidencing how the absence of economic and social reintegration activities that take into account the role that gender norms, values and

roles in a society contribute to reintegration experiences can lead to the assignment or expectation that FFCs have to adhere to preconflict traditional gender norms, roles or values which would not advance efforts towards addressing gender inequality in post conflict environments.

In focusing on FFCs' experiences, the thesis contributes to a growing literature that seeks to readdress the historical focus on FMCs' experiences, or on research that does not explicitly consider the difference in experiences of FCs by gender, such as Özerdem (2012); Özerdem and Podder (2012); Kilroy (2011); Peters and Roberts (1998), to name a few. In highlighting the challenges that FFCs experienced with reintegration which were directly linked to their gender, this research contests existing claims by Humphreys and Weinstein (2007), who amongst other things, argue that FFCs do not necessarily have a more difficult time reintegrating into society than FMCs, and that violence perpetrated/experienced plays a more significant role. Instead, this research stands with scholars De Watteville, 2002; Farr, 2003; and McKay & Mazurana, 2004, who maintain that FFCs generally face constraints in reintegration over and above those faced by FMCs. This is demonstrated by the fact that it was not just a matter of violence (experiencing and/or engaging in acts of violence) but violence *and* gender that has impacted FFCs' social reintegration experiences. FFCs' encounters with violence cannot be separated from their gender, due to the historical way violence and gender have been conceptualised.

This thesis contributes to existing feminist scholarship that problematises the way gender has been conceptualised in the design and implementation of reintegration programmes (and DDR more broadly). It also makes a *new* contribution, by responding to calls by feminists like Weber (2021) and Friedman (2018) for research that interrogates FFCs' reintegration in terms of the private sphere. This is evident in that this thesis's interrogation of FFCs' efforts to rebuild social relationships with their families and in their homes (as well as publicly with their comunities),

and in so doing, revealed the ways in which reintegration that crosses the public/private divide is more transformative, potentially playing a role in how gender roles, values and norms are redefined. As such, addressing the problematic way gender is conceptualised in reintegration becomes about more than just addressing the inclusion of women and FFCs in the design, implementation and participation in reintegration programmes/activities, but about 'disrupting and reimagining traditional views on men and women's roles' in post-conflict environments (Weber, 2021: 400). To return to Enloe's warning, 'Demobilization [and reintegration by extension in DDR programmes] is as gendered – and as potentially patriarchal – as any other political process and will continue to be so if not assessed with feminist analytical skills' (Enloe, 2013:1 cited by Stark, 2013: 1) This is especially important, since reintegration seeks to help combatants transition into civilians – thus is it important for feminists to interrogate *what kind of gendered subjects* reintegration attempts to produce in post-conflict environments.

Economic and social reintegration are mutually reinforcing

Chapters 4 and 5 demonstrate that social and economic reintegration are mutually reinforcing. As such, the success of one often determines the success of the other. In Chapter 4, this was evident in how some FFCs found that the training they completed via economic reintegration programmes was redundant, unless accompanied by community relationships. Some employers would only employ FFCs with community ties, for example, requiring a community member to vouch for them or that training received came from a local tradesman. Having a job or business allowed FFCs to immerse themselves in environments where they could engage in frequent social interactions. Most FFCs found that on a personal level, having a means of earning a living meant that they could live a dignified life, because they were creating an alternative identity in which they were participating in the economy and could be more than just a former combatant (Subedi, 2018: 208).

In Chapter 5, the symbiotic relationship between economic and social reintegration was demonstrated through the experiences of FFCs, where their economic status (breadwinner or burden) informed positive or negative social reintegration experiences with their families or communities. This is because for FFCs who were breadwinners, or who financially supported themselves (and sometimes their families or communities), experiences of public rebuke or shaming because of their combatant identity of experiences were not as common – as opposed to those that were deemed a financial burden by their families or communities, because they were not contributing to their upkeep or engaging in any economic activities. In interrogating the social relationships of FFCs in the private sphere, Chapter 5 also revealed how this symbiotic relationship between economic and social reintegration can exist within negative attitudes, behaviours or environments which can be detrimental to women's livelihoods, as it can lead to their pursuing or staying in unhealthy relationships.

In putting forward the symbiotic relationship between social and economic reintegration, the chapter challenges Humphreys and Weinstein's (2007) argument that the socio-economic status of FCs, in terms of their ability to financially support themselves and others, does not affect their level of acceptance by their family or community. Instead, it supports existing research, like that by Bowd and Ozerdem (2013), that points to the need to ensure that efforts to support both forms of reintegration are equally prioritised and as stated in social reintegration theory by Ozerdem (2012).

Mutual engagement and participation in reintegration activities from families, communities and former combatants

Chapter 4 revealed that, for some former combatants who engaged and completed economic reintegration skills training, securing employment or a client base was aided or hindered by their ability to gain the trust of their communities and established tradesmen/artisans in their

field. This point demonstrates the importance of ensuring that they are also engaged and participate in the consultation, design and implementation of economic reintegration programmes by the local communities and established tradesmen/artisans, as well as the former combatants themselves.

In the same vein, Chapter 5 asserted that for social reintegration to be achieved, both FFCs and their families and/or their communities play important roles in reshaping and redefining societal values and norms on an individual and group basis. For FFCs, this reshaping and redefining process involved practicing agency and adjusting behaviour to reflect the communities into which they have settled. For the families and communities, the reshaping and redefining involved adjusting mindsets and behaviours towards FFCs, which would support reconciliation. In advancing this point, the chapter also revealed how some families and communities repurposed processes for reconciliation that existed in pre-conflict times.

In arguing that former combatants and their families and communities play an important role in reshaping and redefining societal values and norms of their new normal, this thesis contributes to reintegration literature and scholarship that moves away from giving communities and families ownership of the social reintegration process – as is the case when it is all attributed to family or community acceptance. In doing this, the thesis challenges empirical research by Gomes Porto, Parsons, and Alden, 2007; Humphreys and Weinstein, 2007; Kilroy, 2014; Nadler and Shnabel, 2015, and others, who analyse or centre social reintegration in terms of acceptance by FCs' families and communities.

The thesis also contributes to existing scholarship theorising that FCs, their families and their communities must consciously learn to adapt to change (McKay & Mazurana, 2004; Mehreteab, 2004; Veale, 2003). This is because social reintegration relies not just on FCs, but also on the mutual engagement of the receiving community or families and their willingness to accept the

returnee (Ozerdem, 2012: 63). The thesis advances this existing scholarship by providing insights into the process of reshaping and redefining gender, norms and values, both for the individual former combatants and the collective. For FFCs, this reshaping and redefining process involved practising agency and adjusting behaviour to reflect the communities into which they have settled. For the families and communities, the reshaping and redefining involved adjusting mindsets and behaviours towards FFCs, a process which would support reconciliation. Additionally, by interrogating the experiences of violence in conflict from three different angles (the violence perpetrated by the FFCs; sexual violence experienced by FFCs; and the violence to which families or communities were exposed), this research demonstrates how social reintegration could also be an opportunity for families and communities to exchange conflict experiences, and by so doing, tackle some of the shame and stigma levelled at FFCs in post-conflict environments.

Silence can be as powerful as voice

Chapter 6 demonstrated how the 'language of silence' plays an equally vital role as that of 'voice' in how FFCs experience and manage social reintegration. The chapter argued that for FFCs, employing silence didn't necessarily mean that they didn't want to engage with the various interventions on offer, but that their experiences might be unspeakable or unshareable, or that their employment of silence is externally driven – and as such, FFCs may need time or a change of audience before sharing their experiences or combatant identities. In analysing the experiences of FFCs who employed silence or voice as rational strategies and purposeful decisions, the chapter moves away from the binary allocation of conceptualising silence as having a negative impact, and voice as a positive impact on FFCs' reintegration efforts.

Moreover, the chapter revealed that, for the FFCs who experienced the transition from silence to voice several years into the post-conflict environment, support was needed with challenges

they faced personally or socially about reintegration, in the same way as those who shared their experiences and received support when interventions were being implemented. It did this by interrogating how and why some FFCs employed silence and how doing so can be internally and/or externally driven. In analysing the experiences of FFCs who employed silence or voice as rational strategies and purposeful decisions, the chapter moved away from the binary allocation of conceptualising silence as having a negative impact and voice as a positive impact on FFCs' reintegration effort.

In doing this, the thesis provides new insights into factors that play a role in the transition from silence to voice, specifically: *time* and *audience*. These assertions also revealed that FFCs who went through this transition needed access to and support provided by reintegration programmes lasting for more than 15 years after the official programmes concluded; thus, the argument is made that informal and formal reintegration programmes must be active many years into the post-conflict environment.

This research, therefore, contributes to feminist scholarship on silence and voice, such as Motsemme, 2004; Parpart, 2010; Eastmond and Selimovic, 2012; Parpart and Parashar, 2018; Sylvester, 2018; and Selimovic, 2020, to name a few. This is because the thesis contributes to efforts in both fields to redress the binary opposition between silence and voice in women's spaces. Specifically, it contributes to the intellectual and practical work in feminist scholarship founded upon breaking gendered silences (especially for women) – which, when it comes to challenging patriarchal power, has historically led to voice being seen as empowering and silence as weak (Enloe, 1993, 2000; Cockburn, 2010 and Sylvester, 2013). This binary also exists in post-conflict environments, where voice is seen as an expression of power, emancipation and assertiveness; and silence is the powerless or uninformative other (Parpart and Parashar, 2018). In terms of reconciliation scholarship, this section contributed new insights

that question the generalised assumption that reconciliation is difficult without dialogue, and the voicing of experiences and some action or reform are informed by the same understanding.

7.2 Future research

This thesis responded to calls by other feminist scholars for research that expands our knowledge of FFC's reintegration experiences beyond the years that official reintegration programmes were active. In the same way, there is now the opportunity for others to build on the findings from this research, and expand knowledge in several key areas. The first may be through a comparative research project on the reintegration experiences of FCs which would make the research more responsive to capturing gender difference in the post-conflict reintegration experiences. This is because, whilst this project contributes to our knowledge on FFCs' reintegration experiences 15 years after official reintegration programmes concluded in Sierra Leone, currently there is no such research on FMCs. As such, it is difficult to unpack further the problematic way gender has been conceptualised in DDR and other post-conflict reintegration programmes . This research would be feminist in nature, as gender will still be at its centre, revealing a broader comparative understanding of reintegration.

On the same point of comparative research, further research could explore whether there are differences between FFCs' long-term reintegration experiences from different geographical regions – as culture, gender norms and roles, motivations, and experiences of conflict will vary. Alternatively, there is also the option to interrogate the reintegration experiences of FFCs involved in different conflicts – for example, researching those who fought in liberation struggles and those who fought in rebel groups. This would be particularly interesting, as it would reveal the adaptations that reintegration programmes made to accommodate these variables, and develop our understanding of different FFCs' post-conflict lived experiences across regions or types of warfare.

Another area for further research could be to interrogate the difference between FFCs' experiences with reintegration, and that of women who were refugees or internally displaced peoples (IDPs) during the conflict and placed in integration camps (as was the case in Sierra Leone with Liberian and Guinean refugees). This research would be a worthwhile exploration, as both groups of women would have experienced some marginalisation from the recipient communities (albeit for different reasons), but also had access to the same economic reintegration training, thus diluting the market with the same skills and qualifications (as was revealed in this research). Both groups would have also engaged in social reintegration programmes. In Sierra Leone's case, some refugees or IDPs had at some point been combatants in their country of origin or Sierra Leone itself, so they could also provide different insights as FFCs. Of added value would be for further research to also explore what alternative economic re-integration programs that recognise and support care labour and contributions look like from the perspectives of FFCs and the groups of women mentioned above in post-conflict Sierra Leone.

This research has revealed that most FFCs did not engage with formal reintegration mechanisms such as the TRC, but did engage with those linked to their cultural or religious beliefs, or other mechanisms that their community repurposed to support reconciliation and reintegration. Further research could help us develop a better understanding of the social reintegration experiences of FFCs, by interrogating the different local mechanisms and processes with which communities and families engage.

7.3 Implications for future reintegration programmes that are part of UN-led DDR

WPS here This research contributes to the importance of the WPS framework as it evidences the need for equal and meaningful participation of women in all all aspects of the peacebuilding process especially the design, implementation, assessment and evaluation of DDR initiatives

(Shekhawat and Pathak, 2015: 58). Moreover, the thesis supported one of the WPS framework by promoting a gendered perspective on post-conflict reintegration experiences which would be invaluable in how future UN-led DDR programmes should be designed if they are to support FFCs economic and social reintegration, especially those that would like to challenge traditional gender norms, values and roles in post-conflict environments. The impact of the WPS framework is evident in that in Sierra Leone they adopted the WPS commitment into their National Action Plan (NAP) especially their second NAP which the country adopted for the period 2019-2023 which aligns with their national priorities in The National Gender Strategic Plan, the Draft Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Policy, and the Sierra Leone's Medium-Term National Development Plan where the six pillars include "protection and support of women, girls and SGBV survivors and other vulnerable persons; prosecute and punish perpetrators of SGBV effectively and safeguard women's, adolescent's and girls' rights at all times as well as rehabilitate perpetrators; participation and representation of women in leadership at all levels of decision-making in peacebuilding and development processes" (PeaceWomen, National Action Plans for Sierra Leone, 2021).

When it comes to reintegration supporting the way gender roles, norms and values are conceptualised in post-conflict environments from this research, it is not just the patriarchal values, norms and systems of the men in communities or leadership in the country that need to be challenged. The male leaders of international NGOs and institutions that fund these programmes must also be challenged, to tackle at all levels the existing or historical narratives that continue to promote approaches/interventions that support a return to traditional gender norms, values or roles for women. Reintegration programme design and implementation should not use an 'add women and stir' approach, as this often results in ineffective engagement with women/FFCs and their needs. Instead, when women and FFCs are included, those involved in negotiating, designing and implementing, as well as monitoring reintegration programmes

should make a concerted effort to engage with those they are representing, so that they incorporate the views and needs of FFCs who recipients/targets of economic reintegration programmes are. As such, any efforts to address the problematic way gender is conceptualised in reintegration theory and practice will need to take into consideration the fact that not all FFCs will want to engage in activities that transform traditional gender norms, values and roles.

The absence of formal social reintegration interventions referenced by the FFCs in this research demonstrates the importance of local interventions in supporting reintegration, as they engage community leaders and community practices in a different way to formal interventions. This was evident in Chapter Five, where, for example, community leaders used cultural practices or religious ceremonies that had been used before the conflict, to aid reconciliation. Moreover, in advocating for the engagement of communities in the design and implementation of the economic reintegration process (DDR more broadly), this thesis reiterates the importance of funding partners employing collaborative partnerships where decisions are informed by local knowledge (MacKenzie, 2009: 213), rather than top-down approaches.

Whilst third-generation DDR recognises the importance of community-based approaches, employing a wider scope that seeks to ensure that DDR approaches are implemented with the local context in mind, community initiative support continues to be underfunded (Avis, 2021: 2). Not only must reintegration programmes be community-based, but Asiedu (2010) reminds us that reintegration programmes must also be chosen, selected and controlled by the community. If they are not, they are 'an outside agency's programme, which is merely located in a community and has some level of community participation, cannot claim community-based status, but rather it is community-led' (Asiedu, 2010 cited in Avis, 2021: 6). As such, future DDR programmes need to ensure that these local interventions are supported alongside national interventions like the TRC.

Whilst this thesis has demonstrated the importance of ensuring that FFCs have the option to engage in skills training that transcends the traditional norms, values and roles historically assigned to women, there is a need to caution against doing this in isolation. In Sierra Leone, there were multiple issues concerning how economic reintegration was implemented, including funding issues reducing the duration or quality of the programmes. There is therefore a need to ensure that – beyond conducting a needs and skills assessment by gender, and ensuring sufficient funding for the proposed period – a labour market needs and skills assessment is also undertaken, with skilled and established tradesmen/artisans to identify gaps in the labour market as employers. More than that, it is clear that there needs to be alternative economic reintegration programs that recognise and support care labour to ensure that for FFCs who have household care responsibilities get the access or support to participate in the ful range of skills training opportunities available to other FFCs and FMCs who don't have these responsibilities.

In revealing how long-term reintegration programmes can support FFCs that employ silence into the post-conflict period, it is evident that there is also a need for reintegration programmes to have clearer key performance indicators (KPIs) or milestones, as well as mandates on what each set of activities is meant to do, whom it supports, and for how long. Programmes also need to ensure a clear handover of which organisations will take on these activities for former combatants left behind, and what funding is available to support these activities. Doing this would encourage a post-conflict environment where there is transparency and accountability about the responsibilities the new government has or doesn't have with regards to supporting FCs long-term (e.g., MacKenzie (2012) and Jennings (2009) highlight the benefits that might follow separating R from DD when it comes to the design, funding and implementation of DDR programmes).

Ultimately, this thesis demonstrated how 'scrutinising and reimagining DDR [reintegration] through a feminist lens can contribute to DDR's [reintegration's] transformative potential by

turning it into a process that challenges unequal gendered power relations' (Steenbergen, 2020: 49). As such, this research is an avenue that demonstrates that the reintegration process itself can be an opportunity to reconceptualise gender dynamics in post-conflict environments, in a manner that encourages gender equality, where there is the desire to do so. More than that, this thesis conceptualised the long-term reintegration experiences of FFCs in post-conflict Sierra Leone and helped develop a better understanding of their individual journeys, their experiences with economic reintegration, and social reintegration through the rebuilding of relationships with families and communities. It also conceptualised the different ways that FFCs embodied silence and voice in their reintegration experiences and how there is also value in understanding their experiences with the reintegration process through the passing of time and a change in audience.

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Appendices

Map of Sierra Leone

Based on a map of the UN Cartographic section.

Source: https://www.nationsonline.org/oneworld/map/sierra_leone_map2.htm

Participant Information Leaflet

Participant Information Leaflet

Study Title:	*What happened after we put our guns down: Reconceptualisng the social reintegration experiences of former female combatants in post conflict Sierra Leone*
Researchers(s):	*Gwendolene Cheve (PhD Candidate)*

Introduction
I am conducting a research project on the post-conflict reintegration experiences of former female combatants. This project seeks to understand former female combatants' experience of conflict and post conflict reintegration. I would like to know how your engagement with or lack of engagement with programmes like DDR and others alike shaped your efforts to rebuild relationships with your family, friends, community, work colleagues and authority figures since the conflict ended.

Do I have to take part?
Participation in this study is voluntary. If you do take part, I will ask you to sign a consent form or give recorded consent. You are free to withdraw your participation at any time, without giving a reason.

What will participation involve?
The interview will use semi-structured questions on how you as a former female combatants rebuilt relationships with family, friends, community, work colleagues and authority figures post-conflict. There will also be some questions about your life before the conflict, life during the conflict, and your life since the conflict ended. All these question will focus on you and your social and community relationship as well as how you earn a living. Some of those questions will require that you provide some personal information, but you can decide what to disclose and what to withhold. The interview should last between 45 minutes to an hour and if there are to be any repeat interviews a date for those will be arranged in the first interview. The interview will be done by a research team made up of myself and a Research Assistant.

What are the possible disadvantage, of taking part in this study?
Some of the interview questions might lead you to recover memories that might be upsetting and lead to your getting upset or distressed. If this does happen, please do let me know and I can stop, we can then resume the interview when you are ready, or you can decide to withdraw from the interview entirely. I will also ensure that as a participant you are given information of different support groups that will be able to help you going forward.

What are the possible benefits of taking part in this study?
The reintegration experiences of former female combatants have been understudied and this research seeks to fill this gap. More importantly, it seeks to not only give you a platform to share your experiences will help academics, practitioners, policy makers and all those that read this work develop a better

understanding of your post-conflict lived experiences.

Expenses and payments
Please note that there will be no financial compensation for participation.

What will happen to the data collected about me?
As a publicly funded organisation, the University of Warwick (UoW) have to ensure that it is in the public interest when we (UoW and I). This means that when you agree to take part in a research study, such as this, we will use your data in future research and publications by myself. As the research data will be anonymised as quickly as possible after data collection it will not be possible to withdraw your data after this pointWe are committed to protecting the rights of individuals in line with data protection legislation. The University of Warwick will keep this information for 10 years after the study has finished.

Will my taking part be kept confidential?
So, whilst I will not reveal your name and the interview will be recorded anonymously, I would like for an anonymised transcript of your interview to be included in a public archive deposited with the University of Warwick after the end of this project. However, if you do not wish for the transcript to be uploaded onto the archive you can decline to give consent in the consent form. I will ensure that I follow strict ethical and legal practice and all information about you will be handled in confidence.

Who is organising and funding the study?
This study is being conducted in order for the above me as the named researcher to gather data that they will use to complete their doctoral thesis. I am conducting this research whilst in receipt of a scholarship from the Department of Politics and International Studies at the University of Warwick in the United Kingdom.

Who should I contact if I wish to make a complaint?
Please address your complaint to the person below, who is a senior University of Warwick official entirely independent of this study:

Head of Research Governance
Research & Impact Services, University House
University of Warwick
Coventry, CV4 8UW, England
Email: researchgovernance@warwick.ac.uk
Tel: +4424 76 522746

If you wish to raise a complaint on how we have handled your personal data, you can contact our Data Protection Officer, Anjeli Bajaj, Information and Data Director who will investigate the matter: DPO@warwick.ac.uk. If you are not satisfied with our response or believe we are processing your personal data in a way that is not lawful you can complain to the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO).

What will happen to the results of the study?
The findings of this study will be included in the thesis, published in academic journals and any other future research and publications by the author. If you give us your contact details, I will send you any materials before they are published and you will have the opportunity to respond.

Data Sharing
Your rights to access, change or move your information are limited, as we need to manage your information in specific ways in order for the research to be reliable and accurate. The University of Warwick has in place policies and procedures to keep your data safe. This data may also be used for

future research, including impact activities following review and approval by an independent Research Ethics Committee and subject to your consent at the outset of this research project.

Who has reviewed the study?
This study has been reviewed by Ethics Coordinator for the Department of Politic and International Studies and given favourable opinion by the Humanities and Social Science Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) at the University of Warwick.

Who should I contact if I want further information?
If you have any questions about any aspect of the study not answered by this participant information leaflet, please contact:

Gwendolene Cheve (PhD candidate)/ Prof Gabrielle Lynch (Academic supervisor)
Department of Politics and International Studies
University of Warwick
Coventry
CV4 7AL
gwendolene.cheve@warwick.ac.uk/ g.lynch@warwick.ac.uk

Thank you for taking the time to read this Participant Information Leaflet

Participant Consent Forms

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Title of Project: *What happened after we put our guns down: Reconceptualisng the social reintegration experiences of former female combatants in post conflict Sierra Leone*

Name of Researcher(s): *Gwendolene Cheve (PhD Candidate)*

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet (*dd/mm/yy*) for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily. ☐
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason, without being penalised or disadvantaged in any way. ☐
3. I agree to take part in the above study and understand that my identify will be anonymised ☐
4. I agree for my interview to be audio recorded ☐
5. I understand that my data will be securely stored for a minimum of 10 years, in line with the University of Warwick's Research Data Management Policy and I am happy for my data to be used in future research and publications by the researcher. ☐

Both parties shall, by signing below, indicate acceptance of the Agreement.

Name of Participant	Date	Signature
Name of Person taking consent	Date	Signature

Summary of FFC who were participants/contributors

FFC pseudonym	Age	Geographical location at time of interview	Group (s) associated with during conflict	DDR programmes training
Mary	54	Bo	RUF	None
Aisha	40	Bo	Kamajohs	None
Aminata	58	Kenema	SLA/RUF	SSR
Zainab	42	Makeni	RUF	Catering
Ramatu	53	Kenema	SLA/RUF	SSR
Tenneh	36	Kissi Town	RUF	Tie and dye
Jande	36	Makeni	RUF	Sewing
Rosetta	63	Bo	Kamajohs	None
Adama	35	Kenema	RUF/Kamajohs/SLA	Sewing
Mariatu	34	Bo	RUF	Catering
Fatima	38	Kenema	RUF	None
Sarah	38	Makeni	RUF	None
Kadie	40	Kenema	RUF	None
Marta	45	Makeni	RUF	None
Abena	36	Kissi Town	RUF	None
Georgieta	40	Kissi Town	RUF	Tie and Dye
Taka	34	Bo	RUF	Catering
Seratu	32	Makeni	RUF	None
Khadija	44	Kissi Town	Kamajohs	None
Meru	38	Bo	Kamajohs	None
Titi	55	Kissi Town	RUF	Tie and dye
Fatmata	40	Makeni	RUF	None

*Age groups: 10 are between **30 -39 years old** ; 7 are between **40 – 49 years old**; 4 are between **50 – 59** and 1 is **60-69 years**. Average age is 42 years

** Location: **6** from Bo; **5** from Kenema; **6** from Makeni; **5** Kissi Town

*** Group (s) associated with during conflict: **15 RUF**; **4 Kamajohs** and **3 Mixed groups**

*** DDR programme training: **3 Catering**; **2 SSR**; **3 Tie and Dye**; **2 Sewing**; **12 None**