

**Crossing the Bridge:  
From Combatant to Community Member**

**DRAFT**

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Despite the wide range strategies developed to assist societies transitioning from war to peace, peacebuilding is often criticized for “falling short of expectations” (Muggah; 2009, 1). One of the main challenges is the lack of coordination among these initiatives, which has often resulted in duplicative and contradictory efforts. Due to previous shortcomings, there is an increasing expectation by international donors to deliver integrated and coordinated efforts during the post-conflict recovery process (Waldorf; 2010, 16). Of increasing interest to academics and practitioners are the potential synergies between transitional justice (TJ) and disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) (See Sriram & Herman, 2009; Theidon, 2007; Patel, 2009; Waldorf, 2010; Shaw, 2010).

Until recent, DDR and TJ have operated in isolation from each other due to their opposing positions on the “peace versus justice” debate. TJ focuses on issues related justice, such as criminal prosecutions, truth-seeking and reparations, while DDR seeks to secure and maintain peace by transforming combatants into ex-combatants, and ensuring they remain that way (Waldorf; 2010, 16). Combatants, however, are less likely to participate in DDR programs, if TJ mechanisms that promote accountability await them (Sriram & Herman; 2009, 463).

Although academics and practitioners often conceptualize TJ and DDR as separate processes, this has not been the practice in post-conflict communities. Communities struggling to live together after mass atrocities have found their own innovative ways to promote social trust and repair. In Sierra Leone and Northern Uganda, for instance, cleansing ceremonies and rituals, were used to facilitate the (re)integration of former combatants into their communities. These traditional justice mechanisms are particularly useful in situations where the line between “victim” and “perpetrator” overlap, such as the case for child and youth combatants.

This paper argues that traditional justice mechanisms, particularly cleansing rituals and ceremonies, can help bridge the gap between DDR and TJ in theory and practice. To develop this argument, I demonstrate how traditional justice mechanisms have been successful at initiating social reconstruction, which is often expected to be transfer from macro-level to the micro-level. After providing an overview of DDR and TJ, this paper examines the short-term tensions and long-term linkages with these processes. Following this, I analyze how cleansing rituals and ceremonies were used to facilitate social reintegration with former child and youth combatants in Northern Uganda and Sierra Leone.

### **Overview of DDR and TJ**

Despite the seeming disconnect between DDR and TJ, these initiatives are often implemented in the same time and place. For example, in the past twenty years there were eleven peacekeeping operations in Africa, which included DDR in their mandate. Of these, seven also involved some type of a TJ process or mechanisms, supported by the international community (Patel; 2009, 250). In some instances, like Sierra Leone and Liberia, there was an overlap between DDR and TJ processes. Recent initiatives in Colombia have formally linked DDR and TJ under the “Justice Peace Law” (See Theidon 2007), which could set precedence for the future relation between these two processes.

### Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Programs

DDR is considered to be an important feature<sup>1</sup> of post-war reconstruction and recovery and is frequently initiated during a ceasefire or immediately after a peace-agreement is signed.

The United Nations defines DDR as:

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<sup>1</sup> Between 1994 and 2005, there have been approximately thirty-four DDR programs implemented world-wide (Waldorf; 2010, 16).

[a] process that contributes to security and stability in post-conflict recovery context by removing weapons from the hands of combatants taking combatants out of military structures and helping them to integrate socially and economically into society by finding civilian livelihoods (United Nations DDR Online Resource Centre)

More specifically, its three main phases involve: (1) disarmament which focuses on the collection, control, and disposal of weapons and ammunition; (2) demobilization where armed groups decrease in size and/or are dismantled, and gathered in temporary centres or cantonments; and, (3) (re)integration where combatants receive financial and material assistance to help them reinsert into new or old communities (Sriram & Herman; 2009, 457).

DDR is increasingly criticized for adopting narrow security framework, which has been referred to as the “guns, camps, and cash” approach (See Knight & Ozerdem, 2004). Indeed, DDR is often viewed as a technocratic processes, primarily preoccupied with counting the number of guns and combatants while failing to rebuild social relations (Theidon; 2007, 67). The (re)integration component of DDR is often unplanned, receiving the least amount of resources (Dzinesa; 2007, 87). In Liberia, for example, there was a significant mismatch between the “DD” and “R” elements of the program whereby thousands of combatants that disarmed and demobilized did not receive any (re)integration packages or support due to funding shortages (Paes; 2005, 258). Even when (re)integration initiatives are implemented, the type of vocational training that is often provided is not conducive to post-war environments. For instance, in Liberia there was an over-production of mechanics and seamstresses that could not be absorbed by the economic market (Jennings; 2007, 214). Not surprisingly, (re)integration is widely considered to be the “weakest link” of DDR (Theidon; 2007, 67; Shaw; 2010, 113; Waldorf; 2010, 19; Dzinesa; 2007, 87).

Building sustainable peace, however, requires that ex-combatants be economically and socially integrated. Without an adequate (re)integration process, ex-combatants are more likely to re-arm or join neighbouring armed groups, thus undermining peacebuilding initiatives (Paes;

2005; 258). In light of this growing evidence, further attention and resources need to be allocated towards the (re)integration phase of DDR. By expanding our unit of analysis and intervention from the individual towards the communities to which these ex-combatants are joining, can help to conceptualize a more holistic approach (Theidon; 2007, 67).

### Transitional Justice

Transitional justice has become a “globalized” intervention in post-conflict environments (Teitel; 2008, 2). Indeed, the question today is not *whether* something should be done after mass atrocities, but *how* it should be done (Nagy; 2008, 276). The standard TJ toolkit includes criminal trials, truth commissions and reparation programs, which are backward-looking mechanisms, but with forward-looking goals (Waldorf; 2010, 21).

Despite the proliferation of TJ, there is little empirical evidence to illustrate that its standard tools are making a difference in post-conflict communities (Arriaza & Roht-Arriaza; 2008, 152). Transitional justice is mainly based on normative assertions rather than empirically based evidence (Thoms *et al*; 2010, 2). Academics and practitioners often assume that justice, peace and reconciliation -the main goals of TJ- can easily transfer from the macro to the micro level. These goals, however, are multifaceted processes and are unlikely to follow the same path or lead to identical results.

Furthermore, transitional justice praxis is deeply embedded within a legalistic framework rooted in international norms and standards (Nagy; 2008, 267). With the institutionalization of human rights norms and standards, criminal trials have become the privileged response by the international community (Okello; 2010, 275). However, it is inaccurate to assume that legal justice is desired or the highest priority in all post-conflict societies (Weinstein *et al*; 2010, 47); especially when the search for *justice* comes into conflict with *peace*. The institutionalization of

TJ, has been criticized for promoting a “one-size-fits-all” solution (Jackson; 2009; 329), which often fails to consider the social, political, economic and cultural context of societies transitioning from war to peace. As such, the current phase of TJ is marked by a disconnection between international and local priorities (Shaw & Waldorf; 2010, 1). Reconciliation is commonly assumed to transmit from macro-level processes of justice and truth-seeking to the micro-level.

### **Short-Term Tensions Between DDR and TJ**

Although scholars and practitioners have only recently begun to examine the possible links between TJ and DDR, there is a tendency to emphasize the tensions between these processes. The main frictions between these processes, however, are in the short-term, before or during the transition period when there is uncertainty of what will be the next steps. Will perpetrators be held accountable and prosecuted by a criminal court? If so, which individuals will be brought to justice? Will victims be compensated for what they have lost? How will their stories be shared and remembered for future generations? It is during this period that TJ and DDR propose different mechanisms to facilitate the transition from violence to peace.

The main obstacle is that TJ and DDR occupy different sides of the “peace versus justice debate” (Waldorf; 2010, 22). While justice is widely considered to be a key ingredient to sustainable and lasting peace, the timing of international criminal courts and tribunals has sparked a lively debate. In particular, the ICC’s interventions in conflict zones, such as Northern Uganda, Sudan, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, have been at the forefront of this debate.

On one side of the debate, proponents argue that peace must be secure before justice mechanisms can be implemented. Indeed, criminal investigations, indictments and prosecutions

have the potential to derail ceasefires or peace agreements (Patel; 2009, 253). For example, the utility of the ICC's intervention in Northern Uganda was largely criticized for disrupting the Juba peace talks between the Government of Uganda and the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) (See Southwick 2005 and Hovil & Quinn, 2005). The ICC's lack of enforcement capacity to execute its arrest warrants against the LRA top commanders and its reliance on the support of member states is of particular concern (Suarez; 2008, 175). Given that the mandate and operational features of DDR are often negotiated during peace talks and incorporated into peace agreements (e.g. Southern Sudan), the sequencing of criminal prosecutions is of major importance to this process. Simply put, combatants are less willing to disarm and demobilize if they know that justice awaits them.<sup>2</sup>

On the other side of the debate, proponents argue that "justice delayed is justice denied". Prosecuting individuals responsible for international crimes will prevent and deter others from committing the same crimes and put an end to a culture of impunity. Criminal trials individualize guilt and responsibility for the abuses committed, giving victims a sense of justice (Duthie & Specht; 2010, 192). The current "justice cascade" marked by the proliferation of criminal trials and tribunals (e.g. Rwanda, former Yugoslavia, Sierra Leone, Cambodia), has made it difficult, if not impossible, to grant amnesty to combatants in exchange for peace, as was done so in the past (e.g. South Africa, Mozambique, Angola).

TJ and DDR are not only focusing on different elements of peacebuilding (justice versus peace), but they also benefit different constituencies involved or affected by mass violence. Transitional justice focuses on "victims", while DDR efforts are aimed at "perpetrators",

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<sup>2</sup> However, it should be recognized that there may be other factors deterring combatants from DDR programs, especially child and youth soldiers. For example, young fighters are often shameful and fear the repercussions of being associated with armed groups (See Coulter 2009). Others argue that fighting with an armed group is sometimes considered a survival strategy (See Utas 2005).

although referred to us as “combatants” or “fighters”. The reinsertion packages that ex-combatants receive during the DDR programs have been controversial, as it is often perceived as a reward for violent behaviour. Some communities view these cash payments as “blood money” or “pay-offs to murders” (Duthie & Specht; 2010, 204). A sense of injustice heightens, as reparations for victims often fail short. For example, it is noted that approximately one million ex-combatants participated in DDR programs in twenty countries in 2005, which cost around \$1.9 billion. However, none of the same twenty countries had reparation programs for victims (Waldorf; 2010, 15). Increasing the links between DDR and TJ could potentially help to narrow the imbalance distribution of assistance packages between “victims” and “perpetrators”. In particular, collective rather individual reparations could be also implemented to reduce resentment among survivors of armed conflict, like the case for Guatemala and Peru.

### **Long-Term Linkages Linkages DDR and TJ**

DDR and TJ are both part of the liberal peacebuilding paradigm, although they engage in different activities (Sriram & Herman; 2009, 462). Despite the short term tensions between DDR and TJ in the short-term, both of these processes have complementary long term goals. In particular, they seek to promote social trust and repair among community members, particularly with ex-combatants (Waldorf; 2010, 29). Therefore, the strongest link and opportunity for convergence is during the (re)integration and reconciliation components of DDR and TJ. Arguably, reconciliation begins with the return and (re)integration of ex-combatants. However, there is no serious discussion both in theory and practice as to what reconciliation means in terms of (re)integration (Sriram & Herman, 2009; 466).

The (re)integration of ex-combatants poses formable challenges on post conflict communities and requires some form of reconciliation, if it is to be successful. At a minimum



this processes involves co-existence while at a maximum it requires establishing a level of trust that reinforces cooperative and peaceful relationships (Stovel; 2007, 310). Indeed, (re)integration relies heavily on the willingness and acceptance of community members, which is why it is important to link DDR to broader processes, such as TJ (Sriram & Herman; 2009, 465).

### Challenges with (Re)integration and Reconciliation

A critical challenge in fostering stronger links between (re)integration and reconciliation is that these are often considered to be the weakest elements of DDR and TJ. These are long-term goals that often fall through the sidelines during the short-term focus of the peacebuilding initiatives. Reconciliation and (re)integration are also frequently conceptualized as processes rather than outcomes, which makes it difficult to know when they begin and end. Additionally, these processes are difficult to measure and cannot be adequately captured through the “results-based management” indicators that currently dominates peacebuilding praxis (Muggah; 2009, 4). With increasing pressure from donors to demonstrate tangible results, non-governmental organizations, dependent on external funding, might be less willing to engage in these activities.

Given the short-term mandates and timeframes, DDR and TJ struggle to quickly differentiate “victims” and “perpetrators” of mass violence and establish their beneficiary groups. However, the victim-perpetrator dichotomy that is often endorsed and perpetuated by the peacebuilding paradigm is increasingly difficult to disentangle in contemporary civil conflicts. For instance, intermingling in post-conflict communities are bystanders, collaborators, informants, forced perpetrators and victims-turned-perpetrators (Baines; 2010; 410), all of which

have complicated levels of guilt and complicity. These individuals fall into a “grey zone” of violence and are often marginalized from DDR and TJ.<sup>3</sup>

Due to these complexities, the majority of individuals involved in mass violence will never face criminal trials, as there is simply too many of them to prosecute. For example, in Rwanda the number of *genocidaires* was so great that it overflowed the national prisons. Local justice systems are often absent or destroyed during civil wars and not surprisingly, civilians have little trust in these structures to bring “justice” in the aftermath of violence. In light of these circumstances, international criminal courts and tribunals, which is the preferred solution by the international community, only focus on those “who are most responsible” for orchestrating violence and atrocities (Okello; 2010, 275). While TJ focuses, almost exclusive, on the individuals that are “most responsible” for atrocities, community members often struggle to live side-by-side with individuals that do not meet this high-level threshold or status. Although community members will not face these individuals in criminal court, they usually meet them on a daily basis within their communities or nearby towns (Baines; 2010, 414). Truth commissions aim to promote broader community participation, regardless of their “victim”/“perpetrator” status, but have also come under scrutiny. For instance, some argue that truth-telling might be detrimental to the (re)integration of former combatants, as it draws attention to their involvement with armed groups in front of their communities (Duthie & Specht; 2010, 192). Others note that recounting trauma does not always “heal” or “reconcile” community members (Coulter; 2009, 173). Social reconstruction should therefore not be assumed to be an automatic consequence of criminal trials and truth commissions, although both might be components of this process

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<sup>3</sup> These binary dichotomies are further complicated from a gender perspective. Coulter highlights how someone who has been raped is generally regarded a “victim” and someone who has been a fighter is a “perpetrator” (2009; 126). However, females involved with armed groups have usually experience both of these identities.

(Arriaza & Roht-Arriaza; 2008, 164). In fact, social repair is a process that needs to be forged and lived by community members themselves (Theidon; 2007, 88).

The narrow focus of DDR programs is also limiting in addressing the various actors involved with armed groups. Most armed groups have a hierarchical organizational structure, comparable to a military unit. DDR tends to focus on those situated at the top-rank of the hierarchy, similar to TJ, although with very different intentions. To participate in a DDR program, individuals often surrender a gun, as evidence that they were part of an armed group. Yet, informers, porters, cooks, foot soldiers, and “bush wives” occupying the lower ranks of armed groups are rarely given their own weapon, even though they form the basis of these groups. Consequently, they are often excluded from DDR programs (Duthie & Specht; 2010, 205). For example, in Sierra Leone, many “bush wives” had their guns taken away by the men (Coulter; 2009, 155) and were in turn, significantly underrepresented in DDR programs (McKay and Mazurana; 2004, 98). Furthermore, there is growing evidence that commanders are entitled to preferential treatment and benefits through DDR programs. In Liberia, for instance, computer training, which is considered a luxury in a post-conflict context, was only granted to top commanders. It is important to recognize that senior commanders often receive better treatment and benefits because they often pose a higher security concern in post-conflict contexts. Nevertheless, this unequal treatment can lead to social resentment and reinforces hierarchies among former combatants.

Although TJ and DDR are most compatible in regards to social reconstruction through (re)integration and reconciliation processes, their short-term rather than long-term focus prevents them from making a substantial contribution towards these goals. They focus on perpetrators/combatants that are “most responsible for armed violence”, while the rest tend to fall

through the sidelines. Of particular concern, are child and youth combatants that have traditionally been excluded from both of these processes (Annan *et al.*; 2010, 3). Although the use of child and youth soldiers is not a new phenomenon it has become more prevalent since the 1990s. As previously noted, these individuals do not fall neatly within the victim-perpetrator dichotomy that is perpetuated by TJ and DDR initiatives. Although scholars debate the agency of child and youth combatants, whether they are all victims, forcibly recruited by armed forces, or if some joined voluntarily as a form of empowerment (See Baines 2009, Coulter 2009, and Utas 2005), it is widely recognized that the reinsertion process is complex. In response to this, communities have developed their own ways to promote social reconstruction with individuals that challenge the victim-perpetrator dichotomy. In so doing, communities have also found innovative ways to merge DDR and TJ.

### **Traditional Justice Mechanisms**

Post-conflict communities across Africa have developed ‘bottom-up’ (local) rather than ‘top-down’ (national or international) efforts in post-conflict reconstruction (Arriaza & Roht-Arriaza; 2008, 154). Traditional justice encompasses different forms of justice, including restorative, reparative and retributive (Quinn; 2007, 394). These mechanisms draw upon established conflict-resolution practices and approaches adapted to address post-conflict dynamics. For instance, cleansing ceremonies and rituals derived from cultural expressions and practices, were used to facilitate the (re)integration of former combatants into their communities in Sierra Leone and Northern Uganda. These ceremonies promote symbolic gestures of social healing and recovery, thus fostering reconciliation at the community-level (Stovel; 2008, 306).

Traditional justice mechanisms, also referred to as “local justice”, “customary” or “indigenous law” encompass a wide range of activities (Duthie; 2010, 231). Although there are

stark differences among these mechanisms depending on the context, they are often grouped together and compared with each other, as they share common elements: (1) they straddle the line between informal and formal, state and non-state; (2) they involve wide community participation; (3) they often draw upon established practices, although they are adopted to post-conflict realities; (4) they are usually “bottom-up” rather than “top-down”<sup>4</sup> (Duthie; 2010, 231; Huyse; 2008, 14). The community based nature of these mechanisms makes them more accessible and legitimate than other transitional justice processes, especially as they incorporate local norms and values (Duthie; 2010, 242). The following section will focus exclusively on cleansing ceremonies and rituals that were used in Northern Uganda and Sierra Leone that fall under the rubric of traditional justice, to demonstrate (re)integration and reconciliation processes “from below”.

#### Insights from Northern Uganda and Sierra Leone

Ex-combatants, particularly former child and youth soldiers, face challenges of stigma, resentment, and even, violence when they return “home”.<sup>5</sup> Some argue that re-marginalization, rather than re-integration is the most common outcome (Utas; 2005, 150). Name calling, such as “rebel” or “bushwife” are common source of pain for ex-child soldiers that are trying to adjust to civilian life (Baines; 2007, 109 and Coulter; 2009, 211). To address these challenges, rituals and ceremonies have been used by community leaders and members to assist ex-child soldiers with their (re)integration process.

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<sup>4</sup> Recent experience with the *gacaca* courts in Rwanda contravenes this point, see Waldorf 2010.

<sup>5</sup> A recent research project in Northern Uganda, demonstrates that reintegration varies according to the context and time. This study shows that social rejection of child and youth combatants in Northern Uganda improved with time (Annan *et al*; 2010; 19). Furthermore, this study also highlights how females face more difficulties when returning home than males, particularly those who came back with children, which is similar to Sierra Leone (Annan *et al*; 2010; 19-20 and Coulter; 2009, 155-180). Nevertheless, it is important to recognize that the mass violence in Northern Uganda had been geographically displaced by the time this research study was conducted, which could have influenced how child and youth combatants are treated by community members.

The Acholi, one of the main ethnic groups in Northern Uganda, are commonly known for the *nyono tong gweno* (stepping on the egg) ceremony. Although traditionally practiced at the family and clan level, *nyono tong gweno* is now practiced at the community level to welcome back ex-child and youth soldiers. This ceremony involves the individual stepping on an egg placed on a slippery branch and a stick with a fork used to open granaries (Baines, 2005; 44). *Nyono tong gweno* is commonly utilized for individuals that have been away from home for an extended period, such as hunting, although currently it is usually because of their time in the “bush”. Over fifty *nyono tong gweno* have been organized by *Ker Kwaro Acholi*, an institution representing clan chiefs and elders and presided by an elected Paramount Chief (Baines; 2007, 110). *Nyono tong gweno* has been particularly useful in the midst of armed violence, as it sends the message to those remaining in the “bush” that they will be welcomed and accepted by community members, if they return home (Baines; 2007, 110). This is of key importance since ex-child soldiers often fear returning to their village due to possible reprisal from community members (Wessells; 2006, 209).

Similarly, local communities in Sierra Leone drew upon a Krio proverb “there’s no bad bush to throw away a bad child” to facilitate the (re)integration process for ex-child soldiers. This traditional proverb means that no matter what a child has done, the community always has a place for him or her (Stovel; 2008, 306). This proverb was used to promote a reconciliatory environment after mass violence (Boersch-Supan; 2009, 63). Reconciliation for many Sierra Leones was conceptualized as a having a *kol at* (“cool heart”). Indeed, “when the heart (the centre of feelings, thoughts and intentions), is ‘cool’, it is not angry (‘warm’ or resentful), it does not cause one to ‘think too much’ about painful memories” (Shaw; 2010, 125). Purposeful forgetting was an important way to foster a *kol at*. These cultural beliefs and practice, however,

went against the main purpose of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission which encouraged public testimonies and remembering (Shaw; 2007, 206). The reconciliation ceremonies held after the TRC hearings were believed to be far more effective than the actual hearings (Kelsall; 2005, 390). During these ceremonies, implicated individuals had the opportunity to demonstrate humility and shame, which was far more powerful than an apology (Shaw, 2010, 130). Overall, community-based reconciliatory practices in Sierra Leone appear to be less uniformed than those in Northern Uganda. For example, the National Committee for Disarmament and Demobilisation and Reintegration, brought together ex-combatants to ad hoc community reconciliation meetings (Duthie; 2010, 237). Others note, that ex-bush wives returning from fighting forces were given herbal baths by traditional healers to cleanse them and help them cope with their experiences during captivity (McKay and Mazurana; 2004, 48).<sup>6</sup>

Cleansing rituals and ceremonies, like the ones used in Northern Uganda and Sierra Leone, were originally used to appease ancestors after an offence (Stovel; 2008, 306). Indeed, “spirit possession is not uncommon throughout Africa, where the worlds of the living and the dead are intimately connected” (Baines; 2010, 429). This cosmological perspective influences the reconciliation process in post-conflict communities, in ways that are not addressed by the dominant peacebuilding discourse and practice. In several post-conflict African contexts (e.g. Northern Uganda, Sierra Leone, Mozambique, Angola), community members believe that spiritual forces can cause misfortunes until the person afflicted take actions to correct wrongs of the past (Baines; 2010, 429). In Northern Uganda, for instance, believe that *cen* (a bad spirit) will take vengeance on those responsible for a “bad” death, sending misfortunes, such as illness, accidents and even death, to the individual, his/her family, or even clan members (Baines; 2007,

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<sup>6</sup> McKay and Mazurana also note that some of the former “bush wives” received combined ritual cleansing and talks from the Queen Mothers.

93). Similarly, in Sierra Leone former “bush wives” who did not conform to social and cultural norms, were often marginalized as they were believed to be possessed by bad spirits, although they could be cured (Coulter; 2009, 218). Much of the stigma and rejection that ex-child soldiers encounter during the (re)integration processes stems from these spiritual beliefs and practices. Atrocities<sup>7</sup> committed during captivity, such as killing and being raped in the “bush”, are believed to result in spiritual impurity that can contaminate the family, clan and/or community if it is not properly addressed (Wessells; 2006, 195). Nightmares that former child and youth fighters experience are often interpreted as spirit haunting or possessions that need required some form of purification (Annan *et al*; 2009, 660).

Cleansing rituals and ceremonies used in Northern Uganda and Sierra Leone are therefore required not only to cleanse the individual and community, but to also restore social order (Baines; 2010, 112). The increasing use of these cleansing rituals throughout Africa demonstrates their fundamental role in the (re)integration process of ex-child soldiers (McKay & Mazurana; 2004, 47). Through these rituals and ceremonies community members, including ex-child soldiers, construct a new sense of co-existence (Theidon; 2007, 89).

### Limitations of Traditional Justice

Despite the global prevalence of traditional justice (e.g. Sierra Leone, Peru, East Timor, Northern Uganda, Mozambique, Angola), critics argue that such practices should not be romanticized as they were not developed to address gross human right abuses (Arriaza & Roht-Arriaza; 2008, 161). Consequently, “traditional justice mechanisms are often set in opposition to modern ones, the first informal (illegitimate) and the latter formal (legitimate)” (Baines; 2010, 414). Unless adapted to meet international norms and standards, such as due process, they remain on the outskirts of transitional justice praxis. Yet, the flexibility of these mechanisms and

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<sup>7</sup> Given that cleansing rituals vary from clan to clan, different offences are considered to result in spiritual pollution.



their ability to address the complex roles and identities that deviate from the victim-perpetrator dichotomy is precisely why they are increasingly used by communities in the aftermath of violence.

Others critics highlight the potential abuse of power by community leaders and chiefs, who carry out these rituals and ceremonies. Of particular concern, is the marginalization of children, youth, and women, however, this varies according to the case study (Stovel; 2008, 308). In Northern Uganda the involvement of the traditional chiefs and elders in the (re)integration efforts have been generally well-received and appreciated by community members (See Baines, 2005 and Quinn 2007). While in Sierra Leone there was a danger that traditional expressions, rituals, and ceremonies, would reinforce the pre-war status quo, which marginalized and disempowered the youth and ultimately contributed to the outbreak of violence (Stovel; 2008, 308). The level of respect between the youth and elders will ultimately determine how successful these mechanisms unfold, which is different in Northern Uganda and Sierra Leone; the former having better relations than the later.

Furthermore, there are concerns regarding the gender implications of traditional rituals and practices, particularly with the perpetuation of patriarchal norms and practices. Unlike Sierra Leone, there are no gender specific rituals to assist sexually abuse girls (Mckay and Mazurana; 2004; 49). The Queen Mothers in Sierra Leone and *Megos* in Northern Uganda play different roles in these practices, the former having greater involvement than the later. The case for Northern Uganda and Sierra Leone demonstrate how traditional rituals and ceremonies vary significantly depending on the time and context, and should therefore not be generalized.

Lastly, there are criticisms that cleansing rituals and ceremonies do not result in genuine reconciliation (See Stovel 2008 and Boersch-Supan 2009). Community members are often

believed make significant sacrifices by accepting these individuals in order to maintain peace. In turn, community members subtly punish ex-combatants through social discrimination, such as name-calling and teasing (Boersch-Supan; 2009, 63). However, “embracing forgiveness while at the same time rejection those who returned is easier understood when one considers the [complex] context in which people are not forced to live together” (Baines; 2007, 109). Most research indicates that these initiatives have provided a ‘starting point’ towards co-existence and reconciliation at the community level (See Latiago 2008 and Alie 2008), but an assessment of their lasting contributions is limited with current data (Huyse; 2008, 188). This has been particularly the case for Northern Uganda and Sierra Leone, where ex-child and youth soldiers tended to gain community acceptance through traditional expressions and ceremonies (Duthie and Specht; 2010, 208).

### **Concluding Remarks**

Falling under the peacebuilding paradigm, TJ and DDR share similar limitations in fostering (re)integration and reconciliation: they have short-term mandates for long-term processes; they have a narrow focus of beneficiary groups and subsequently reinforce a victim-perpetrator dichotomy; and lastly, they also assume that macro-level interventions will transfer to the micro-level. Despite the short term tensions between DDR and TJ in regards to peace and justice, their long term goals of social repair present opportunities to deliver a integrated post-conflict recovery approach. However, the socio-cultural context and relevance of these approaches need to be further considered in order to successfully bring about sustainable peace. As communities struggle to co-exist with individuals that have been involved and affected in mass violence in varied and complex ways, they are increasingly resorting to traditional expressions, rituals and ceremonies. Indeed, it is only natural that communities turn to their local cosmology

to make sense of their “bad surroundings” (Finnstrom; 2006; 201). Although a long term assessment of these mechanisms is needed, there is evidence indicating that they provide a “starting point” towards social reconstruction. Further attention and consideration needs to be granted to these innovative initiatives within peacebuilding, as they demonstrate how (re)integration and reconciliation can work not only in theory, but also in practice.

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