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To cite this article: Ibrahim Bangura, Kate Lonergan & Anders Themnér (2023): Patrimonial Truth-Telling: Why Truth Commissions Leave Victim and Ex-Combatant Participants Aggrieved, Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding, DOI: [10.1080/17502977.2023.2187135](https://doi.org/10.1080/17502977.2023.2187135)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/17502977.2023.2187135>



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Published online: 17 Mar 2023.



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Patrimonial Truth-Telling: Why Truth Commissions Leave Victim and Ex-Combatant Participants Aggrieved

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ABSTRACT

There is a growing awareness that truth commissions (TCs) often leave victim and ex-combatant participants aggrieved. This is problematic since it can undermine support for peace processes. When attempting to explain such shortcomings, previous research has not paid sufficient attention to the patrimonial sources of TC-participants' frustration. We argue that such forms of disenchantment are largely caused by internationalised TCs' patrimonial mode of working, utilising tactics such as motorcades as manifestations of power and brokers to mobilise witnesses. To highlight the relevance of our argument, we use the work of the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission as an example.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 13 December 2021

Accepted 28 February 2023

KEYWORDS

Truth commissions;
reconciliation; civil wars;
peacebuilding; Sierra Leone

Introduction

Why do post-civil war truth commissions (TCs) so often leave participants, both those who testify as victims and as perpetrators of violence, aggrieved? In recent years, a growing body of research has highlighted how individuals who have taken part in TCs often feel disillusioned and frustrated over unmet expectations. This is particularly true concerning the inability of TCs to help build trust between victims and ex-combatants, and the lack of economic reparations (Ainley, Friedman, and Mahony 2015; Bangura 2021; Brounéus 2019; Guthrey 2016; Hayner 2011, 152). For instance, in Liberia the truth and reconciliation process was criticised for failing to create a conducive truth-telling environment that encouraged perpetrators to cooperate at hearings and provide more than half-truths. The TC was subsequently seen by many as a squandered opportunity to foster a new relationship between victims and perpetrators, and to contribute to healing a deeply divided society (Weah 2012). Meanwhile, a reoccurring grievance amongst Sierra Leonean war-victims has been the limited economic support provided in the aftermath of the TC's work (Ainley, Friedman, and Mahony 2015, 269). In this article, we seek to explain why TCs so often fail to fulfil the expectations and aspirations of victims and ex-combatants.

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Since the early 1990s, TCs constitute a central pillar of the post-civil war peacebuilding template. TCs are often expected to generate a multitude of social goods, ranging from creating an accurate account of the war, empowering victims, and countering impunity, to recommending government reforms and facilitating societal reconciliation and healing, all assumed to be conducive for sustainable peace.¹ For these reasons, national and international governments and donors have invested considerable resources in promoting officially sanctioned TC bodies in countries such as Guatemala, El Salvador, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Solomon Islands, South Africa, and Timor-Leste.

However, in recent years, scholars have begun to critically assess the ability of TCs to ease transitions from war to peace (Lundy and McGovern 2008; Millar 2011a; Shaw, Waldorf, and Hazan 2010; Snyder and Vinjamuri 2003). A commonly cited shortcoming is that even if TCs successfully implement the mandates and goals that typically reflect international actors' interests – such as helping to strengthen liberal democratic norms (public deliberation, transparency and respect for human rights) and provide a national, historical narrative of the previous war² – it often leaves participants with feelings of unmet expectations (Ainley, Friedman, and Mahony 2015; Bangura 2021; Brounéus 2019; Guthrey 2016; Hayner 2011, 152). Grievances around unmet expectations constitute a serious challenge; not only can they inhibit reconciliation and undermine trust in the new post-war state, but also sow the seeds of new violence (Ainley, Friedman, and Mahony 2015, 272; Holsti 1996; Kostić 2007; Themnér 2011).

To explain the inability of TCs to satisfy the needs and aspirations of participants, scholars commonly refer to several generic explanations: lack of funding; unwillingness of governments to implement TC recommendations; accusations that victims hold unrealistic expectations; and that the Western and formal bias of TCs make them insensitive to local needs and cultures (Ainley 2015, 254; Ainley, Friedman, and Mahony 2015, 269; Hayner 2008, 5–6, 163–180; Kostić 2007; Lundy and McGovern 2008; Millar 2011a). The problem with these types of arguments is that they rarely take into consideration the dynamic interplay between the multitude of actors involved in truth and reconciliation processes, in particular TC-officials, local leaders, victims and perpetrators, and the patrimonial context in which they operate. This is problematic since TCs are often implemented in societies where the state has limited institutional reach and popular legitimacy, and TC-officials need to negotiate and ally themselves with multiple stakeholders, often based on patrimonial arrangements.

In this article, we argue that it is necessary to apply a *patrimonial lens* – a perspective that sees the implementation of peacebuilding programmes primarily as a hierarchical and largely informalised exchange of resources and services between programme officials and participants – when studying TCs. Only then can we gain a more holistic understanding of why it is so common for victim and ex-combatant TC-participants to be *aggrieved*. By the latter, we mean a sense of frustration caused by the discrepancy between the high expectations born out of taking part in TCs and the actual post-testimony benefits acquired.³ More specifically, we focus on two forms of grievances – (a) perceptions of unmet promises of economic assistance, and (b) frustration over TCs' failure to help build trust between victims and perpetrators of violence. These observations are based on unique in-depth interviews conducted with individuals who provided testimony to, or participated in a public hearing of, the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission (SLTRC). Hence, in this study, we see victim and ex-combatant witnesses as the

primary TC-audience. While ‘victim’ and ‘ex-combatant’ are often complex and intersecting identities, in this article we use the terms to refer to the capacity in which an individual testified in the TC process.

Embracing a patrimonial lens can help us shed light on how TC-officials (un)consciously employ patrimonial modes of mobilisation to implement TCs: (1) utilising *motorcades as manifestations of power* (a performance that seeks to establish a forward-looking relationship between TC-officials and potential witnesses that hierarchically places the former above the latter) and (2) outsourcing witness mobilisation to *brokers* (local elites, such as chiefs and ex-commanders, who can bridge feelings of distrust between TC-officials and potential witnesses). TC-officials thereby de facto present themselves as ‘patrons’ to an audience of witnesses, who take on the role as ‘clients’. While such strategies constitute an efficient method to mobilise support for TCs, it also has a number of negative ramifications. First, providing expressions of remorse and forgiveness largely becomes a question of fulfilling clientelistic obligations vis-à-vis peacebuilding patrons, rather than acts of grassroots reconciliation aimed at improving relations between perpetrators and victims. Second, by outsourcing participant mobilisation to brokers, TC-officials inadvertently create a multi-layered patrimonial debt, which it is virtually impossible for TC participants to call in. These patrimonial side effects risk leaving victims and perpetrators disgruntled over unfulfilled promises of a new beginning.

On a broader level, the findings presented in this article speak to the critical scholarship on transitional justice. It does so by highlighting how the top-down international intervention structures of TCs generate grievances amongst an important category of local stakeholders (TC-victim and ex-combatant participants). More specifically, we make a unique contribution to the literature on TCs by tracing how participant grievances are largely generated by a combination of two patrimonial-based explanatory factors – *motorcades as manifestations of power* and *brokers*. We thereby move beyond what are more generic explanations for how patrimonialism shapes TC processes and outcomes.

Truth commissions and participant grievances

Truth Commissions (TCs) are formal and officially sanctioned temporary bodies mandated to investigate patterns of past abuse (Bakiner 2016; Hayner 2011). While the first TCs were generally domestic institutions set up in the wake of political transitions, they have subsequently expanded to address transitions after civil wars as well. As the use and popularity of TCs has expanded, they have also become firmly situated in the standard repertoire of international peacebuilding efforts and become increasingly standardised across a diverse range of contexts (MacKenzie and Sesay 2012; Subotić 2012; Zvobgo 2020).

A large body of research has critiqued the top-down and standardised structure of TCs, arguing that their globalised goals and values – such as bolstering democratic values and respect for human rights, establishing a record of factual truth, and healing through public truth-telling – often do not align with needs and priorities at the local level. Criticism against TCs is perhaps most visible in the apparent discrepancy between the high expectations participants, victims in particular, but also ex-combatants, have of the socio-economic benefits of taking part in TCs and the actual assistance provided. First, studies have highlighted how participants often feel disappointed over the inability of TCs to redefine victim-perpetrator relations. For instance, not only have public TC-hearings

proven to be an un conducive setting to build inter-personal trust between ex-combatants and victims, experiences have shown that perpetrators of violence are often unwilling to constructively cooperate at TC-hearings (Brounéus 2019; Kelsall 2005; Stovel 2008; Zvobgo 2019). Second, a reoccurring theme of several TC-processes is the disappointment many participants, in particular victims, have over the lack of economic support provided to them. In fact, the contrast between the resources invested in the implementation of TCs and its work, and the limited (if any) reparations provided for victims is often a source of frustration (Ainley, Friedman, and Mahony 2015; Bangura 2021; Brounéus 2019; Guthrey 2016; Hayner 2011; Weah 2012).

Participant grievances may, from a programmatic perspective, seem irrelevant as international policymakers, and to some extent researchers, often evaluate TCs based on mandates and goals that reflect the priorities of international actors. These markers of success include strengthening liberal democratic norms (Brahm 2007; Chapman and Ball 2001; Minow 1998; Olsen et al. 2010), preventing recurrence of conflict (Lie, Binningsbø, and Gates 2007; Loyle and Appel 2017; Snyder and Vinjamuri 2003), or establishing a national, historical narrative of the previous war (Bakiner 2016; Hayner 2011). However, as for most types of international peacebuilding interventions, TCs are subject to demands and expectations from multiple and often contradictory audiences (Gippert 2016; Von Billerbeck and Gippert 2017; Whalan 2017). In fact, TCs are simultaneously beholden to international donors, host governments, local leaders and organisations, as well as victims and ex-combatants, actors whose expectations often go beyond those articulated in TC's mandates. Hence, as with many types of peacebuilding programmes, there is a risk that the expectations and aspirations of local actors (TC-participants) do not align with the goals and outputs of the implementing institution (the TC) (Whalan 2013).

If left unchecked, participants' grievances can constitute a serious challenge to sustainable peace; not only may it inhibit national reconciliation and undermine trust in the new post war state, but also increase the risk of post-war violence (Ainley, Friedman, and Mahony 2015, 272; Holsti 1996; Kostić 2007; Themné 2011). A key finding in the literature on contentious politics is that aggrieved individuals who share a common identity are more likely to withdraw support for, and collectively mobilise against, the state (Hillesund et al. 2018). There are reasons to suspect that this may also be true for disgruntled TC-participants. In many post-war countries victim and ex-combatant networks and organisations tend to be some of the most vocal and easily mobilised social groups. Not only do they have the agency to shape national political discourses, but, at least in the case of ex-combatants, reengage in violence. For instance, in Liberia, grievances over the conduct and implementation of the country's TC generated public demonstrations, death threats, warnings of a return to war, and public outing of assumed war-criminals. At the centre of these activities were aggrieved victim and ex-combatant TC participants who engaged in a discursive, and at times physical, struggle to shape Liberia's political landscape in accordance with their specific interests (BBC 2009; FPA 2019; The Analyst 2008).

TC-participants' grievances are commonly explained by pointing to a number of generic causes, ranging from lack of funding and the unwillingness of governments to implement TC recommendations, to accusations that victims hold unrealistic expectations and that TCs are insensitive to local needs and cultures (Ainley 2015, 254; Ainley, Friedman, and Mahony 2015, 269; Hayner 2008, 5–6, 163–180; Kostić 2007; Lundy and McGovern 2008; Millar 2011a). However, recent findings also point to the important role

patronage structures can have in shaping TC processes and outcomes in post-civil war contexts. For instance, Millar (2015) argues that truth telling in a patrimonial setting encourages participants to internalise and play the performative role of the ‘victim’ in the hope of acquiring material benefits. However, in the institutional context of internationally sponsored TCs, there is no requirement for other actors to take on the role as patron. Consequently, TC participants are often left empty-handed and disillusioned. Meanwhile, Mahony and Sooka (2015, 46–47) highlight how the TC in Sierra Leone was often dependent on chiefs to organise local hearings. Not only did this cement their position as local patrons, but at times generated tensions, as TC participants resented efforts by chiefs to censor their own role during the war.⁴ In this article, we build on and expand these findings concerning the role patron-client relations play in TC-processes. We do this by providing a more fine-grained theoretical understanding of how TC-officials negotiate and ally themselves with multiple stakeholders, often based on patrimonial arrangements, to implement truth-telling initiatives and demonstrate how these dynamics can generate grievances amongst victims and ex-fighters.

Patrimonial truth-telling: Motorcades as manifestations of power and brokers

A central challenge for TCs is how to identify and mobilise potential participants to testify in proceedings. This is particularly true in post-civil war societies where TCs may not be able to rely on the support of and legitimacy bestowed upon a state, whose institutions often have a limited reach outside the capital. The origins of these institutional shortcomings can be traced back to the illegitimacy of the colonial project, which imposed borders and institutions on communities in disregard of existing socioeconomic and political realities and often governed according to the principle of indirect rule (Bayart 2009; Englebert and Tull 2008). After independence, some leaders actively sought to reinforce this informalisation of politics in order to further their own personal rule, while other heads of states were, from the late 1980s and onwards, obliged to downsize their bureaucracies in response to neo-liberal donor policies. Oftentimes civil wars have exaggerated the challenges levied against state institutions; not only do rebel groups commonly target the latter, many states lose popular legitimacy due to atrocities carried out against the population (Chabal and Daloz 1999; Paris 2004). The net effect of these aggregated pressures is that politics and governance are largely dominated by resource rich economic, political and military elites, or ‘patrons’, in war ridden societies. The latter base their rule on patrimonial distribution of resources in return for clientelistic services (e.g. working, voting, fighting, demonstrating). Consequently, participation in externally driven programmes, irrespective if they are national or international initiatives, generates clientelistic expectations that participants will be compensated sometime in the future (Themnér 2017; Utas 2012). What is more, even if there is often a mushrooming of civil society organisations after the arrival of peace, they seldom possess the capability to implement large-scale programmes and often lack local legitimacy in the communities they claim to represent (Van Leeuwen and Verkoren 2012). The limited capacity of state institutions and civil society constitutes a serious obstacle for TCs. One of the reasons why the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission was a relative success, is that it was conducted in a strong state context – which could provide the commission with a staff of

over three hundred and an initial yearly budget of 18 million USD – with the backing of an armada of well-organised local NGOs (Hayner 2011, 27–32). Similar outreach problems are generally compounded by a weak media, underdeveloped communication infrastructure and low literacy rates (Millar 2011a, 181).

How can TC-officials overcome such obstacles and gain access to local communities and encourage participants to testify? An efficient strategy is to fall back on long-proven patrimonial modes of mobilisation, commonly used by national politicians and international development agencies, when introducing themselves to local communities. This can, for instance, be done by using *motorcades as a manifestation of the power possessed by the external peacebuilder* (i.e. the TC) (Smirl 2015; Themnér and Sjöstedt 2020). Such manifestations often take the form of suddenly appearing vehicles carrying an outside delegation composed of presumably resource rich individuals. This is a common phenomenon during election campaigns in many African countries, where politicians travel from village to village to convince constituencies to vote for them. An integral part of such visits is the organisation of community meetings, where politicians or development workers sensitise inhabitants about their programmes. Such events often include the distribution of food, basic supplies, money, and more or less precise promises of a better life if the community supports the elite's programme. What is important during such elite-grassroots encounters is not necessarily the amount of resources distributed or how enticing future promises are, but rather the lavishness of the event, the size of the motorcade and the crowd that it attracts (Daloz 2003). If the event includes a large delegation, with many cars and officials, and can mobilise substantial crowds, TC-witnesses may be reassured that the TC has the capacity to improve the lives of participants. Such forms of vertical redistribution, based on displays of power and prosperity, de facto function as a type of costly signalling, where patrons seek to convince prospective clients that they can deliver on pledged promises (Daloz 2003). As such, the motorcade is not merely a static symbolic act, but a conscious performance that seeks to establish a forward-looking relationship between TC-officials and potential participants. In the words of Smirl (2015), the 'white jeeps' of peacebuilding implementers become key manifestations of power that hierarchically places them above local communities.

Relying on the awe and wonder of the motorcade may, however, not be enough to mobilise support for TCs. There are at least two reasons for this. First, local communities often have a healthy suspicion of outside elites (Themnér and Utas 2016). The wartime destruction of societal trust, coupled with bad experiences of previous elite programmes and promises, may make local citizens reluctant to offer their clientelistic services to new patrons. Second, there is often a sociocultural, and sometimes language, barrier separating external elites and local communities. Such differences can inhibit direct and meaningful communication, and easily leads to misunderstandings.

For these reasons, TC-officials may need to enlist the services of *brokers* who can function as sociocultural translators and vouch for the TC-leaders' sincerity. Building trust is particularly crucial in the context of truth-telling where participants, both victims and perpetrators, risk being socially ostracised or physically attacked because they speak in public (Guthrey 2016). Broker figures are best understood as individuals who can frame '[...] the claims and identities of different actors as sufficiently similar to each other to justify coalition formation' (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001, 334), allowing, for instance, TC-officials and potential participants to find enough common ground to trust one

another. In the realm of social sciences, there is a rich literature highlighting the central role brokers have in overcoming societal distrust and facilitating political mobilisation, informal modes of governance and the implementation of internationally sponsored development programmes (Lewis and Mosse 2006; McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001; Themnér and Utas 2016). Of particular interest for this study, is the key role transitional justice professionals – often working for national and international NGOs – have in brokering relations between international donors, local governments and victims. As intermediaries they not only facilitate interactions, but also shape discourses and perceptions about victimhood (Jamar 2015; Madlingozi 2010).

However, in post-war societies that lack viable NGOs, and where citizens distrust outsiders, the most efficient brokers are often local leaders who are socioculturally embedded in their communities (Themnér and Utas 2016). This allows them to repackage and present TC-activities in a manner that is more culturally familiar and acceptable to victims and ex-fighters (Alie 2008). In many instances, traditional leaders, such as chiefs and elders, may constitute the most natural TC-brokers (Huysse and Salter 2008). In large parts of Africa, there is a long tradition – often originating in colonial empire’s preference for indirect rule – of state elites outsourcing key governance functions to chiefs. This particularly concerns their role as arbitrators of interpersonal disputes in local communities (Mac Ginty 2008).⁵ However, as symbols of the status quo, and their marginalisation and maltreatment of especially youth and women, chiefs and elders are often targeted by armed groups during war. As a consequence, many chiefs find themselves disempowered or distrusted once peace arrives. For this reason, peacebuilders (e.g. TC-officials) may be obliged to collaborate with alternative broker figures when implementing top-down interventions. Recent research has, for instance, highlighted how governing elites and international peacekeeping troops are often obliged to work with ex-commanders – who continue to wield informal influence over their former fighters despite demobilising – to deliver economic resources to and uphold law and order within ex-combatant communities (Themnér and Utas 2016). It is therefore not farfetched to believe that TCs may need the support of ex-commanders to convince their former fighters to take part in TC-hearings.

By utilising these two familiar modes of mobilisation, motorcades as manifestations of power and brokers, TC-officials de facto engage in a patrimonial contract with victims and perpetrators. At times, this is clearly spelled out, whereby TC-officials, and their brokers, make more or less precise assurances of economic compensation (money, training, food, ‘a better life’) and future security. However, even when no explicit promises are made, TC-witnesses are likely to assume that there is an implicit agreement. As much as TC-officials pretend to stand above patronage politics, they are culturally transformed into patrons the moment they usurp patrimonial ways of working (c.f. Millar 2011a, 188). According to this logic, divulging the ‘truth’, begging for forgiveness and accepting apologies should primarily be seen as clientelistic services – just like voting, working, and fighting – that victims and perpetrators offer to brokers and by extension their TC employers.

The main benefit of using motorcades as manifestations of power and brokers is that these tactics constitute efficient ways to sensitise communities and convince victims and ex-combatants to take part in TCs. Thereby, TC-leaders do not need to use scarce resources to build up a multilevel organisational structure for project implementation. In addition, by working with local strong-men it is easier for officials to adjust the work

of TCs to fit local customs and needs (Millar 2011a). In this process, chiefs and ex-commanders are often eager allies. By aligning themselves with TC-officials, they can consolidate their influence over communities at a time when war-to-peace transitions, with its focus on statebuilding, risk diminishing their local power (Themnér and Utas 2016).

There are, however, negative repercussions of employing patrimonial modes of mobilisation in the context of truth telling. First, the aim of public declarations of remorse and forgiveness is primarily to please TC-patrons and ensure that local brokers are not embarrassed. Not only does this entail that little emphasis is put on facilitating direct horizontal engagement between victims and perpetrators, it also becomes less important who actually takes part in the events (meaning that any perpetrator will do). As such, reconciliation is largely a symbolic act for public consumption, rather than a sincere encounter that can promote interpersonal reconciliation and personal healing. This may explain why many victims perceive perpetrator apologies as insincere and shed light on why TCs seldom provide a conducive environment for building trust. Second, the involvement of numerous TC mobilisers – TC-officials, chiefs or elders, and ex-commanders – creates a multi-layered debt that TC-participants struggle to call in. Not only are these actors unlikely to speak with one voice, whereby they extend the same type of pledges, they can always deflect responsibility by claiming that the promises did not come from them. In many patron-client relations, the very purpose of employing brokers is to insulate elites from client creditors (c.f. Galaskiewicz 1985, 42–46). Hence, once the motorcade of TC-officials leave town, victims and perpetrators will struggle to verify whether promises of compensation were inflated by local brokers, or if they have been left in the lurch by their newfound patrons.

Case selection and source material

This study explores the role of patrimonial truth-telling in the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission (SLTRC). Sierra Leone is a paradigmatic example of an internationalised truth process and has functioned as a model for subsequent transitional justice processes (Ainley, Friedman, and Mahony 2015). Despite these innovations and the SLTRC's success in achieving macro-level goals of nation-building and democratisation, the critical academic literature has illustrated that there were important discrepancies between local and international priorities (Kelsall 2005; Millar 2010, 2011a, 2011b; Shaw 2007). Post-conflict truth-telling and transitional justice processes continue to be highly institutionalised and internationalised (Subotić 2012; Zvobgo 2020), and tensions between international and local priorities continue to plague transitional justice processes in many other contexts. Given Sierra Leone's centrality in the transitional justice literature, understanding the factors that contributed to the grievances of the country's TC-victim and ex-combatant participants is important for the future development of the field.

Furthermore, Sierra Leone is a case of a transitional justice process operating within a patrimonial context. Since colonial times politics have been dominated by resource rich elites who have employed patrimonial distribution to mobilise political support. As a result, access to economic resources and social advancement has been dependent on having access to national and local elites. Even if the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) partly fought the civil war to abolish this system, the peacebuilding process has de

facto reinforced this mode of economic and political domination (Bledsoe 1990; Utas 2012). Our study therefore speaks to the population of cases of internationalised truth processes operating within patrimonial contexts, such as Liberia, Solomon Islands, and Timor-Leste.

The empirical data was collected through in-depth interviews in Sierra Leone during January–February 2019 and February–July 2020. In total 36 informants were interviewed. Of these, 33 were individuals who had taken part in the SLTRC, either self-identifying themselves as participating in the role of ‘victims’ (11) or ‘ex-combatants’ (22). While these categories are in practice complex and fluid, in the context of SLTRC participation one had to assume a more clear-cut role; either performing the role of the ‘civilian victim’ or the ‘abusive ex-combatant’.⁶ Participation ranged from providing written statements, attending community gatherings organised by the SLTRC or truth-telling sessions, or directly testifying in a public session of the SLTRC. An additional two interviews were conducted with SLTRC staff and one with a civil society activist.

Interviews were semi-structured and focused both on respondents’ initial decision to participate in the SLTRC and their reflections on the outcomes of the truth process many years later. Semi-structured interviews allow the researcher to respond dynamically to emerging issues of interest while ensuring that comparable data are collected across interviews (Brounéus 2011). All interviews were conducted with informed consent of the respondents, and anonymity was assured.⁷ Respondents were identified through snowball sampling, beginning with the research team’s existing contacts and then expanding by asking interview participants to refer to others who had also participated in the SLTRC. As records of SLTRC participation are not publicly available, a snowball sampling approach allowed access to the population of interest. Snowball sampling can also facilitate making connections when doing research on potentially sensitive topics, such as perpetrator status and TC testimony (Cohen and Arieli 2011).

Most interviews were conducted in Freetown, with respondents who moved to the city after participating in the SLTRC. This geographic focus introduces possible selection bias, as our sample primarily consists of individuals who have now left the patrimonial networks that were mobilised during the TRC process. While migration decisions, the new lives built in the city, and the long period since the war ended, may influence the way that respondents make sense of the past, it is unlikely to systematically bias the focus of our analysis, which looks at why respondents decided to engage in truth-telling, apology, and forgiveness in the first place. Interviews were also conducted with SLTRC participants in the cities of Bo, Lunsar and Makeni. Many respondents in these provinces were still living in the same communities as when they participated in the SLTRC, thus allowing for comparison on this possible biasing factor for perspectives in Freetown.⁸

The Sierra Leone truth and reconciliation commission

The Sierra Leonean Civil War (1991–2002) was officially declared over in 2002. The main components of the peace process, predominantly based on the 1999 Lomé Peace Agreement, was the deployment of UN peacekeepers (United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone, UNAMSIL), the disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) of combatants, the transformation of the RUF into a political party and the establishment of a truth and reconciliation commission. Even if the creation of the latter had been stipulated already

in the Lomé agreement, it was not until 2002 that the body (Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission (SLTRC)) was established by an Act of Parliament. The SLTRC, which was largely structured on the South African model, was headed by a senior Methodist Clergy Joseph Christian Humper, four national and three international commissioners and an Executive Secretary, all appointed by the president of Sierra Leone with recommendations from international and national actors including the UN Mission in the country and the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. The mandate of the SLTRC was to ‘address impunity, break the cycle of violence, provide a forum for both the victims and the perpetrators of human rights violations to tell their story, and to get a clear picture of the past in order to facilitate genuine healing and reconciliation’ (SLTRC 2004, 24). The three main areas of focus of the work of the Commission were:

- (a) undertaking investigation and research into key events, causes, patterns of abuse or violation and the parties responsible;
- (b) holding sessions, some of which may be public, to hear from the victims and perpetrators of any abuses or violations of from other interested parties;
- (c) taking individual statements and gathering additional information regarding the matters referred to in paragraphs (a) or (b) (GoSL 2000).

To operationalise the Commission, a secretariat was established in Freetown, with offices opened in every region and district in the country. On 4 December 2002, the Commission deployed 73 statement takers across the country and the statements they collected formed the basis for both public hearings and the documentation of historical records of the war (SLTRC 2004). The public hearings were held in several communities across the country using both public and closed hearings. Some of the proceedings ‘were broadcast live on radio and the highlights were edited into a forty-five-minute television show each evening. A total of 7000 people testified to the Commission in thousands of hours of testimony’ (Kelsall 2005, 363). The Commission ended its activities and presented a report to the GoSL and their international development partners in 2004, thereby ending its mandate.

Aggrieved participants in the Sierra Leone TRC

After the conclusion of the SLTRC’s work, it became clear that many participants found that both the process and the outcomes did not align with their hopes. Unmet expectations centre around two main issues. First, it was common to voice grievances against the SLTRC’s inability to foster a new relationship between victims and perpetrators of violence. Many ex-fighters were reluctant to participate in the SLTRC. Less than 1 per cent of the total statements submitted to the SLTRC came from perpetrators (Zvobgo 2019). The limited participation of perpetrators meant that few victims heard testimony from the individuals who had employed violence against them, and the offering of apology and forgiveness became a symbolic exchange with a generic perpetrator. In addition, apologies were often perfunctory and lacked genuine meaning (Stovel 2008). An account of proceedings in Tonkolili district describes testimonies as ‘circling around the truth’ (Kelsall 2005, 369). Second, the SLTRC was unable to live up to participants’

hopes of economic support. Grievances were further exacerbated as victims were aware of the material assistance given to ex-combatants during the DDR process and expected similar benefits from the SLTRC. Economic grievances serve as a constant reminder of the struggles of war, and continuing economic marginalisation, especially amongst youth, has limited the possibilities for positive peace (Bangura 2016).

Why did local and international expectations of the process and outcomes of the SLTRC diverge so sharply? One commonly cited reason concerns the confusion over the relationship between the SLTRC and the Special Court of Sierra Leone (SCSL) – the latter being set up in 2002 to ‘prosecute persons who bear the greatest responsibility for serious violations of international humanitarian law and Sierra Leonean law’ (SCSL 2000). While the SCSL only targeted top commanders, many lower-level fighters were sceptical of this claim and declined to participate in the SLTRC out of fear that their testimony would be used against them in a criminal trial at the SCSL (Kelsall 2005; Zvobgo 2019).

Other scholars emphasise that the ideas of memory and justice put forth by the SLTRC did not resonate with the cultural context in Sierra Leone (Kelsall 2005; Millar 2011b). Rather than seeing the SLTRC as an emotional outlet and collective memory project, most participants saw it as a resource to rebuild their lives through material assistance (Millar 2010, 2011a, 2011b; Shaw 2007).

A final explanation concerns the limited financial and technical resources available for the SLTRC to conduct its work, as well as the lack of political will – amongst both national and international actors – to implement its recommendations. As a result of these challenges, the Commission was only able to collect testimonies from approximately 7000 participants, in a country that had a significant percentage of its population (estimated at 5.5 million in 2004) directly affected by the conflict (SLTRC 2004). As such, a good number of victims were not engaged. What is more, even though the SLTRC heard the demands for reparations and emphasised these issues in the resulting report, only approximately 32,000 victims – roughly half of the expected caseload – eventually acquired some kind of support. This mostly concerned a one-off payment of ca 100 USD (IOM 2014; Ottendörfer 2014, 15). Lacking the economic and political will to continue the reparations programme, the international community arguably made their investment in the act of memory, not the fulfilment of the needs expressed during the TRC process.

While these explanations shed some light on why so many TC-witnesses held grievances, they do not fully explain why the expectations of participants were so clearly mismatched with the objectives, values, and performance of the SLTRC. Why did victims expect material assistance when the intended outcome of the process focused on factual truth, reconciliation, and emotional healing? Why did ex-fighters offer what was often perceived as insincere apologies and why did victims, despite this, publicly forgive them? Most existing explanations do not fully take into consideration how the SLTRC interacted with existing networks and the interplay between the multitude of actors involved in carrying out the process. The international-local binary alone obscures the complex interactions happening at the local level between TC-officials, brokers, and participants. These explanations do not consider how the existing patrimonial system interacted with the truth-telling process, and how this dynamic played into generating grievances.

Motorcades, brokers and clientelistic expectations

Most of our informants, both victims and ex-combatants, described the day that the SLTRC came to their community or camp as a noteworthy event that stood out. The visitors were commonly referred to as ‘people from Freetown’, ‘whites’, or ‘important people’, all epithets suggesting outsiders possessing unique resources and international connections. When recalling his encounter with the SLTRC, one ex-RUF child combatant explained that ‘[...] I was just a little boy but had a chance to speak to very prominent people in the society and foreigners. They were even giving us money’.⁹ The aura of importance was reinforced by ‘[...] the convoy approach adopted, with commissioners and their staff using motorcades and travelling from one town to another to conduct hearings and then move on’.¹⁰ At times, these delegations included trucks carrying food and even UN helicopters to facilitate access to remote areas. The fact that meals and cultural activities, such as music and dancing, were often organised for the participants, underlined that the SLTRC events were something out of the ordinary. By utilising the ‘motorcade’ as a performative act, the SLTRC spoke to a long tradition of Sierra Leonean elites using convoys to visualise their power, especially vis-à-vis rural communities. Since the 1980s, at least, new presidents have made it a habit of touring the country in large delegations to present themselves to their citizens via the ‘pump and pageantry’ of the motorcade (Bangura 2013). To underline the affluence of the new ruler, Presidents often leave their cars running during the duration of their visits, purposefully wasting expensive gasoline, and making sure to distribute economic resources, such as government coupons, to prospective clients. Hence, by using the same strategy as political elites to introduce themselves to a new audience, SLTRC-officials de facto acted as patrons.

Despite the imagery of a resourceful external intervention, many victims and ex-fighters were initially reluctant to take part in the SLTRC’s activities. Several interviewed victims explained how they feared that the ex-rebels would take advantage of the gatherings and kill those who attended. One victim explained how he had had a bad experience of a similar initiative during the war; at one point, the RUF had called for a meeting in his community to reconcile the rebels with the civilians. This had degenerated into the execution of several community members. Interestingly, many ex-rebels expressed similar misgivings. They suspected that vengeful civilians and ex-Civil Defence Forces (CDF) combatants, members of a pro-government militia of which many had taken oaths to kill RUF members, would lynch ex-rebels who dared to attend the SLTRC events. Similar suspicions constituted a real challenge for the SLTRC; without sufficient participation its message of a ‘new beginning’ would ring hollow.

To ease the fears of victims and ex-fighters, SLTRC-officials were dependent on broker figures. Interviewed participants particularly referred to the role played by chiefs and ex-commanders in sensitising them about the process and convincing them to participate. For most victims, especially in more rural settings, the chiefs were the most important brokers; it was they whom civilians and ex-CDF fighters were accustomed to and regulated social life in their communities. The role played by the chiefs was vividly described by one victim:

[...] at the time that the TRC came to make peace in our country, they went to our village and they met the town chief. They called us to the chief’s compound when he told what the TRC

had discussed with him. He told us that the war had ended and that we should come together as one and let peace prevail for ourselves and the country. He gave us encouraging words.¹¹

For several informants, the intervention of the chiefs had been decisive. When asked why he took part in the SLTRC event, despite his security qualms, one victim explained that: 'The paramount chief sent a strong message that we should not be scared [...] it was for the sake of the paramount chief and because I saw the other chiefs and stakeholders in the community going there so I went'.¹² For many ex-fighters, it was their ex-commanders who convinced them to take part in the SLTRC activities. Several ex-combatants described how SLTRC-officials talked to their 'bosses' to convince them to bring them to the truth-telling events. This was a very useful strategy, as many ex-commanders continued to wield influence over their ex-fighters despite the completion of the demobilisation processes (Themnér 2011). An added benefit of this type of collective mobilisation was the sense of security it bestowed ex-fighters to attend the SLTRC as a group.

By outsourcing much of the mobilisation to local brokers, the SLTRC was generally able to gather a good number of participants at their events. This is perhaps not surprising considering that it was a familiar task that they were asked to perform. Sierra Leone elites have a long history of employing community leaders, such as chiefs and (ex)-commanders, to mobilise potential clients as voters, demonstrators, labourers and fighters (Bledsoe 1990; Utas and Christensen 2016). The local potentates' brokering services were, however, not confined to mobilising truth-tellers; the former, particularly chiefs, often played a key role during the SLTRC events. Not only did they moderate the truth-telling ceremonies, but they also acted as mediators between victims and ex-fighters. Oftentimes chiefs also spoke on behalf of vulnerable groups, such as children, and conveyed the latter's testimonies to SLTRC-officials.

A problem with SLTRC's mobilisation strategy was that it became less important who came to their events. Brokers employed their own networks to identify possible participants. As a result, it was foremost accessible individuals, living in the brokers' communities or nearby camps, who were approached. Little emphasis was put on identifying victims and ex-combatants in more remote areas, or those who were in hiding. In addition, chiefs and ex-commanders were also keen to satisfy their employers by mobilising large numbers of truth-tellers, irrespective of how (ir)relevant they were. By presenting themselves as indispensable for programme implementation, they could ensure their continued political relevance at a time when local and national power structures were in flux.

The heavy reliance on chiefs, and those ex-commanders who felt safe enough to collaborate with the SLTRC, entailed that it was difficult to access ex-combatants who had secluded themselves out of fear of being arrested or killed. This is probably one reason for why relatively few ex-combatants took part in the in the SLTRC's work. Consequently, it was necessary for the latter to 'tour' those ex-combatants who they had access to, around the country. One ex-RUF fighter described the truth-telling tour that he embarked on in the following manner:

We visited a lot of places where victims were. We went to Kabala. In Kabala we went to several places. We also went to different places in Kono, Kabala and other places in the Northern Region. We were travelling in the TRC vehicle, we were amongst them (victimised

communities) and we discussed many things [...] they took us to where the victims were, we begged for forgiveness, it was difficult.¹³

As a result, victims were seldom confronted with those who had actually perpetrated violence against them, or as expressed by one ex-rebel, we ‘[...] were not responsible for what happened but we needed to ask forgiveness on behalf of our colleagues’.¹⁴ This patrimonial mode of mobilisation, with its emphasis on employing brokers’ networks to generate large crowds, exposed the SLTRC to accusations of corruption. When asked about his experience of the SLTRC, one ex-RUF fighter gave the following response:

They (SLTRC) were biased in the process. Without connections you would not get anything. Instead, people that were not involved and knew nothing from the start to the end of the war benefitted. Some didn’t even know what to say in the TRC, while the real victims because they had no connections were not included in the process.¹⁵

Most victims and ex-fighters portrayed the SLTRC events as ceremonial and impersonal, geared towards public consumption rather than providing a meaningful encounter between victims and perpetrators. At the events, commonly spread out over two days, victims and ex-fighters spoke in groups. The former were encouraged to share their experiences of wartime abuses with the SLTRC-officials and gathered audience, after which the ex-combatants were given time to speak. Habitually, the ex-combatants had selected a spokesperson to apologise and ask for forgiveness. According to most informants, this took the form of ‘begging’, symbolising ex-combatants’ willingness to repent. Thereafter, the victims were encouraged to accept the ex-combatants’ apologies. One ex-RUF fighter described the encounter in the following manner: ‘[w]e saw the victims, but we hardly interacted. Once we were taken to the victims and we asked for forgiveness, and they forgave us’.¹⁶

Interactions between SLTRC-officials and brokers on the one hand, and witnesses on the other hand were characterised by asymmetric relations. When describing how the two engaged with them, most victims and ex-combatants employed expressions such as ‘we were called to apologise’, ‘told to forgive’, or ‘they preached peace to us’, all indicative verbs clearly signalling what was expected of them. Such calls for action were generally clad in religious terms, either Christian or Muslim, about the necessity of forgiving people who publicly repented. In a religious country like Sierra Leone, it was extremely difficult for victims to withstand the social pressure to accept public calls for clemency or expressed by one victim: ‘[w]hen someone repents and asks for forgiveness, you forgive them’.¹⁷ During those few instances when participants were less complaisant, brokers had to be creative. One ex-RUF combatant divulged how the chief facilitating the SLTRC event in his community initially failed to convince the victims to forgive their tormentors. According to him, the chief subsequently ‘came up with another method’, whereby:

[...] the perpetrators and victims were encouraged to speak freely about what happened during the war, then they put water in a bowl and prayed over it. All of them were then told to drink this water as symbol of forgiveness and reconciliation.¹⁸

The chief’s inventiveness had the intended effect, and the ceremony could proceed as planned.

When recollecting their experiences of the SLTRC, both victims and ex-combatants emphasised the economic promises that had been extended to them. The latter

ranged from assurances that war-ravaged houses would be rebuilt, to promises of money, vocational training, and employment. All the ex-fighters and victims had to do was to take part in the truth-telling ceremonies. For many, similar promises appeared credible; not only due to the international character of the intervention, but that the organisers were able to offer some immediate relief in the form of food and cash. The sense of optimism that these acts instilled was lucidly expressed by one victim, who described how ‘[t]he white people gave the children sweets and toys and the children were showing off and the joy on their faces made me feel glad and I was happy’.¹⁹ It was, however, not only the SLTRC-officials who were in the business of making promises. Several informants also described how various brokers, such as chiefs and ex-commanders, would encourage people to testify in order to gain access to money, training and jobs.

Patrimonial debts and participant grievances

Even if the SLTRC’s patrimonial approach to truth-telling generally convinced people to support the process, it left many aggrieved. Several victims described the public acts of repentance and forgiveness as artificial or fake. Even if most victims officially forgave the ex-fighters, many harboured feelings of resentment. One victim described how he only forgave ‘[...] because the TRC, the chiefs and other stakeholders told us; we must forgive them, so I forgave them’.²⁰ Many ex-fighters also had misgivings concerning the effectiveness of the process. A recurring theme was that the ex-combatants were unsure if the victims’ declarations of forgiveness were sincere and a general frustration that the ceremonies had failed to establish a positive relationship between them and the victims. One female ex-RUF combatant described her experiences in the following manner:

it became clear that it was more like a show, with people coming together and having you ask for forgiveness, with photos taken and then they move on. There was no real reconciliation and healing for me. The stigma and the stereotypes continued. People looked at me like I was a dog and I believe they never did forgive me.²¹

Even if both victims and perpetrators of violence found the process unsettling, it was more common that ex-combatants described elements of the truth-telling ceremonies in a positive manner. A number of ex-fighters expressed gratitude towards the SLTRC for ensuring a safe return to their communities of origin. Also, ex-combatants were much more willing to embrace the SLTRC’s religion-infused narrative, holding that devout Christians and Muslims must forgive those who repent. By echoing this mantra, ex-rebel fighters could to some degree empower themselves and reduce the moral and political asymmetry that characterised their post-war relations with many victims.

The patrimonial manner of truth-telling made it virtually impossible for victims and ex-combatants to break script during the SLTRC events. Played out in front of potential new patrons – who were not only making promises of a new economic beginning, but more or less ordering participants how to behave – it was de facto unthinkable for ex-combatants not to repent and victims not to forgive. What is more, the weight of the nation pressed on the participants to forgive and move on, or as expressed by one ex-RUF fighter:

It was a national interest and that all those ex-combatants were to be forgiven. The message from the government was that they shouldn’t tamper with anybody who had gone through the DDR.²²

In fact, out of all the informants interviewed, only one reported that a participant had caused a scene by not acting as expected. One ex-RUF fighter described how a man, whose brother's hand had been cut off by his rebel colleague, attacked the latter. The man was subsequently removed by SLTRC-officials.

What caused the greatest grievances were, however, the SLTRC's inability to deliver on the plethora of material promises made to victims and ex-fighters. In our interviews, almost all the informants dwelled on their disappointment of having been left empty-handed. For instance, one victim described his disillusionment in the following manner:

I was informed of a reparations program that will provide support to victims but got nothing from anyone. I have been frustrated ever since and it appears that I was provided with hope and sweet words to get me to participate, with the staff of the TRC knowing that I may not get any assistance. Since then, I have been on my own with no support. How can one ever trust my government again?²³

As indicated in the quote, similar forms of frustration do not appear to be a function of private, unsubstantiated hopes of acquiring help. On the contrary, most interviewees pointed to having received verbal assurances of assistance, ranging from 'a better life' and training, to money, employment and rebuilt houses. To some extent, the unmet expectations may be explained by victims and ex-fighters conflating SLTRC activities with programmes geared towards DDR or community development, and that vague references to 'help' were culturally understood as receiving material endowments (Millar 2010; 2013). There are, however, enough testimonies to disprove that these factors were the most important. Most informants described how individual SLTRC-officials, and particularly various brokers, took the freedom to employ economic compensation – even if they had no institutional mandate from SLTRC to do so – as a bargaining chip to motivate truth-telling participation.

What this *de facto* meant was that a patrimonial contract was created, whereby truth-telling, repentance and forgiveness became clientelistic endeavours that victims and ex-fighters expected to be compensated for. The anticipation of a *quid pro quo* is vividly captured in the following quote from a victim who had been promised assistance from SLTRC-officials. Describing his encounter with the SLTRC he declared that:

When they (SLTRC) came and talked to us, I was willing to go and up to this present time I am ready to talk to anybody because I don't know who will assist me one day. I was expecting that there would be assistance but to this present time nothing of such has happened.²⁴

Several other informants also appear to have interpreted their participation as a clientelistic service that should have been compensated. For instance, one victim stated that he would not 'have forgiven the rebels' had he known that promises of training or a job would be unmet. One bizarre side-effect of patrimonial truth-telling is that ex-fighters and victims may start blaming themselves for not receiving the promised assistance; if they underperform as witnesses, the patrimonial contract is broken. This is exactly how one ex-RUF combatant reasoned when asked if his testimony was given equal time and value like those of victims: 'I don't think they gave it any value because no benefit has come to me as a result'.²⁵

Our extensive empirical research highlights that a key reason for why the SLTRC's patrimonial truth-telling model created such a discrepancy between promised and delivered

endowments was that so many actors were involved in the businesses of promise-making. Therefore, it was easy for local, national, and international ‘patrons’ to blame each other. Brokers, such as chiefs and ex-commanders, assigned guilt to long-gone international organisations and SLTRC representatives for not fulfilling their promises and providing them with sufficient resources. Meanwhile, the SLTRC and international donors cleansed their hands by arguing that resources never arrived to back up the recommendations and that brokers and individual TC-officials lacked the mandate to extend many of the promises that they made. Left behind were victims and ex-fighters with uncashable debts.

Concluding discussion

Based on some thirty years of experiences, there is a growing realisation that TCs often leave victim and ex-combatant participants aggrieved. Although previous studies have advanced our understanding of some of the causes of this frustration, insufficient attention has been devoted to tracing the patrimonial sources of TC-participants’ grievances. Based on in-depth interviews in Sierra Leone, we have sought to address this lacuna by providing a more fine-grained theoretical understanding of how patrimonial modes of truth-telling often leave participants aggrieved. We find that utilising *motorcades as manifestations of power* and outsourcing witness mobilisation to *brokers* constitutes a doubled-edge sword when implementing TCs. On the one hand, such tactics can successfully mobilise TC-witnesses and craft TC-activities in accordance to culturally familiar discourses and practices. In the case of Sierra Leone, this arguably allowed the SLTRC to achieve two of its mandated objectives: construct a national historical account of the war, and, at least technically, provide a forum for victims and perpetrators to share their stories.²⁶ On the other hand, patrimonial modes of mobilisation risk leaving many TC-participants frustrated and aggrieved. Not only do such tactics generally create an uncondusive environment for inter-personal reconciliation, TC-officials de facto present themselves as patrons. The problem is, of course, that few officials are willing to take on the ‘patron’s’ responsibility to compensate TC participants for rendered services, inevitably leaving the latter economically aggrieved. Hence, as with many types of top-down peacebuilding interventions, there is a glaring discrepancy between the official objectives of the interveners and the aspirations and hopes of the local stakeholders (Whalan 2013). The inherent tension in patrimonial truth-telling is consistent with findings in the broader literature on informal trust networks, which have highlighted how informal governance practices can both undermine, as well as complement the performance of public services (Helmke and Levitsky 2004; Meagher 2012).

What are the broader theoretical implications of these findings? One way to understand patrimonial forms of truth-telling is to see it as an example of what Bliesemann de Guevara (2017, 58) calls ‘travel-as-performance’. By conducting short visits to various post-war communities – where local actors (i.e. victims, ex-combatants and brokers) are well aware of the role they are expected to play – elites (i.e. TC-officials) gain ‘authentic insights’ by having been on the ground. Such insights constitute the basis for knowledge production that can subsequently be employed in discursive struggles to establish ‘truths’. Even if such performances may be necessary in order to create a national account of wartime transgressions, it risks leaving victims and ex-combatants disillusioned.

Does this imply that there are no positive micro-level benefits associated with TCs? A reoccurring theme that many of our informants came back to was the role local SLTRC events played in generating trust for the peace process. Both victims and ex-fighters vividly described the anxiety that they felt before attending the SLTRC ceremonies. In fact, both groups feared that the events would degenerate into violence. However, by gaining first-hand positive experience of sharing the same physical and social space as the ‘Other’, our informants were convinced that a new post-war order had begun. From this perspective, TC-participation de facto functions as a sort of costly signalling; by making themselves vulnerable and attending TC ceremonies, victims and ex-fighters signal their peaceful intentions to each other. This exercise, which necessitated a heroic leap of faith, was perhaps the most lasting contribution of the SLTRC.

Notes

1. Ainley, Friedman, and Mahony (2015), Bakiner (2016), Gibson (2006), Hayner (2011), Lambourne (2009), Lundy and McGovern (2008), Millar (2011a), Minow (1998), Roht-Arriaza and Mariezcurrena (2006).
2. Brahm (2007), Chapman and Ball (2001), Minow (1988), Olsen et al. (2010).
3. Inspiration for this definition comes from Gurr’s (1970) concept of relative deprivation, which captures the tension between the socioeconomic goods that individuals believe they ought to have, and what they actually have, and how this incentivizes men and women to employ violence.
4. It is important to note that some scholars, such as Alie (2008, 144), argue that the SLTRC did not make much use of the chiefs in the implementation of its work.
5. It is vital to note that in some instances there was an unwillingness amongst TC-officials and donors to integrate chiefs in the work of TCs due to liberal principles that see traditional beliefs and practices as primitive (Alie 2008).
6. Statements provided to the SLTRC were classified as either ‘victim’, ‘perpetrator’ or ‘witness’ testimony, as well as a fourth category of those providing statements on behalf of someone else. When providing written statements, individuals were able to complete multiple sections of the statement form in accordance with overlapping experiences as victim, perpetrator or witness (SLTRC 2004). However, public hearings involved a more explicit division between those participating in the role of ‘victim’ and ‘perpetrator’.
7. The project received ethical approval by *Regionala Etikprövningsnämnden i Uppsala*, reference no 2018/155.
8. The interviews are only used in the empirical analyses in the sections entitled ‘Motorcades, Brokers, and Clientelistic Expectations’ and ‘Patrimonial Debts and Participant Grievances’.
9. Interview with ex-RUF combatant, Freetown, 11 January 2019.
10. Interview with civil society activist, Freetown, 11 April 2020.
11. Interview with victim 1, Freetown 1 February 2019.
12. Interview with victim 2, Freetown, 1 February 2019.
13. Interview with ex-RUF combatant 1, Freetown, 17 January 2019.
14. Interview with ex-RUF combatant 2, Freetown, 17 January 2019.
15. Interview with ex-RUF combatant, Makeni, 14 February 2019.
16. Interview with ex-RUF combatant 3, Freetown, 17 January 2019.
17. Interview with victim, Freetown, 31 January 2019.
18. Interview with victim, Freetown, 10 January 2019.
19. Interview with victim, Freetown 1, 1 February 2019.
20. Interview with victim, Freetown, 31 January 2019.
21. Interview with female ex-RUF combatant, Makeni, 12 March 2020.
22. Interview with ex-RUF combatant 4, Freetown, 17 January 2019.

23. Interview with victim, Lunsar, 23 March 2020.
24. Interview with victim, Makeni, 15 February 2019.
25. Interview with ex-RUF combatant, Freetown, 11 January 2019.
26. There is, however, less evidence that the SLTRC succeeded in attaining the two remaining mandated objectives breaking the cycles of violence and facilitating genuine healing and reconciliation. This is particularly true when considering the repeated outbreaks of electoral violence in Sierra Leone, and the lack of trust between victims and ex-combatants outlined in this article.

Acknowledgements

We are grateful to Roland Kostić and the editors and external reviewers at *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding* for their helpful comments. This article would not have been possible without the financial assistance provided by the Swedish Research Council. Anders Themné is also grateful for the support provided by the Centre for Gender and Africa Studies, University of the Free State, where he is a research fellow.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding

This work was supported by Vetenskapsrådet: [Grant Number 2016-05812].

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