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**Women's perspectives on transitional  
justice in Liberia**

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## Chapter I: Introduction

### 1. Introduction

Transitional justice (TJ) is a systematic approach to massive violations of human rights, which demand to be addressed in order to prevent new violence and give remedy to the victims (Kastner 2020). TJ is applied when there is acknowledgement that the human rights of the citizens have been violated and there is a need of restorative justice (Mieszkalski and Zyla 2021). Through this readdress it is possible to enhance the opportunities for a holistic transformation of the political system, minimise conflicts, and improve the conditions in the post-violence era by identification and elimination of the root cause of the major problems (Clark 2021 p. 232; Shaw and Waldorf 2021). In its history, Liberia has been impacted by civil war where more than two million people lost their lives (Clark 2021). This was also associated with a massive collapse of the state structure and migration and displacement of the population. Multiple peace agreements were signed – thirteen, to be precise – in an attempt to elect new governments and bring stability in the region (Mieszkalski and Zyla 2021). However, the armed conflict only settled in 2003 after the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in Accra, Ghana, was signed and acknowledged. Since the advent of 2003, two peacebuilding mechanisms were implemented, including a security sector reform (SSR) and Liberia's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) (Dahlström et al. 2018). The justice framework of the United Nations and transitional justice more generally is applied primarily in regions that are identified to be lacking the capacity of working in manner to ensure justice and to address the victims of the war conflicts (Dhizaala et al. 2018). The application of transitional justice components is often done in a top-down fashion. The history of conflicts can also result in the societal internalisation of the war and violent events, which can impact the overall trajectory of societal growth and development (Sharp 2018).

It is also critical to understand that the conflicts that are prevalent in the West African region are not only the results of developments in modern history but are rooted in the history of slavery and war imposed by imperialist nations since its establishment in the 19th century. The impact of war and conflict is massive on women and associated with the displacement and violence against women (Lawson et al. 2021). The wars and the conflicts have a major impact on the specific context of economy of Liberia, which has been characterised by a reduced rate of growth along with major debts and burdens on the government system. With uncertainty in the current systems of the economy and the social structure Liberia, it is

important to decipher the nature of gender parity and to assess the application of transitional justice reforms from the lens of society and of women in particular. The majority of women that work in Liberia are part of an informal economy, and they make up the majority of the labour force, given the high unemployment rate of the country that has crossed 80% in the last years. Seventy-four per cent of the female workers in the region are working in the informal sectors. The female population of the country plays a very significant role in the current context of the country and has also been a victim of civil wars and imposed systemic violence through the history of the country (Kapshuk and Jamal 2020).

The role of women has been monumental in the process of application of transitional justice in Liberia. The women's movements played an essential role in developing the overall democratisation of the country (Mieszkalski and Zyla 2021). This has largely been associated with the connotations of liberal feminism. Only women who belong to the privileged sections have largely benefited from the political and social structures that were part of the peacebuilding efforts (Cárdenas 2022). This cannot be seen in isolation from the existing social structures where there exists privilege among a small section of the society. According to the Marxist understanding of society, it has been underlined that social structure implicates certain privileges in the community and is also associated with an impact on the improvements (Feenstra and Özerol 2021). It is for this reason that this research focuses on upper middle-class women of Monrovia (Caiani and Graziano 2019). Hence, it not only becomes critical to identify the perception of the women in the Liberian society towards the transitional justice reforms and also to identify how they see the role of women in society to understand how the TJ process has impacted them and their position in the society (Cole et al. 2018). This understanding can be developed by derivation of the theoretical perspectives and understanding their application in the context of Liberia. The essential theory that will help contextualizing this research is critical feminist theory. The feminist theory will help in understanding the role of gender in the context and history of Liberia.

### **1.1 Motivation to do this study**

It is well established that the wars and the conflicts affect men and women differently. While the current roles of women in Liberia have been documented in the literature to be associated with the domestic roles and the services undertaken by the women, there has been an observed shift in the nature of the jobs that have been undertaken by the women and how the efforts of transitional justice in terms of where society now positions women and what are

their roles in the society (Kapshuk and Jamal 2020). The truth and reconciliation commission (TRC) In Liberia was a truth commission that was created as a part of the Lomé Peace Accord ending the civil war of even years. Women have been critical in the peacebuilding processes in Liberia and have been acknowledged as a critical part of the rebuilding processes of the region. At present, women are present in the leading positions of the administration in the country and have been participating in the mediation processes between the conflicting parties of the armed local groups. The county has marked several efforts to build peace in the region and has been defining the protracted power struggle focussed in destruction of the social boundary, the issue of gender and the perception of women towards these steps needs to be acknowledged and reported to be able to develop a holistic perspective. Consideration of gender roles and dynamics is critical for understanding the dynamics of post-war society (Clark et al. 2018). In the case of Liberia, this becomes even more critical as the role of women has been of prime importance in redevelopment and peacebuilding in the region. Therefore, this study will be able to provide a quest into the gender politics, power dynamics in the Liberia with the application of theoretical perspectives.

## **1.2 Research Aim**

The aim of this research is to understand the role and experience of women in the context of transitional justice and peace building in Liberia after the end of the civil war in 2003. The study focuses on women in Liberia's capital Monrovia, who have been involved in various way in initiatives towards transitional justice and peacebuilding. Development of this understanding will help in improving the process of transitional justice and assist it in making it more robust and inclusive. The focus is on the time period after 2003, as this is when transitional justice measures were implemented.

## **1.3 Research Questions**

Through this research, the following questions will be investigated and analysed:

1. What are the insights of women living in Monrovia based on their experiences with the transitional justice process in terms of how women are involved in the procedure?
2. How do these women understand the changing roles of women in Liberia during the war and during the process of peacebuilding and transitional justice?

This study will define the TJ process as the peacebuilding efforts that were initiated in 2003, including the security reforms and measures towards democratization, which were implemented in Liberia. The study will focus on the perceptions of women who have witnessed the conflict years (till 2003) and the time after that.

## **Chapter II: Background**

This chapter will provide a background to the existing research and the case of Liberia.

### **2.1 Women, war, and transitional justice in Liberia**

Historically, the social and economic position of Liberia has been associated with conflicts and wars that existed between the state along with complications worsened with the history of slavery and the imperialism imposed on the country and history of colonisation. As the justice and truth seeking processes were developed and were acknowledged in Liberia, the TRC launched its operations in the year 2006 where the commissioners were assigned for different programmatic, thematic and the oversight roles and responsibilities (Dahlström et al. 2018). It was in these roles that the question of gender was first raised by the authorities. The commission asserted that the women must be given a position of power and asserted on the need of identification of issues associated with gender to be of importance. It was through this Act that in the Article IV section 4(e) identified that the women and children were vulnerable groups and special attention as required for the management of gender based violence in Liberia (Mieszkalski and Zyla 2021). In addition, it highlighted the issue of child soldiers. This acknowledgment was essential as it was for the first time that the broad term of gender and crimes inflicted and oppression of women was categorically identified.

In the late 2006, a gender committee was established with focus on the outreach program that was focussed on the Liberian women. The Gender policy developed derived its consensus with the idea of gender as defined in the TRC Act and focussed on building policies and plans that were associated with the negotiation of gender roles in the region and also on development of more comprehensive policies and structures for building more opportunities for women. In the times of war, the women organisation worked tirelessly to bring the parties on a course of negotiation to achieve peace in the region (Kastner 2020). The role of women has also been profound in the peace building networks in the initial times of the first civil war (1989-1996), which was an internal conflict in the country. In the year 1991, this organisation had led public marches for the advocacy of peace and security and

also to initiate peace talks. In the second civil war (1999-2003) took place between the Rebel group funded by Guinea government and the Liberians, the women had also worked to fund a delegation trip to Sierra Leone and worked as the intermediaries in the region. Therefore, the women in the history of civil war in Liberia had been the core of mass action for peace campaigns (Mieszkalski and Zyla 2021).

The gendered census of Liberia indicates that about 49.73% of people in the country are women (as of the data census collected in the year 2020) (World Bank 2020). The African Development Bank Group identified that only 4.8 per cent of the population could truly be regarded as the middle class the population. Even when the population of Liberia was just 3.4 million people, Liberia has been able to gather maximum attention in the civil conflict (Anoba 2019). The country also gathered attention that Liberia has also become a country that is associated with the first female president in Africa. For this reason, the development of Liberia has been associated with the role of women in the region (World Bank 2020).

The women experienced sexual exploitation and killings. In the specific context of Liberia, a World Bank report suggests that women were pushed towards the extreme of sexual violence in the country (Steiner et al. 2021). The women lived with poor structural planning and did not even have basic access such as light at night. The placement of the bathhouses and the washrooms were in poor protection and increased the vulnerability of women to the sexual crimes. This data was particularly reported in work by TRC that constituted one third of the total violations that were reported in the region (Republic of Liberia 2009). The civil unrest in Liberia that lasted for fourteen years resulted in the killing of more than 300,000 individuals (Gallo-Cruz 2020). Killings represent one-fifth of the total violations that took place in the country (Goyol 2019). Both men and women of Liberia were associated with massive assaults that took place during the war. The targeted groups for killings were individuals aged between 15-and 24 years belonging to both genders of the community (Republic of Liberia 2009). The assault was meant to be humiliating for women where they were stripped naked, and objects were forced into their body parts (Vastapuu 2018). A major feature of the conflict in Liberia was looting. Women were at the same risk of being targeted as men in the region. The market of women often fell into the hands of the raiders significantly (Mullins 2020). Many Liberian women had testified before the report of TRC that wars resulted in the burning of towns and looting of the communities (Republic of Liberia 2009). The armed battles in Liberia had a major impact on the women and are also

closely associated with the practice of forced labour. Women were abducted from the camps and were used as forced labour, mostly for sexual trades and slavery. Many women were also directly tortured by the army factions and were used as a tool of revenge (Akiode 2019).

Gender is seen as a significant component for the peacebuilding process (Brenner 2003). The civil war of Liberia took a major toll on the women of the country and resulted in both structured and unstructured violence on women. The active participation of women in the processes can be seen as an example that questions the existing gender roles and structures.

The women of Liberia have had a strong role in the peace processes of the country with the Accra Peace Agreement being one of the foundational contributions of the women. The participation of women has increased since 2008 with peace and social participation. The timeline of participation of women in Liberia can be seen through the lens of what initiatives have been undertaken to acknowledge their participation and what needs further improvement. The economic empowerment of women in Liberia was first acknowledged in the year 2004. By year 2005 WIPNET (Women in Peace Building Network) was established. Further, psychosocial programs for rehabilitation were also developed. The safe hokes project was established in 2006 that focussed on the women's protection. Liberia has thus been one of the essential case studies that have been associated with the role of women in peace building in Africa (Jaggar 2009). The women played a foundational role and released the Golden Tulip Declaration that was signed before the establishment of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement. This declaration outlined the demands of women for peace. This highlights the role of women in the rebuilding process in the society after a war.

## **2.2 The transitional justice process and status of women in Liberia**

Liberia constitutes sixteen groups with diverse ethnic and linguistic identities who had never presented as unionised political identities. In the northwest region, there were no states; however, the people were classified only into two main ethnic groups, "Poro", the group for men and "Sande", the group for women. However, the groups were majorly patrilineal (Sarkin and Ackermann 2018). The Association of Female Lawyers of Liberia had reported that the legal status of women and the protection of their rights were not prioritised in Liberia before 2003. Culturally, it is realised that these practices were an extension of the fear that women would occupy spaces that were traditionally designed for men the society (Medie 2020). The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Liberia was part of the 2003 August initiative in the region and has been associated with the establishment of the gender sensitive



Act of the National Transitional Legislative Assembly in 2005 (Dhizaala 2018). The timeline of 2003 is also important as it was in 2003 that the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) was signed. With the signing of the CPA in 2003, there was a change in the focus from mediation to implementation. Another significant contribution was developed by the Mano River Women's Peace Network (Mieszkalski and Zyla 2021). This allowed acknowledgement of the rights of women and children and asserted that at least four of the five commissioners in the region had to be women.

It also established that the TRC must be sensitive to the questions of gender, and in particular, to the questions of gender based violence in the region (Fanneron et al. 2019). The TRC Act was thus one of the foundational efforts of the transitional justice framework that recognised the reality of women in Liberia and their exclusion from the system. Hence, it provided concise guidelines for the treatment of women in the region as per the TRC principles focussing on improved condition of women, understanding the dynamics of war and human rights violations that were established in Liberia (Sarkin and Ackermann 2018). Section 4(a) of the TRC also outlined the importance of how the human rights violations were to get special focus in consideration with the women. These violations included violence inflicted in the form of torture, disappearance, disembowelment, decapitations, maiming, amputations and mutilations, and cruel treatment of women (Goyol 2019). A gender committee to especially advise the TRC was established in the year 2006, and an outreach program was developed for women (Gallo-Cruz 2020). Eventually, the Foundation Open Society Initiative (FOSI) and Women's Campaign International (WCI) were the major contributors to the gender program. The UNIFEM also undertook the community-based programs that focused on enhancing the involvement of women (Dutta 2021). As the Commission started working towards the gender committee, it focussed on enabling the participation of women through designing of women specific activities and engaging them in the TRC operations such as statement taking, development of outreach programs, research and investigations, and public hearings (Sarkin and Ackermann 2018). The TRC inquiry unit had also established that the role of women and children as eminent component of peacebuilding, and an umbrella society of twelve civil society organisations was created. This included the Women's NGO Secretariat, which worked across the fifteen countries of Liberia (Republic of Liberia 2009). The role of women was monumental in times of war and society. During the war, the women's organisations had worked tirelessly and had managed to bring in the warring parties to a table of negotiation (Shipley 2020). A crucial movement was associated with the

WIPNET during the second civil war when these organisations had challenged the rebel leaders (Shipley 2020).

According to the United Nations, the women are impacted disproportionately during and after wars. This results in magnification of the existing inequalities and disparities that are imposed by the gender along with breaking of the social norms (Mbachaga 2018). In addition, wars and conflicts also pose a greater risk of developing sexual violence on the women. The women in conflicts and situations of wars have acted as the actors and the peacemakers and thus have been at the core of utilisation of ideas and experiences for protection and developing peace building activities (Khattak 2019). The impact of gendered violence and disparity on women in the war has been greatly highlighted and has been included in the United Nations Platform for Action that asserted that in an armed conflict, women are impacted disproportionately. This is associated with the already existing unequal status of women in the society. Some of the common harms that are inflicted on women in a situation of war are associated with women of all ages and include crimes and imperatives like displacement, loss of home and property, loss or involuntary disappearance of close relatives, poverty and family separation and disintegration, victimization through acts of murder, terrorism, torture, involuntary disappearance, sexual slavery, rape, and sexual abuse (Sanmuanathan 2020).

The roles and responsibility of women after a war or a conflict in a situation are formidable and they are largely associated with holding the families together with participation in the domestic as well as economic aspects of the society (Chaney 2021). Therefore, the role of women in society has been associated with preservation of the social order. Since, an armed conflict demands that the roles and the responsibilities of women are expanded they are often moved to the roles that were categorically reserved for the males of the society. In addition, it has been observed that the life expectancy of the unarmed civilians in a position of war and conflict is also severely impacted where the primary victims are the women. The trauma is inflicted where women are forced into brothels and rapes and there is tremendous increase in the cases of domestic violence (Ibnouf 2020). Historically, sexual exploitation and rape have been systematically disregarded and needs to be taken into special consideration in drawing any imperative of an armed struggle or a conflict. A large number of women are harmed in modern warfare where widows of the war are often displaced and disinherited leading to their impoverishment. In addition, statistically, it has been observed that majority of women are the war refugees. The trauma is massive as women see the increased militarisation and

violent extremist developing in the societies with direct impact on themselves as well as on their communities (Chaney 2021).

The perceptions of women in context with the application of the transitional justice system are essential and help in outlining the primary aspects associated with how they see its impacts. The individual perceptions of women have not been acknowledged or recognised and are not included in the study. This thesis will thus focus on closing this gap in the literature.

### **2.3 Transitional justice, peacebuilding, and women's roles in Liberia**

The World Bank has played an important role and has acted as an international partner for the reconstruction of Liberia. Through the World Bank, a Gender Action Plan (GAP) was implemented in 2009, and a focus on gender equity and smart economics was laid (UN women 2020b). The gender needs assessment was done to identify and acknowledge the long term needs of women of Liberia. (United States Institute of Peace 2012) These findings were of prime importance as they highlighted that women play an essential role in the economy of Liberia. However, these women were absent from the major sectors of the economy (van der Merwe and Masiko-Mpaka 2022). The women were part of about 53% of the agricultural labour force and were direct producers of 60% of the agricultural products in the region. Most of the women were entrepreneurs and were self-employed. Yet, women did not form a significant part of the profitable sectors (UN women 2020a). Hence, it was important that women were included in the profitable sectors of the region and also in the growth sectors. A results-based initiative (RBI) is an agriculture-based initiative that is still undergoing in the region (Sileo et al. 2021).

When the factions that were into war refused to sign and abide by the peace agreement to end the war, a group of women in the year 1994 designed a Liberian Women Initiative (LWI) (Machakanja 2021). The group was identified as a non-political group and a non-partisan group that aimed to end the war. The group was inclusive of women from different backgrounds and professions. The advocacy of women in the role included writing several press statements and position statements (Ndongo 2020). It was also associated with understanding the humanitarian crisis and asserting the impact of war on women and children. The women had invited themselves to the Accra Peace conference (Konneh 2020). This was a major move as women in the region were denied participation in the conflict. The women peace activists of the troubled Mano river basin of Liberia and Sierra Leone also

struggled to be acknowledged and heard in the peace building processes (Sileo et al. 2021). A women's movement was launched in 1994 in Sierra Leone for peace (Ndongo 2020). This resulted in the organisation of the protests and deepening of the civil conflicts with advocacy of women's rights. Eventually, in the year 2000, the Mano River Union Women Peace Network was also established. This worked on the mediation of conflict management between Guinea and Liberia in the year 2001. The only way to ensure that the women of Liberia were included them as equal partners for peace was to ensure their active participation in the political, economic, social, and national struggles. Therefore, the role of women was not only monumental in deciphering the women. Therefore, understanding the nuance in this discussion is crucial (Quah 2018).

### **Chapter III: Theoretical approach**

#### **3.1 Application of critical feminist theory**

An understanding of the feminist theory and frameworks is essential to develop an insight into gender roles (Feenstra and Özerol 2021). Feminist theory, in general, is a critical theory that identifies that women as equal individuals and suggests unequivocal rights to the women of society, breaking the norms that have been set by the patriarchal structure and the superstructure of the society (Tummers 2020). The first feminist theories emerged in the times of 1974 with the works of Mary Wollstonecraft, who wrote about the vindication of the rights of women. The major schools of feminism have since then evolved to a great extent and are associated with how the emancipation of women is seen in society (Anandavalli et al. 2020). The feminist theory is classified as a critical theory as it aims to destabilise the existing systems and powers of oppression. This approach, in itself, is beneficial as it helps in establishing the importance of working women, as they are able to have financial independence as the key decision-makers and challenges the norms of the society. In the instances of war, the role of women becomes even more dominant and is associated with bringing in significant changes in the society. Anuradha Gandhi (2014), in her book philosophical trends in the feminist movement, highlights how the liberation movement of women has always been integrated with the war and dispute among the people in the society as well as revolutionary leadership. This is also associated with the social and political awakening of the masses and the realisation of the need for an improved philosophical

understanding of philosophy and its interpretation (Gandhy 2014). Most feminist underpinnings indicate that gender has a major role to play in the understanding of war. An individual “feminist theory” of war does not exist. However, several feminist theories have also presented contradictory opinions on an understanding of war and its impact (Goodman 2019). Yet, most theorists underline that gender plays a crucial role in the understanding of war. This is associated with a stemming concern of how masculinity, war, and gendered oppression are interrelated (Gandhy 2014).

The connection between war and gender is crucial and is consistent across several cultures. The gendered lens of understanding warfare is associated with several social and political validations (Copelon 2018). The feminist understanding of the war helps in asserting how all the systems of violence are closely interconnected. In the case of violent conflicts or war, gender presents itself as an extension of violence that is manifested within politics, society, economy, family, cultures, and structures (Basham and Catignani 2018). The feminist theory asserts that violence permeates through all the spheres of life and is beyond the spectrum of radicalised violence or sexual violence (Barberet and Carrington 2018). A critical understanding and knowledge need to be developed in the context of violence, authority, and militarism that is associated with the incidence of war (Pinheiro 2019). These factors, according to the theory, are essential for the maintenance and construction of a masculine identity that is an extension of patriarchal function. Hence, the theory asserts that instead of involving more women in the military, the participation of women in the peace programs should be encouraged. In the case of war, women are often used as tools of oppression (Pease 2019). Women are used in wars as a tactic strategy to further inflict violence as they are exploited as a tool and are associated with the idea of honour of the society. Violence against women is then used to psychologically harm the counter groups. Therefore, the theory of feminism not only discourages the war but also asserts the need of understanding the gendered impact of war (Barberet and Carrington 2018).

Understanding the dynamics of gender and class thus also becomes essential. It is critical to understand that being able to comprehend the notion of gender in the dynamics of conflict and war is crucial and helps in the improvement of the social situations (Caiani and Graziano 2019).

### **3.2 Understanding transitional justice**

Transitional justice has been recognised as a systematic approach to deal with the violations of human rights to enhance the possibilities of transformations that will heal society and individuals and prevent new violations (Greeley et al. 2020). TJ focuses on the development of the political systems and management of conflicts and is based on the identification of the root causes of the abuses (Schwandner-Sievers and Klinker 2019). This justice approach recognises that there are two primary goals for management and dealing with the history of systematic abuse. The first approach is to reinforce the idea of justice. The second form is to ensure and reinforce the possibilities of democracy, peace, and reconciliation (Seul 2019). Therefore, the application of transitional justice is associated with a combination of elements that include restorative justice, criminal justice, and social justice. The application of transitional justice should not be seen as a special form of justice. Rather, it should be seen as an adaptive form to meet the population's needs and focus on the conservation of human rights (Kastner 2020).

The history of transitional justice extends to early 1900s with its re-emergence in the 1980s. The application of transitional justice has been associated with the political transitions in the systems that were mainly associated with Latin America and Eastern Europe (Gavshon and Gorur 2019). The concerns and participation of the population were associated with the political transformations of democracy. Therefore, in the initial stages, the transitional justice approaches focussed on the regime leaders and promoted the truth-telling initiatives for improving the well-being of the people and focusing on the members of the security forces (Dancy et al. 2019). Therefore, it can be asserted that the transitional justice systems had emerged as a part of recognition to deal with the systematic and massive abuses that demanded a distinctive approach in both positive and backward-looking. Hence, the application of transitional justice systems is not to only ensure the application of the justice erasures for dignification of the victims but also to prevent incidents of similar victimhood in future (Schwandner-Sievers and Klinker 2019). The long term goals of transitional justice are to focus on the promotion of peace and democracy as well as reconciliation (Pietropaoli 2020).

In the current context, the application of transitional justice has grown and has evolved in several manifolds. They have shifted from the post-authoritarian regions to the post-conflict zones in the regions. The role of transitional justice in this paradigm has thus shifted towards a more holistic approach. The effective application of transitional justice is associated with taking reasonable steps for human rights violations and conducting serious investigations for

violations as they take place (Urueña et al. 2018). The principles of transitional justice also help in conducting serious investigations on the violations of human rights. In addition, the transitional justice systems also focus on imposition of the suitable sanctions for the developed violations (Greeley et al. 2020). This helps in ensuring reparation for the victims of the violations (Seul 2019). The essence of decision making is associated with the explicitly affirmed through the subsequent jurisprudence of the court and the Human Rights Court, and the UN treaty (Gavshon and Gorur 2019).

In a practical and conceptual manner, several measures of transitional justice are associated with each other. With the absence of institutional reforms and reparation efforts, the application of justice and reforms are essential (Schwandner-Sievers and Klinker 2019). Therefore, it is important that transitional justice should be structured in a form that can maximise complementarity and also focus on the minimisation of conflict and contradiction (Dancy et al. 2019). In addition, it can help in the interrelationships among the several measures that are not vague and too complex. Also, the transitional justice systems should ensure that their application is based on the conservation of democracy and peace (Greeley et al. 2020). The application of transitional justice has been associated with a range of critical challenges and difficulties in measuring its impact (Urueña et al. 2018).

### **3.3 Transnational justice and the role of women**

The United Nations has identified four pillars of transitional justice that can help in reforming the principle of justice and can help in building of a sustainable society. These four pillars include the prosecution initiatives, reparation programs, truth-seeking processes, and the institutional reforms (Anania et al. 2021). According to United Nations, the long-term goals of the transitional justice are associated with promotion of peace in the region, establishment and maintenance of democracy and focus on reconciliation in the region. The process of application of the transitional justice methods is inclusive of both judicial processes as well as the non-judicial processes. This is associated with facilitation of the initiatives that can help in conservation of rights of the masses with delivery of reparations and development of institutional reforms to direct the progress and development of the region (Quah et al. 2018). With multiple reports drafted and collection of opinions in the transitional justice processes, the final report by the TRC asserted that 98 individuals were prosecuted for the violence done on the individuals. But how effective these processes have been in the eyes of the community living in Liberia is a question that needs further address and discussion (Opongo et al.

2021). Therefore, the application of this commission helped in highlighting some of the key culprits and aimed to ensure restoration of peace and promote sustainable development in the country.

In this thesis, I understand transitional justice and peacebuilding as the process that started after the end of the war in 2003 and which included the TRC, but also a democratization process that brought a woman to the presidency in 2005. I will look at the emancipation of women during this period and when the country was struggling to come to terms with the legacy of war.

When a structure like TJ is developed and applied, it can lead to assertion of a monolithic narrative. It is crucial to understand that individuals are shaped by their own experiences that may vary in context of how they see the process of TJ in the country. All the women of the country may not be able to express their opinions in general and can be silenced by the power dynamics. This makes understanding of their individual viewpoints and narratives even more crucial and collection of their viewpoints as essential for assessing the implications of TJ (Sierra and Roman-Odio 2011).

### **3.4 Analytical framework**

When attempting to understand the experiences and roles of women in Liberia in TJ and peacebuilding, I will thus take as a point of departure the power analysis of the critical feminist theory, which highlights the importance of women's emancipation. I combine that with the insights about women's roles in transitional justice and peace building, which say that:

(a) Women may be silenced: In developing and conflict prone countries, it is often seen that the income disparities are vast. The power relations between genders cannot be ignored. Neither can the dynamics of class. The social hierarchy and power dynamic impact what is being presented in the society and that forms the primary narrative (Sierra and Roman-Odio 2011). Therefore, acknowledgement and understanding of individual experiences of women is essential.

(b) There may be opportunities for women to be empowered: The application of TJ challenges the existing structure of gender dynamic where women are reaching the position of power. This may thus be seen as an opportunity for empowerment of women (Simić 2020).



This is in alignment with the critical feminist theory and highlights the gender roles in the society (Anania et al. 2021).

(c) There may be a backlash when it comes to women's emancipation: The existing gender roles may impact how the rise of women in the justice processes impacts the social dynamic of Liberia. This can lead to resistance or backlash in consideration of emancipation of women (Gandhy, 2014).

(d) It is important to include women's voices when planning for the future and dealing with the past: The research has discussed the role of women in transitional justice and peacebuilding and the opportunities for women's emancipation/gender equality through this process. The process of peace building in Liberia has been associated with development of gender aware connotations that focus on women empowerment in consideration of the social, political, economic, as well as the human rights. Therefore, it is associated with individual as well as group accountability and highlights the importance of the reconciliation processes (Kastner 2020). The conceptualization of the role of women in Liberia in TJ thus needs to be seen in the context of social context as well as its theoretical contexts and boundaries. Women, who have gained experience and insights over the years on the land can provide guidance for rebuilding the society and for its further development.

#### **Chapter IV: Research methodology**

This section of the thesis will talk about the research methods and paradigms that were used for completion of the research. This research followed a primary qualitative research design in which 22 interviews were conducted and 15 were finally selected for analysis.

##### **4.1 Research type and design**

- The study used a primary qualitative research design in which purposive sampling. Purposive sampling is a method of non-randomised sampling where the characteristics of the participants that will be involved in the study are already defined (Campbell et al. 2020). This method for the selection of a suitable sample population is beneficial when the target population under analysis is specific and defined (Denieffe 2020). In the given case, the target population was identified as the upper middle-class women of Monrovia, Liberia. Women of Monrovia aged above 18 were

included in the study. This will help in identification of the current perceptions of TJ framework in the region.

- The primary research design was selected for this study as the data was collected de novo from the target population. Further, a qualitative research approach was chosen as it allowed for the collection of detailed responses from the participants (Pandey and Pandey 2021).
- Collection of valid consent is one of the core requirements for conducting research and is essential to ensure that no harm was inflicted on the participants for participation in the research (Campbell et al. 2020). In this study, the participants were told about the use of information and completion of the research, and then consent was taken from them for completion of the research.
- Through the process of research completion the principles of ethics with principles of confidentiality and autonomy (Rashid et al., 2019). Since the issue is associated with gender a highly sensitised approach was taken into consideration. No triggering words were prompted in the conducting the survey and participants were given freedom to participate in the study or abstain from it at any given point of time.

#### **4.2 Data collection through interviews: Interview methods**

The collection of data in this research is done through interviews. A total of twenty two women were selected for this study who identified themselves to be belonging to the upper middle class sections of the society. The interviews were conducted after collection of informed and valid consent. The primary survey to select women for participation in the study was done online through social media platforms: Facebook. This was done by posting on the social media groups and requesting participation of the women. This was a suitable approach as Facebook is accessed by a wide range of audiences and it is easy to meet

Interviews are used to collect data from a small group of participants. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with open-ended questions (Pandey and Pandey 2021).

The semi-structured interviews serve as a tool for data collection based on a pre-determined thematic framework and are found to be beneficial for qualitative research (Swedberg 2021). Open-ended questions, that is, the questions where the participants had the freedom to develop and provide answers, were used. This is beneficial as it helps in the development of focussed and conversational communication. It also allows the exchange of ideas freely and promotes detailed answers and elaboration on the subject matter, providing a detailed understanding of the research questions and to develop inferences (Mohajan 2018). Open

ended questions were asked from participants. The participants were eager to respond to the questions as they were close to their personal experiences.

### **4.3 Selection of research subjects**

A total of 22 interviews were collected of which 15 were selected based on the eligibility criteria and suitable English. Communication was done through Facebook messenger. The participants were identified from Liberia Facebook page and many women were interested to be in the interview because they want to be heard. Among those that accepted the interviews I chose the one that was at least 18 in 1989. The steps of interviews included: Posting about the study on a Liberian's Facebook group page, selection of participants based on nationality and age (Above 18 years), and conducting of interviews through Facebook messenger. The fact that the women were involved somehow in transitional justice and peace building. This was identified by initial data and participant introduction. The 45 participants applied for the study of which 22 were selected based on inclusion criteria. Of the 22 participants only 15 interviews were transcribed due to language difficulties where the comprehension was difficult for what was being said due to linguistic barriers. This study was restricted to Monrovia and hence this impacted the diversity in the study. The findings were impacted by the socioeconomic status of women. This study reflects the view of a more educated group, more involved; they are not representative of "ordinary people". But it is an important group to listen to, as they can play a crucial role for TJ and peacebuilding, as they living in the capital, being engaged in civil society and politics.

### **4.4 Ethics and positionality**

My personal perception as a researcher was that women have a major impact of the war. Hence, it is critical to understand their perspectives. As a man myself, I ensured that I communicated in a safe manner and did not use any triggering language (such as mention of assault or description of any form of graphic detail). women's reaction to me being a man was that they really wanted to express and were not shy to speak. Being American Liberian, it was important for me to understand the individual perspectives of women of Liberia with a more nuanced perspective and understand the implications of war on women and thus ensure use of sensitive language. Advantages with that, knowing language, culture, context. But people may see you as an outsider, however, being an American Liberian, I was able to build trust and engage women in the interview process.

#### **4.4 Data analysis**

The analysis of interview transcripts was done to derive the results. To do the same, a thematic analysis was undertaken. Thematic analysis is defined as a method for the assessment and analysis of qualitative data. The non-numerical data is used for conducting thematic analysis (Mohajan 2018). The seven steps of thematic analysis were used and were applied for the completion of this research. These steps include transcription, reading, familiarisation, coding, identification of themes, reviewing of the themes, defining and naming the themes and finalisation of the analysis. There are also several advantages of thematic analysis, which make it a suitable approach for conducting and finalising research. These include flexibility in the research methods for conducting a wide range of analytical options (Pandey and Pandey 2021). Thematic analysis is also a quick and fast method to learn and interpret data. A descriptive approach of thematic analysis was used for the completion of the research, and this includes understanding the data based on the individual viewpoints of the participants (Campbell et al. 2020). Thematic analysis was done collection of transcripts, coding of the data was done by identification of commonalities in the transcripts. These were reviewed and then individual themes were developed. The selection of 15 interviews from the 22 studies was done based on availability of answers of all the interviews and availability of answers in comprehensible English. Seven of the interviewees spoke broken Liberian English which was difficult to understand and even more difficult to transcribe.

#### **4.5 Limitations of the study**

It is essential to identify the primary limitations of this study to help in understanding the existing shortcomings of the research (Ross and Bibler Zaidi 2019). Identification of limitations helps in understanding and placing the research findings in a specific context. This study was limited by the fact that only women belonging to the upper middle-class were included in the research as they were the accessible sub-population for the research. Qualitative research generates a large volume of data that can be difficult to interpret (Busetto et al. 2020). However, since the individual opinions were considered, the findings were in alignment with the research aim. The ethical considerations of assuring consent from the participants and focussing on completion with the suitable guidelines was ensured. Further, since I am a man and hence this can impact how the participants approached the questions or were comfortable answering the same.

Further, the research was based on the individual experiences and understanding of the participants and was thus based on self-reporting. The findings of the research were consistent with the literature; these limitations impact the overall generalizability of the research outcomes. The impact of the civil war in Liberia impacted women across the spectrum of social and economic classes. However, this research, in particular, focussed only on a very small section of the population that belonged to the upper middle class. Hence, it is critical to consider that the findings of the research are not suitable to develop the general narratives regarding the perceptions of women around the war (Ross and Bibler Zaidi 2019). The implication of transitional justice and perceptions around the same were discussed in this research through the non-quantifiable methods (Hennink et al. 2020). Further, the inclusion of a diverse population in the research would have been successful in ensuring a more holistic approach to research (Köhler et al. 2022).

The interviews were conducted online impacting the transparency of the study. As it is possible that the participants were not fully engaged due to online interaction. Further, it was not possible to comprehend the language due to broken English for all the respondents. Mitigating these would have enhanced the study outcomes.

## **Chapter V: Results and discussion**

A total of 22 women were interviewed of which 15 were studied closely were included in the research. The median age of women that participated in the study was 52 years. The women belonged to the upper middle-class income groups of Monrovia. The following themes emerged from the analysis of the interviews conducted. The interviews were recorded and transcribed to complete the research

The following key themes emerged from the discussion and analysis of the interview transcripts:

### **5.1 Impact of war on women, and how women understand the changed role of women more broadly in the country.**

Liberia has experienced massive conflicts and has been facing with complications for fourteen years 1989-2003 (Gallo-Cruz and Remsberg 2021). These years and several interventions applied over the course of years had a major impact on the women of Liberia and the outcomes of the role of women in the country. A common theme that emerged in the course of the discussion was how women understood the change in roles and dynamics of women in the course of war and peacebuilding. This is in alignment with the research

question of the study, that is, to understand opinions of women regarding the transitional justice in the country. Currently, women of Liberia hold positions in the ministries, including the ministry of gender and development, justice, youth, and sport, national police missions, and the truth and reconciliation commission (Ciftci 2019). To improve how the issues of transitional justice are associated with gender equality, alternative approaches have been developed by the government and international agencies like UN. It is important to understand that the problem of gender issues and violence is a compounded problem that demands effective work and will require systematic action. Therefore, this is in alignment with the analytical framework that it is important to include voices of women in the decision making and frameworks because their experiences have been vital in the transformation process. While it is important and critical to advocate for representation, there is also a massive need for gender-responsive policies (Leib 2019).

*“It is through fights of years and years that the women of Liberia now exercise civil rights for women. The women are able to inherit the property or land and are also able to take loans. Women in this country come from different religions. I am Muslim, and many women around me were Christians. We sat together for the peace demonstrations. It has changed how we see things and how we function. We understood the importance of unity and working together. We did not lose hope, and it worked in our favour!”.*

Says 62 year old participant in the research (Interview 1, 2022)

The emancipation of women in Liberia has been largely associated with women leading the political positions in Liberia (Gready and Robins 2020). The improvement of the condition of women in Liberia and its association with positions of political power present a nuanced case in the case of Liberia. The primary indicators that are associated with the role of gender and women highlight the primary focuses of women in the field of the emancipatory potential of the transitional justice process, TRC of Liberia and its women (UN women 2020a). The gender indicators that have been identified in conversations with the women show that the application of the transitional justice phenomenon is linked with understanding gender inequality and equality of representation in the basic community (Blom et al. 2020). Allied indicators include economic rights of the women, participation of women in the society, and to protect against violence and political rights of the women.

Research indicates that women that occupy the leadership and decision-making positions have the ability to influence the aspirations of young women (International Centre for

Transitional Justice 2018). The same is asserted when one of the participants says the following (Interview 2, 2022):

*“I do not know what the measure of success of an intervention program is, and at what level do we say that women have now achieved enough! The years of war had a major impact on us. We had nothing, and it took us years of hard work to reach here. We were not part of the decision making bodies or any form of policy-making initiatives. We had to protest and demonstrate to reach this place. We did not get what we did simply because TRC was running or any other program. We did because we continued to demand peace and worked in our best capacity to achieve the same. We now have women in power, and we know we will be heard. We understand how difficult it has been for our sisters to fight this battle. I can’t say if it was because of the individual programs. It was many things. Of all, I think it was our work for peace and belief that it must be achieved”.*

Women in Liberia were the central caretakers of the families but were victims of the civil unrest in the society but with changing roles, the TJ process has given women the opportunities to be empowered. They experienced massive losses and were subjected to torture and structured harm as a war tactic in the region (Oxfam International 2012). This has left a major imprint on the minds of women, who often remember the traumas that were inflicted on them (Vastapuu 2018).

*“It is horrifying to think of lives that we have left in the past and of how many of our sisters and friends were the victims of brutal crimes. It gives me goosebumps even to think of it now. We were never humans in the war”.*

Identifies a forty-two-year-old participant in the research (Interview 7, 2022)

The conflict in Liberia only stopped in 2003 with the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in Ghana (Issifu 2022). Before this agreement was signed, Charles Taylor had resigned and had moved to Nigeria in exile. In the process of transition, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf was elected as the president and was designated as the female head of the state (Spatz and Thaler 2018). The women of Monrovia identified this as a major factor associated with the representation of women in the position of power and associated it with the interventions of the transitional justice programs as they were aware about the role of women institutions

asserting the feministic perspectives present in the upper middle class sections of women in the society given them an opportunity to empower themselves.

*“If it were for a man, I wonder if the problems of women would be resolved. Ellen had helped in the establishment of the Truth and Reconciliation committee. She also won the Nobel Peace Prize for her struggles and is accredited with the peace and economic progress in the country. She has been truly inspiring. I firmly believe that our rights were developed and conserved only by her efforts”.* (Interview 13, 2022)

This is another example of women being empowered in the TJ/peacebuilding process. The International Council for the Transitional Justice began working in Liberia in 2004 and aimed at strengthening the local communities by the development of innovative strategies to serve justice. However, the war had a major impact on the women of Liberia (International Centre for Transitional Justice 2018).

*“The war has not only resulted in a major scar on our lives but has resulted in major trauma in our lives. The trauma has resulted in a major psychological impact on the lives of everyone. Many women went through depression and anxiety after the loss of their loved ones. Much developed post-traumatic stress disorder and several other mental health problems. To raise a question of justice after so much damage is triggering for me. I do not understand how war is justified and how its impacts are quantified in numbers. The war had a major impact on the psyche of all of us. We are still recovering. I think the programs such as TRC have helped a bit. But I don’t think they are enough”.* (Interview 9, 2022)

There is a fear associated with past experiences of the war. The participant said that it is triggering for her to experience and face such situations. This can be associated with the existing power dynamic where women feel fear of being silenced and also fear backlash over the years. The role of women in Liberia has sure changed its course of action by a major part. According to one of the participants,

*“Women in rural areas are more aware of their rights now. They demand changes in the policy and have been able to understand their position in economic development. Even the men from these regions are able to realise the role of women in development. We need to*



*understand that even when we have achieved a lot, there is a lot of pending work that needs to be taken into consideration.” (Interview 15, 2022)*

This is an example of women being empowered in the TJ/peacebuilding process. For the women of Liberia, especially those in the upper-middle class, there is a greater understanding of the political systems and how they impact their rights and their position in society. The women understand that the patriarchal system in which their existence is rooted has not been eliminated and is still very much part of a system. This is in alignment with the critical feminist framework. With the application of the principles of transitional justice, certain factors about the position of women in the country have changed (UN women 2018). These include improved living conditions and reduced vulnerability to threats and war crimes.

When Ellen Johnson Sirleaf became the first democratically elected female president of Liberia, she was hailed as the “leading lady” and hero of Liberia (Richmond 2011). She had succeeded in bringing foreign investment and aid to the country. Sirleaf was seen as a high profile politician eliciting controversy when the critics argued that handing land to the foreign investors could spark further controversy. Many opinions of participants also regarded this aspect of the Liberian politics and is associated with the Transitional justice systems (Issifu 2022). The Truth and Reconciliation Commission barred Ellen from participation along with the charges of corruption. Participants asserted that while the hero-making of an individual did emerge from the situation of crisis, it should be taken into consideration how these have impacted the political and economic situation of the country as well (International Centre for Transitional Justice 2018).

*“I cannot say that women that participate in the customary law are the only leaders we have. We have women who have been traditional leaders and have been handling the situation since a long time. They have also been the ones to organise and demand peace from the beginning of it.”*

-Said one of the participants in the research (Interview 8, 2022)

The goals of the transitional justice programs are often defined at a macro level and are associated with a wider social change (Campbell 2020). Yet, the pathways that are associated with the transitional justice remain implicit. The cross-national studies present a contradiction in the links between transitional justice and democracy. Further, the application of

transitional justice and its impact is associated with demand for change at several levels. That is, change is needed at the individual level, community level, national level, etc (Blom 2020). Women in the country have also faced discrimination in the kind of jobs they get in contrast to the men of the society (World Health Organization 2019). As consistent with the literature studied, the women in Liberia are one of the core centres and drivers of the economy. However, they have remained away from the high profit jobs (Gallo-Cruz and Remsberg 2021).

*“During the periods of war, many women had taken roles of men for doing the business in the region. This enhanced their role in the process of business making, yet their knowledge has been limited to the domestic work and households. I think this is also associated with the cultural trends that limit the scope of women in the places and restrict them to the classical roles of domestic work and farming. This needs to change.”* (Interview 3, 2022)

This indicates a change in the existing power dynamic. When the structure of power dynamic is altered, as in Liberia, there is a fear of backlash. Over the years. It has been realised that women of Liberia are the backbone of the Liberian economy. More than 90% of work in the informal sector of the country that is, mostly associated with farming is done by the women (Shulika 2018). The statistics indicate that 53% of agricultural labours in the country are exclusively women, and 60% of the contribution in the making of the agricultural products is associated with the labour of women. More than 77% of women in the country are self-employed (Oxfam 2012). This underrepresentation exists still today and impacts how the issues of women are documented and reported in the region (Oxfam 2012). The study conducted by Oxfam International (2012) also indicated that only 8% of women have been able to complete their secondary education (Shulika 2018).

Transitional justice often fails to deal with the issue of gender justice completely as it is a highly multidimensional issue (Goertz 2020). The primary transitional justice mechanism, such as the establishment of the truth commissions and tribunal reparations, etc., not only addresses the wrongs that were done in the past but also establishes a groundwork for a more peaceful and just future (Shulika 2018). One of the primary issues associated with women in seeking justice stems from the primary distinction of reflection and analysis as ensured in the transitional justice frameworks. The attempt to bring into consideration of the gender-based violence plays an essential role and is associated with the understanding of conflicts in gender and instability (Shulika 2018).

*“When women are used as a tool by the warring parties, the question on an understanding of the position of women by society, in general, is diminished. The women come to emerge as enemies of peace and reconciliation, when, on the contrary, we have been working to build peace and support”.* (Interview 4, 2022)

The war had a major impact on women, and this was worsened for women who belonged to economically and socially vulnerable groups and asserts how women from the majority of the sections have been silenced due to the existing social order. This is in alignment with the feminist theory that outlines a significant implication of war on women. The women were more vulnerable and at a greater risk of facing violence and torture. The impact has resulted in a large scale trauma for the women of the region (Steenbergen 2022). One of the research participants recalls:

*“During the civil war in Liberia, many women were abused and were denied their rights. The reports are filled with incidents of rape and torture”. Women were also denied access to the healthcare rights. The women needed a voice and exposure along with the support of fellow women. Even now, I see women only of certain sections have full access to resources. It is troubling at times to acknowledge how, even when we have come far away from how things were. It is taking us longer to fully achieve our rights. The problem of patriarchy has remained in the system. The corruption in the powers has also remained. Every day there is a new incident reported. This cannot be ignored and should not be ignored. I am one of the journalists that work on the ground and have seen the problems and troubles of people around. It concerns me, but I also think that we are going in the right direction. Transitional justice was one step, but we need a lot more to be done and to be resolved. I guess we will achieve it. Eventually!* (Interview 5, 2022)

The Transitional justice framework has failed to understand the primary root of inequality in the region (Kastner 2020). In Liberia, the religious and the traditional insights have a major impact on the gender inequality and overall neglect of women in the region (Steenbergen 2022). Consequently, the women are underrepresented and have been silenced to voice their opinions. A categorised helping approach called the National gender Policy was developed in the year 2009 with the aim to minimise and abolish all the gender issues of women in Liberia. This was part of the transitional justice framework. The primary goal of this policy was to

develop a fair, and a just society where the value of human rights is consistent for all the genders and equality prevails with the minimisation of discrimination (Goertz 2020). However, there have been inconsistencies in the national legislature of Liberia and also in the policy development and action in Liberia in consideration of the same.

*“Many women still don’t have access to school and education in the country. Forget talking about the emancipation of women in context with their economic wellbeing and exercise of a power of position in the apparatus. I feel that it has been a long journey to be here. However, it is an even longer journey to achieve our rights where we can truly feel powerful”.*

(Interview 6, 2022)

The reach of women has been limited and many women have been silenced. It is important to thus understand the roles of women and include them in the positions of power for improved decision making. The literacy rate of women in Liberia is only 34.09% (World Bank 2021a). This is one of the lowest literacy rates in the world and is a question of grave concern. The concern of the middle-class women who were the participants of the study can be seen in the alignment with the theoretical perspectives derived from the critical feminist theory. The critical feminist theory helps in asserting that education is one of the primary agents of secondary socialisation (Evans-Winters 2019). Even when the country has been rich with natural resources, the lack of skills and power among the masses has been one of the major concerns associated with the poor state of affairs in the country. The women have been subjugated largely in domestic affairs and have limited access to resources and education. This limits their agency and power in the society and also impacts their political and social power in the society (Steenbergen 2022).

## **5.2 Women’s experience of the transitional justice and peacebuilding process**

The application of the transitional justice framework is associated with several challenges that impact the development of theories (Dhizaala 2018). Despite the challenges in its structure and function, the mechanism of transitional justice advocates that they can ensure the delivery of change. The same has been seen in the connotations of Liberia (Brankovic and Van der Merwe 2018; Lawson and Flomo 2020). The hopes of the leaders of civil and religious institutions were impacted by the inefficiency of the TRC. The feelings of how TRC

has failed to do enough for its society and its people are also reflected in several statements of the participants (Kastner 2020).

*“Many people think that it was only Charles Taylor who had ditched the country and its people. This is not true and not at all fair. When we talk of justice, it is important that we consider the fact that everyone who took part in the war must be held accountable. So going to TRC and relying on it simply is not justice. It is only one part of it!”* (Interview 11, 2022)

The steps associated with reparations and improvement of the conditions of the women in the region was applied through different phases. In 2004, the goal of the TRC and developed programs was associated with economic empowerment. In 2005, WIPNET was established, and psychosocial programs were established (Gcabashe 2021). In the year 2006, the safe homes for children were established, and the UNDP small arms budget along with the national budget allotment to the country’s development was also established (Dhizaala 2018). Therefore, it can be seen that the steps taken towards empowerment of women and improvement of their living status have been made possible only with consistent efforts. However, its impacts have remained only to a small section of the society and have been able to transfer to the women of privileged sections only. Around 68% of the population of Liberia lives in rural areas, with a massive poverty incidence of 71.6%. Further, 44% of the population of the country lives in extreme poverty (Steenbergen 2022). Therefore, while the position of women altered in some cases (especially in more progressive and economically well-off sections), the majority of women were silenced and their representation was limited. One of the participants of the research identifies this as a major problem and asserts her concern in association with the same:

*“I come from a fairly decent household. Even at the worst of our times, we had the ability to work through and manage our finances. As a woman of the house, I was protected. When I think of how the TJ system and the policies and procedures have worked, I fail to understand some things. I remember that when TJ was being announced, the focus was on ensuring economic security for our people. I understood this because, as a country that is rich in resources, we have always been poor overall. There has been massive corruption, and conflict has only drained more out of people. Even after so many years, the poorest of the households live in highly poor environments. The women there have way less freedom of choice than we enjoy. I understand that there are several non-profit organisations working*

*here too. But we need much more than charity. We need a change in the operations of our people so that the emancipation of women is not limited to only a section but reaches a greater section. TJ needs to evolve, and I am hopeful that it will". (Interview 12, 2022)*

The transitional justice approaches in Liberia have been associated with the “legacies of injustice” and massive economic crimes that have impacted the people of the country throughout the years. The worst impact has been associated with the women of poor classes who, even after the movements for women empowerment and justice, remained secluded. As assessed through the analytical framework that asserts that women can be silenced, as what happened for majority of the women.

Further support is needed to assist the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Liberia so that a participatory approach can be developed (Shulika 2018). The developing recommendation for the memorialisation of women for international organisations to improve the coordination between different organisations has also been taken into consideration. Many leaders of the civil society have also expressed their disappointment and dissatisfaction with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the overall process of transitional justice in Liberia (Steenbergen 2022). The disappointment in the process has been associated with several factors.

*“The entire process has lacked transparency and had very limited outreach. Many people who work on the ground were oblivious to the idea of TRC and TJ. If your people are unaware about the process, but it asserts that there has been only limited improvement in the process.” (Interview 14, 2022)*

The failure of the TRC is also associated with bringing in the key actors that have resulted in conflict in the public hearings (Oxfam International 2012). After the end of a conflict or an authoritarian rule, many assert that the state is responsible for the reparations. However, it is important to understand that these measures cannot be individually driven and need to be taken into consideration with the participatory effort at the organisational level (van der Merwe and Masiko-Mpaka 2022).

The process of transitional justice can take several forms that range from the development of institutional reforms to clinical trials and memorials. This is also associated with the establishment of the truth commissions (World Bank 2021b). The economic empowerment of women in the region has been associated with conflicts and poor civil society outcomes due

to existing dynamics and backlash against women. The economic empowerment of women can help free the women and help minimise the vulnerability of their social position (UN women 2020b) .

*“We can always talk about the fact that something is better than nothing. Something will always be better than nothing. But we see that it is difficult to see females in positions of power and in working spheres in comparison to the number of males. The boys have the opportunity to go to school and attain knowledge. Even today, most women stay home and care for their children.”* (Interview 15, 2022)

Women of Liberia understand that the change in the societal norms is gradual but also assert that they are not satisfied with the current position of the transitional justice systems on the question of women (Steiner et al. 2021). Many women assert that one of the greatest changes that have impacted the well-being of the women has been associated with the presence of women in leadership roles and the breaking of the stereotypes (Oxfam International 2012).

*“Many things still limit the women, and several challenges remain, yet, our young ones are trying what they can to break these barriers”* (Interview 12, 2022)

The women in Liberia understand that the process of transitional justice is gradual and is associated with several strengths and limitations in the sense of their application. This is also associated with how the institutions of transitional justice have impacted women in the country. These women are hopeful that the coming generations will continue their struggle and help in the achievement of full emancipation of the gender (Shrama 2018).

*“The emancipation of women and achievement of transitional justice in the women needs to be taken into consideration with the employment of the women and ensuring the safety and security in all the sections of the society”.* (Interview 1, 2022)

Asserts a thirty-two-year-old young woman participant in the research

*“Raising the voices of marginalised and the poor women of Liberia has been one of the primary concerns of the activist groups of this country. I, at my personal and individual level, understand their concerns because I acknowledge the disparity that exists between the rich*

*and poor here. Most people here are poor, and they are hit worst! Most women work domestic chores and even with examples of women leaders in the country; they are mostly associated with the poor living standards and exercise of rights". (Interview 10, 2022)*

The women thus do not see the process of transitional justice as absolute and are able to identify its strengths and weaknesses from their personal reflections as well as an analytical understanding of the society in general. The development of the TRC and application of interventions of transitional justice indicate that most women identify the benefits of the program. These have been associated with the privileged sections of the society. The scope of the justice system has to expand further and needs to be taken into consideration for the emancipation of the women and masses in general.

With respect to the activities that have been developed at the macro political level of the country, it is also recommended that the focus is on niche development in women of marginalised communities. This can be done by enhancing the development of technical skills in the women and promoting the media outreach programs. It is also important that evaluation strategies are developed that can help in understanding the importance of transitional justice programs.

## **Chapter VI: Conclusion**

The transitional justice process is an approach that takes into consideration the massive violations of human rights. The approach identifies that there is a need to address the harms implicated to the victims. Therefore, the application of transitional justice can begin only with the acknowledgement of crimes and brutalities committed against a group of people. Hence, the process is also closely interlinked with the idea of restorative justice. The goal of such programs is to minimise the conflicts, improve the living conditions of people, transform the existing political systems and identify the root cause of the problem and try to remediate it. In the context of Liberia, the civil unrest had a major implication on the population. This unrest needs to be analysed in context with its historical connotations and current impacts. Liberia, a country that has always been rich in the availability of natural resources, has been plunged into a poor economy and massive unrest and war in the region. The state structure collapse also led to the migration of a lot of people from the region. With



the deaths of more than two million people in the region (Clark, 2021, p.232) This was directly associated with the war in the region, several peace agreements were signed and developed. However, their success was either not sufficient or transient. A foundational agreement was the Comprehensive Peace Agreement signed in the year 2003. Different approaches to the delivery of transitional justice are discussed by the peacebuilding groups, and combinations of them were applied in the case of Liberia. These included the application of the Truth and Reconciling Commission (TRC) and truth-seeking and security sector reform (SSR) that are still active in the country. The principles of transitional justice have been defined by the United Nations, which helps in the identification of transitional justice as a form of restorative justice. The long-term goals of this approach are associated with the establishment of democracy and the building of a sustainable society. The vision of a sustainable society cannot be taken into consideration without understanding the role of women in society and the development of acknowledgement of how war and conflicts impact women of the war. Research indicates that the war impacts genders disproportionately with a major psychological impact on women (Shulika 2018). Women play an essential role in the economy of Liberia. The women are involved in different sectors of the economy, with the majority of their employment in the unorganised sectors. Further, the women have been the tools of war tactics during the civil unrest in Liberia and have faced several complications and traumas since. Therefore, understanding how the women of Liberia perceive the idea of transitional justice and how it impacts them has to be taken into consideration. Hence, this research aimed to do the same. The aim of this research is to understand the role and experience of women in the context of transitional justice and peace building in Liberia after the end of the civil war in 2003 and on how they perceived the changing role of women in Monrovia with application of TJ process.

A detailed analysis of literature was conducted to develop a background for this thesis. The findings of the research indicated that the women of Liberia faced major harm with both physical and psychological torture on women as a part of the war processes. One of the key exploitations was observed with women subjugated to sexual violence during the war. Many women were also killed and assaulted during the times of civil war and unrest in the region. The horrors of the crime against women were also associated with reported incidents of abductions. Labour and torture of women of Liberia were thus a norm during the times of civil unrest. This historical understanding of the subject indicates that women were specific targets in the times of war and were often used in the processes of war tactics to inflict

violence and for the assertion of power. The understanding of literature draws attention to the theoretical framework of critical feminism for understanding this approach. The women of Liberia have been the core contributors to the economy. Yet, the power dynamic has been different in Liberia. The critical feminist theory underpins how the position of women in society is seen in the subjugation of men. This deprives women of their primary rights and the exercising of their human rights and positions. This can also be seen in conjunction with how women were treated during the years of conflict in Liberia. The women of Liberia do not exercise equal human rights as their counter males and have been largely associated with domestic work. Hence, the theory of critical feminism helps in understanding the social position of women in society in general and also its projection in the society of Liberia. The application of transitional justice systems was also discussed in detail in this paper, and it was outlined that the process of transitional justice believes in restorative justice but needs application in a highly comprehensive manner. The literature indicates that the women of Liberia played an essential role in the peacebuilding process and were core to the achievement of stability and end of the conflict in the region. The findings also indicated how the women of Liberia have now been able to achieve a relative position with first-ever African female president in the country elected through the democratic process.

To understand the perspectives of women who belonged to the upper middle class section of the society, primary qualitative research was undertaken. The primary qualitative research design was chosen for this analysis as it would allow for the development of comprehensive data and research assessment required to meet the research objectives. The participants were recruited and were informed about the research and its implications to obtain a valid and an informed consent. A total of twenty-two participants were involved in the study that were recruited through purposive sampling. The purposive sampling approach was considered to be suitable for this research as the research question was highly focused and was concerned only with the women belonging to the upper middle-class section of Liberia. Hence, this non-random sampling method was suitable and allowed for the selection of the target population. The data was collected through semi-structured interviews. The interview guide was developed with simple to comprehend and open-ended questions. The open-ended questions allowed the participants to have freedom of expression and present their perspectives freely. The details of participants were kept anonymous to ensure privacy. One to one session for interviews were taken by the researchers. The interviews are audio recorded and then converted to transcripts for thematic analysis. Thematic analysis, as an approach for analysis

of generated data, was chosen as it was based on the identification of the common themes that emerged from the transcripts of the interviewees for the analysis data.

The analysis of the interview transcripts resulted in the emergence of three primary themes. The first theme of the research was, Impact of war on women, and how women understand the changed role of women more broadly in the country. The theme highlighted that it is important to focus on how transitional justice has had a major impact on the rights of women and their position in the society. This highlights that most women in the Liberian society were associated with poor social and economic situations, but things have improved with the improved representation of women in the political positions and other positions of leadership. The findings also indicated that women understand and acknowledge that while most women have been able to achieve better with the implementation of the peace processes but there is a lot that still needs to be achieved. The literacy rate of women in Liberia is strikingly low and needs to be improved with further improvement in the representation and rights of women from Liberia. The theme concluded that with application of TJ process, the women of the country have had some opportunities for empowerment. However, there has been fear of backlash due to past experiences and social structure of the community. The second common theme that emerged from the interview transcripts was, *Women's experience of the transitional justice and peacebuilding process*. The interview outcomes indicated that the participants were able to understand the fact while most people in Liberia have now been able to be free from civil unrest, the social and economic parity has remained. This concluded that the majority of women, that belong to non-privileged sections of the society have been silenced. The women from poor households are more vulnerable and need more protection and support than the existing transitional justice systems have failed to provide. The country is also associated with massive corruption and instability in the government structures. This has been taken into consideration by the people and has been highlighted as one of the concerns among the women. This disparity is indicative of failure and lack of a holistic approach to the restorative process of transitional justice in the country. The interviewees in the research indicated that they have been able to see how the processes of the truth and reconciliation commission and the transitional justice mechanisms have been able to change the face of gender and oppressive systems of civil unrest in the country by giving some opportunities of empowerment. But they also highlight how its improvement is absolutely essential. The participants indicated that they understand how women have been impacted by the institution of patriarchy and how its dismantling will take time. Therefore, while the

process of transitional justice has been able to promise certain improvements to the women who already belonged to the privileged domains, a greater responsibility for sustainable development and reaching the masses needs further development. Through these results, it can be concluded that the women of Liberia who belong to the upper middle-class section of the society are not only aware of the process of transitional justice but are also analytical and critical of its working and demand improvement in its operations. These findings also indicate that the women can understand that there is a need to focus on the reach of the programs to the less privileged sections of the society.

This document also summarises the primary limitations of the study and identifies the future scope and prospects of the study further. This study is crucial as it helps in establishing a primary foundation of research that highlights the perspectives of women regarding the restorative and peacebuilding processes in the aftermath of a conflicted situation. This study opens prospects for further research where a more specific and systematic approach can be used for further development of research.

This study concludes that the women of Liberia have played a historical role in the civil unrest and war. The role of women has also been monumental in the peacebuilding processes. Hence, this study highlights how the process of transitional justice has been perceived by the upper middle-class women of Liberia. The process of transitional justice has been partly successful in improving the situation of women in the country. However, further developments are needed that can help in ensuring the improved status of women and the restoration of peace and sustainable development in the country.

### **Chapter VII: Future scope and prospects**

This research helps in highlighting the individual perspectives of upper middle-class women of Liberia in the context of what they think of transitional justice and how it has impacted them. While this study helps in providing a foundational and background understanding of how women in Liberia feel after years of injustice, further research is required to identify the impact of transitional justice interventions on the overall wellbeing of women in the region and to evaluate its success. The process of transitional justice is complex and is associated with several factors that can be used to assess the implementation of these programs and to assess their impact on the female population of Liberia (Akiode 2019). In future, more

focused research can be developed that is associated with one of the defining factors associated with the liberation and emancipation of women. Factors such as education of women, reduction in the crime rates, reduction in the violent incidents against women, statistics that are associated with the health status of the women, access to the resource and their overall wellbeing all can be included in the study to identify how the programs have impacted the community. Further, only a very small section of the society was taken into consideration or this research. A more diverse sample of the population can be taken into consideration, and more detailed and robust quantitative research can be done in future (Campbell 2020).

This research helps in the identification of the common narratives among the upper middle-class women of Liberia. However, a quantitative study with a greater sample size can be taken into consideration in future for greater generalizability of the study and for more robust research outcomes. The findings of this study are highly significant as they help in the development of foundational knowledge and narratives of transitional justice among the women of Liberia. During the time of the civil war, women were one the key victims and were assaulted physically, psychologically, socially, and economically (Akiode 2019). Therefore, it is critical that the justice mechanisms developed to mediate this take the position of women into consideration and highlight how these programs and policies impacted the women in the country through the years. The findings of the study and the future analysis can also be used for the development of the policies and for further improvement of the programs. This will help in enhancing the position of women in the Liberian society and help reach the goals of emancipation of women (Blumer 2021).

## **Abstract**

The emancipation of women from the regions of war has been a subject of critical debate across all cultures and geographical settings, including Liberia. Hence, the concept of transitional justice for its application in Liberia needs to be analysed in the context of the history of the country and how it has impacted the social demography of the region along with the role of women needs to be assessed. The aim of this research was to understand the experience of women being involved in transitional justice and peacebuilding in Liberia. A primary qualitative research approach was used for the same with foundations based on critical feminist theory. The participants were recruited through purposive sampling with collection of data using semi-structured interviews. The findings of the interviews conducted among the upper-middle-class women of Monrovia included the primary themes: the transitional justice movement has altered the role of women in Liberia, the emancipation of women is yet to reach the masses, and the movement of transitional justice needs to evolve further. Hence, it can be concluded that the transitional justice initiatives like TRC had failed to completely engage with the civil society of Liberia and thus failed to convert the opportunity for mobilization of the potential of civil society for expanding its awareness and enhancing involvement in different efforts of reconciliation, alternative adjunction and witness protection. This was needed as collective action was needed. Hence, future studies can be developed that focus on a greater diversity of population and larger sample size for a more comprehensive understanding of perceptions of women regarding transitional justice.

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## Appendix

### *Interview guide*

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. Your participation is appreciated and highly valued. This is to inform you that the personal details of your interview will not be disclosed and will be stored only until the completion of this research. I will be asking a series of questions, and you are free to answer them in whatever way you like. I will be noting the responses you give for further analysis and to draw findings of this research. If you feel uncomfortable, you are free to refuse to participate further and not answer the question in specific. By agreeing to participate in this interview, it is implied that you consent to participate in this research.

- *Do you think the transitional justice system of Liberia has been inclusive of women in its application?*
- *What do you think has been the role of women in peace-making and peacebuilding?*
- *How have things changed in your opinion?*
- *What do you think needs improvement in the current policies?*
- *Do you think that society has been able to develop an understanding of the impact of war?*
- *How do you see the impact of war on women in the context of Liberia?*
- *The emancipation and upliftment of society is a long process. What has been the role of TJ programs in the same, according to you?*

Thank you for your time and participation. Your contribution is significant and highly valuable.

### ***Participant***

62-year-old participant (Interview 1, 2022)

Former employee of Stop Aids Liberia (SAIL) and member of the Female Lawyers Association of Liberia.

A 48-year-old participant (Interview 2, 2022) Pastor

A 58-year-old participant (Interview 3, 2022) Civil servant.

A 50-year-old participant (Interview 4, 2022) Civil servant

A 39-year-old participant (Interview 5, 2022) Activist

A 52-year-old participant (Interview 6, 2022) government official

A 42-year-old participant (Interview 7, 2022) Civil servant.

A 40-year-old participant (Interview 8, 2022) Businesswoman

A 51-year-old participant (Interview 9, 2022) Businesswoman

A 47-year-old participant (Interview 10, 2022) Activist

A 47-year-old participant (Interview 11, 2022) Activist

A 43-year-old participant (Interview 12, 2022) Self employed

A 45-year-old participant (Interview 13, 2022) Government official

A 49-year-old participant (Interview 14, 2022) Government official

A 67-year-old participant (Interview 15, 2022) Lecturer and government official

***Thank you for your time and participation. Your contribution is significant and highly valuable.***