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Significance is Bliss: A Global Feminist Analysis of the Liberian Truth and Reconciliation Commission and its Privileging of Americo-Liberian over Indigenous Liberian Women's Voices

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Significance is Bliss: A Global Feminist Analysis of the Liberian Truth and
Reconciliation Commission and its Privileging of Americo-Liberian over Indigenous
Liberian Women's Voices

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
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Dedication

I dedicate my thesis to the USF Women's and Gender Studies Department. Had it not been for your guidance, support, laughs, and love I would not be finishing my Master of Arts.

I would especially like to dedicate my thesis to Michelle Hughes-Miller. You have inspired me in more ways than you will ever know. I owe you everything – especially all of the patience which I robbed from you after writing this thesis over...

and over

and over

oh, and one more time for good measure

and over

and over again.

Oh, and Antenor Martins, thank you for always believing me in. I have loved you and cherished you since the first day I saw that Transformers t-shirt!

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Abstract

The purpose of my research is to analyze the Liberian Truth and Reconciliation Commission (LTRC) lack of attention towards accessing rural Liberian women's voices as opposed to privileged Liberian women residing in urban and Diaspora spaces. By analyzing the LTRC and its Final Report from a critical global feminist perspective, I was able to not only illuminate, but bring a spotlight over issues including access, privilege, and multicultural *insensitivity* related to Liberia's indigenous tribal cultures. Liberia, being a country founded by American colonials, is socially constructed by Western ideological norms. As Western ideology is mainly normalized and enforced by the privileged class, Americo-Liberians, the LTRC and Final Report were also constructed within Western constructions.

Given Liberia's historical colonial ties to the United States and its current relations to the global community, the LTRC decided to include Liberians in the Diaspora to its focus group. The Diaspora, also referred to as Liberia's 16th county, is made up of privileged Liberians displaced in overseas countries including the United States, United Kingdom, and Canada. As with any progress, fashion, or business, attention is given to the newest, most profitable *merchandise*, or in the case of the LTRC, *population*. I hypothesized, and feared, that the LTRC did not provide indigenous Liberian women, many of whom reside in rural Liberia, equal access and effort as they did privileged Liberian women residing in urban and Diaspora spaces. To prove this, I conduct a

feminist content analysis of the LTRC Final Report, recorded public testimonies which are available on the LTRC website (www.trcofliberia.org) and quantitative data collected and processed by, Benetech, a human rights statistics organization based out of Minnesota... a city which happens to be home to the highest number of Diaspora Liberians in the world. After conducting my investigation, I was able to conclude my thesis with reasons as to why underprivileged women's voices in Liberian should be included in doctrine, like the LTRC, and suggest ways to improve methods like the LTRC to ensure indigenous women's voices are fairly accessed and heard.

Introduction

The Liberian Civil War (1989-2003) has been internationally recognized as one of modern history's most brutal civil conflicts. The violations of human rights and women's rights were so extreme that international humanitarian intervention was requested to help assist Liberia's peace-building process. Besides a moment of peace between 1996 -1999, the Civil War officially ended on August 18, 2003, with the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) by leaders of warring factions. As a method to facilitate peace building, the CPA called for the establishment of a truth commission to create space "for both victims and perpetrators of human rights violations to share their experiences in order to get a clear picture of the past to facilitate genuine healing and reconciliation" (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Liberia, p.48). The sharing of experiences, creating social accountability, was to be used to assist Liberian political leaders in decisions for victim reparations, social assistance, and legal suggestions as to how Liberia could move forward peacefully and as one nation.

The Liberian Truth and Reconciliation Commission (LTRC) was internationally recognized as being one of, if not the first, truth commissions to focus on women's voices and experiences. Unfortunately, this political recognition was in response to the Liberian Civil War being notoriously violent towards women. After its three and a half years, the LTRC summarized and publicized its findings and suggestions for the nation to go forward, peacefully, with a Final Report. Although Liberian women are recognized in the Final Report, the diversity among Liberian women, privileged and underprivileged,

are not recognized equally. Therefore, as a feminist researcher with the goal to illuminate the underrepresentation of indigenous Liberian women's voices in the LTRC and Final Report, I felt it necessary to look at how and why privileged Liberian women received more representation than indigenous Liberian women in the Final Report.

As the LTRC Final Report is a "cultural artifact" (Reinharz, 1992, p. 146), I decided to apply a feminist content analysis to demonstrate how and why indigenous Liberian women received less acknowledgment in the LTRC's Final Report than privileged Liberian women. The shortage of underprivileged Liberian women's voices has left holes in the narrative of the Liberian Civil War. These holes left out the narratives exemplifying indigenous Liberians women's acts of courage, independence, and peace-building preceding and during the Civil War. The indigenous women were largely responsible for Liberia's peace treaty, and yet they are often stereotyped as "Third World Woman" (Mohanty, Russo & Torres, 1991).

My position as to why the LTRC omitted the indigenous Liberian women's narratives was that it was a conscious effort to continue the association of indigenous women to the Third World Woman stereotype. If indigenous Liberian women were able to fully participate in the LTRC, I strongly hypothesize that they would have been able to articulate their experiences during the Civil War, explain their current living situations, and been able to tell the LTRC what they needed to better their situations. Instead, the holes in the Final Report caused by indigenous women's difficulties with accessing, participating, and culturally relating to the LTRC created excuses as to why Liberia still cannot provide, let alone understand, what its indigenous women need, and want, to better their lives.

Methodology

As the LTRC Final Report is a “cultural artifact” (Reinharz, 1992, p. 146), I decided to do a feminist content analysis on the Final Report to prove my assumption that indigenous rural women’s voice was underrepresented and overshadowed by the voices of privileged Liberian women. The absence of indigenous Liberian women’s voices in the Liberian history leaves out unique and important perspectives in terms of their cultures, norms, and needs. Without their voices, indigenous rural women are defined by existing identities, assumptions, stereotypes (Mohanty et al., 1991). Therefore, for my thesis, I wish to investigate why and how the LTRC and Final Report have perpetuated the marginalization of indigenous Liberian women. There should be no excuses for not accessing indigenous rural women’s voices as they are their own best advocates and personal narrators.

I decided on global feminism as the background to my research as it looks at the progress of women on a global scale. Its focus on women’s diversity, multiculturalism, the effect of neocolonialism on women, modern economy, access, poverty – all issues pertaining to my research topic.

Feminist scholarship and research are not only intrinsically linked to social action, but also empowers the women it speaks for and to (Lather, 1988; Reinharz, 1992). The objective of feminist research is not necessarily a series of predetermined goals, but rather the process of continuous change, “[those] confronting the necessity to be aware of differences can learn from those who have had always to be aware of such” (Brown,

1986, p. 281). Shulamit Reinharz cites sociologist Roslyn Bologh's argument that "our 'limited vision' is freed by loosening theoretical frameworks and methods, allowing them to be anti-positivist, anti-patriarchal, and open-ended" (Reinharz, 1992, p. 178).

Applying a global feminist lens to the Final Report is not meant to be seen as criticism, but rather as constructive criticism; finding places where a "limited vision" can be loosened and expanded.

As an effort to share information globally, the LTRC Committee decided to upload all LTRC documents onto the truth commission's official website, www.trcofliberia.org. The entire Final Report, the LTRC Mandate document, transcripts of public hearings, media footage, and links to the qualitative data provided by Benetech are all available for public, online access. The availability of information is fantastic for academics like myself, who have the privilege and access to computers, the Internet, and are literate in the English language. But how user friendly is this information to an indigenous woman living in rural Liberia? Issues surrounding access and privilege are immediate.

On the LTRC website, a link to the Human Rights Data Analysis Group at Benetech's report, or the qualitative data report, is found next to the Final Reports links. Benetech's data was presented as its own separate paper, "Descriptive Statistics from Statements to the Liberian Truth and Reconciliation Commission" (Kruger, Cibelli & Hoover, 2009). I did a content analysis of the document, including its discussions, graphs, and statistics (Reinharz, 1992) and compared them to information found in the Final Report. It struck me as odd that none of the statisticians were Liberians, though

they were entrusted with gathering some of the most attention grabbing data of the LTRC.

As the public hearing transcripts were available on the LTRC website, I read through them to answer questions including, but limited to what kind of method(s) were used to gather personal narratives, if the method(s) abided by feminist research methods (Reinharz, 1992), if the testifiers were chosen or was it their decision to testify, where narratives were gather- in the Diaspora or just Liberia, and so on. I chose to speak on some of the public hearing testimonies which I felt demonstrated a lack of multicultural sensitivity to illustrate the overshadowing of indigenous women's voices. I also chose a testimony, given by a privileged, Western NGO organization, which discussed her perceptions of the realities of rural Liberian women's lives. I applaud the LTRC's efforts to include objective voice in Liberia's reconciliation process, but again, I feel the narratives could have been gathered using more multiculturally aware methods. I also could not help but wonder if all the narratives were equally listened to and applied to Liberia's reconciliation process.

Because reality is a "subjective state," one where "multiple truth and knowledge claims exist through interlocking contextual understandings" (Kvasny, Greenhill, & Trauth, 2005, p. 3), feminist research analysis can provide probable explanations as to where resulting contextual social constructions from "truth and knowledge" began. Referencing Klein & Myers (1999), critical research aiming at issues related to the privileging of the status quo is an important first step to improving potentially beneficial methods for marginalized populations, women included. By analyzing indigenous women's lack of representation in the Final Report, they are exemplified as a "social

group that is ‘muted’, excised from history, ‘invisible’ in the official records of their culture” (Long, 1987, p. 7). By studying and establishing the context of the relation between Americo-Liberian and indigenous women in the Final Report, indigenous women are ultimately made more visible (Brown, 1986; Reinhartz, 1992).

Historical context

The Liberian Civil War, which lasted for 14 years (1989-2003), affected the entire country. The first seven years of conflict caused approximately 200,000 out of 2.8 million people to lose their lives, internally displaced 1.2 million, and externally displaced over 700,000 to neighboring countries including Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea, Sierra Leone, Ghana, and the Diaspora (Amnesty International, 2007). From 1996 to 1999, a ceasefire was in place due to the democratic election of Charles Taylor. Although approximately 80% of displaced Liberians were able to return to their homes during the ceasefire, another wave of violence was on the country's horizon (Dunn-Marcos, Kollahlon, Ngovo & Russ, 2005). Tragically, the country found itself drowning in violence, yet again. Another 120,000 Liberians were displaced, sexual violence skyrocketed, people lost their families, homes... the flood of chaos seemed to rise and rise. It took another *four years* of violence and anarchy until warring factions could come to an official peace agreement, sign the CPA, and end the Civil War in 2003 (Dunn-Marcos et al., 2005).

The Civil War demonstrated barbaric acts of physical and sexual violence against women. According to June Munala (2007), the former human rights officer for the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL), "Systematized and endemic rape of women and girls, gang rape and multiple reoccurrence of sexual abuse were rampant" (p. 36). Because of these harrowing statistics, the LTRC was mandated to recognize Liberian women's experience during the Civil War, a first in truth commission history. Up until

the LTRC, truth commissions had generally abided by patriarchal social scripts and marginalized women's voices.

The fact that the LTRC recognized and included women's experiences in its mandate and Final Report were huge steps forward for women in Liberia, women in Africa, and women all over the world. The acknowledgement of Liberian women made Liberia a flagship for women's empowerment, and even a success story for how countries should utilize UN Resolutions 1325 and 1820 for gender equality during transitional periods (Bakker, 1997). But, as with any method, there is always room for improvement and development and, in my opinion, although the LTRC was successful at recognizing Liberian women, it did not recognize the social barriers between Americo-Liberian women and rural women, including wealth, class, race, and education. Although both social classes survived horrifying atrocities during the war, their unique individual experiences and perspectives still differ given their social, cultural, and economic stratification. As with any lower social class, indigenous Liberian women's voices are more likely to be marginalized, therefore it is important to be consciously aware and inclusive of their narratives.

Global feminism and the reclamation of identity

On May 1, 1923, in London, England, historian A. P. Newton gave a lecture to the King's College African Society entitled *Africa and Historical Research* (1922). He argued that, although the continent of Africa had already been inhabited by millions of people for thousands of years, "The Africa of our inquiry possesses practically no history before the coming of Europeans. History only begins when [colonial] men take to writing" (p. 267). Because reading and writing are indicative of a formal education, existing world histories are mainly documented from privileged, often Western, perspectives. In Liberia, the existing elite social class, known as Americo-Liberians, has narrated and universalized their narrow perception of what they know to be Liberia's history. According to Americo-Liberians, Liberia did not really exist before its colonialism by America. Therefore, Liberia's history can be summarized by this African proverb: "Until lions have their historians, tales of the hunt shall always glorify the hunters."

Scholars Robin Teske and Mary Ann Tetreault (2000) refer to the reclaiming of identities by revisiting recorded histories as an *eternal return*, a term first constructed by Friedrich Nietzsche. Because Liberia's history has been chronicled by such a small part of the country's large population, there are many perspectives and truths that have been overlooked, misrepresented, and/or misinterpreted. Existing cultural artifacts and histories often identify nonwestern women as victims, helpless, or as Chandra Mohanty

and her colleagues describe them, “Third World” (1991). But rather than assuming these subjective interpretations and perspectives of nonwestern women are true, why not talk to and thereby acknowledge, the women themselves? As women’s voices have often been omitted from historical record, as a feminist researcher, it is important to fill-in existing history’s gaps with women’s experience and allow a reclaiming of women’s identity and voice (Reinharz, 1992).

Liberian indigenous women face discrimination and oppression for many different reasons: their sex, their culture, their race, their poverty. Due to these barriers, indigenous women in Liberia are placed at the bottom of Liberia’s social hierarchy. They are unimportant, forgettable, other, even less than a woman. Because indigenous women are not considered equal to any social category in Liberia, their voices have been blanketed over by privilege, which in Liberia is embodied by Americo-Liberians. Americo-Liberians are decedents of American colonialists; their Western lineage grants them high social status and immediate social privilege over indigenous Liberian peoples. And, like most postcolonial countries, Americo-Liberians have seized political, economical, and social control of Liberia, even though they have never exceeded more than 5% of the nation’s total population (Dunn-Marcos et al., 2005).

As every regional history provides context to current events, I found it necessary to educate myself on Liberian history. Although the Final Report does provide its own version of Liberian history, it starts after Liberia’s colonization and independence. I decided to look further, reading about the American Colonization Society (ACS) in the United States and their plan to relocate freed black slaves to lower white slaveholders’ fears of a racial riot. As the freed American slaves began their American settlement,

Monrovia, in the Gola Valley (soon to be Liberia), they not only brought American culture with them, but they brought a form of discrimination never before seen in the Gola Valley, a colonial authority (Stoler, 1997). The new class of privilege, the Americo-Liberians, represented Americans, Western culture, light skin, and rule over the existing indigenous tribes of the Gola Valley. As Western culture became the norm, fitting in became the goal. For indigenous Liberia women, their place, *their independence*, in the public sphere was revoked. The physical differences between the colonizer and colonized, self and other, a dichotomy, which Patricia Hill Collins articulated, that caused both opposition and oppression (1986).

As Liberia was colonized by America, its social organization, or "material life," demonstrates similar characteristics to those in Western cultures including the United States (Marx, 1972). Men stand at the top of the social hierarchy, while women remain at the bottom. But because my thesis comes from a global feminist perspective, the social category of *women* in Liberia's social hierarchy can be further broken down. Americo-Liberian are the privileged social class, leaving indigenous Liberians at the bottom of the social hierarchy. Therefore, Americo-Liberian women are considered more privileged than indigenous women, making their voices the "so-called master narratives" (Hudson, 2005, p. 159). The LTRC perpetuated the "master narrative" by universalizing the easily accessible voices of privileged women to represent Liberian women, in general. As global feminism advocates for multiculturalism and cultural sensitivity, especially in neocolonial states, it is unfortunate that the LTRC did not make greater efforts to include more indigenous women's standpoints throughout the truth commission and in the Final Report (Tong, 2009). As most indigenous women live in rural areas, accessing their

voices was challenging due to geography, existing violence in certain counties, and the absence of ways to possibility to communicate via phone or Internet (Made, 2000). This situation faced by indigenous women and the LTRC can speak to why women's issues, in general, are often defined by the issues of the privileged few (Mohanty et al., 1991).

According to global feminism, the privileges of women in developed nations exist “at the expense of the well-being of women in developing nations... the harmful effects of nineteenth- and twentieth- century coalition campaigns are still felt in the so-called Thirds World nations” (Tong, 2009, p. 8). Looking at postcolonial Liberian history, the context of the complexities indigenous people, especially tribal women, faced after American colonialism introduced, privileged, and subsequently normalized Western ideology needs to be acknowledged and thoroughly discussed prior to my analysis of the LTRC. To overlook this important historical period would only perpetuate the female chauvinism and cultural insensitivity existing in Liberian history, and subsequently in the LTRC Final Reports.

Women in Africa, and all over the world, have been organizing in an effort to reclaim their identities as their existing identities are not only incorrect, but more often than not, they are insulting and ignorant. In her article, “Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses” (1991), Chandra Mohanty and her colleagues chronicle the “production of the ‘Third World Woman’ as a singular monolithic subject in some recent (Western) feminist texts” (p. 333). They express concern over the damaging effects of the construction and perpetuation of the Third Word Woman stereotype – a helpless victim in need of Western aid. Without the existence of this assistance-seeking stereotype, the West would have no reason to intervene with the

“Third World,” never mind apply Western ideological practices for the best interest of global women (Tong, 2009).

In her discussion on the importance of acknowledge of women’s experience, Joan A. Scott states, “knowledge is gained through vision; vision is a direct apprehension of a world of transparent objects. In this conceptualization, the visible is privileged; writing is then put at its service. Seeing is the origin of knowing. Writing is reproduction, transmission” (1993, p. 398). An individual’s person perspective is an explanation of their understanding of their environments. Since Liberia’s colonization, rural Liberian women have historically been the silent recipients of knowledge. Liberian rural women’s silence throughout their postcolonial existence has only reinforced the muting cultural limitations, which devalue their personal expertise on their own lives.

After the Western social hierarchy monopolized the existing social structures of the Gola Valley, indigenous Liberian women have experienced less social visibility and voice than Americo-Liberian women, leaving their personal standpoints at the mercy of what Donna Haraway referred to as the “god-trick” (1988). In her discussion of feminist research methods, Sandra Harding states, “While studying women is not new, studying women from the perspective of their own experiences so that women can understand themselves and the world can claim virtually no history at all” (1987, p. 8). Introducing and implementing a conversation method, like a truth commission, to acknowledge and give voice to both privileged and underprivileged people is considered a monumental step towards cultural acceptance. But the privileged speaking for those with less privilege happens all too often. Nevertheless, according to Linda Alcoff, “as a type of discursive practice, speaking for others has come under increasing criticism, and in some

communities it is being rejected. There is a strong, albeit contested, current within feminism which holds that speaking for others is arrogant, vain, unethical, and politically illegitimate” (1992, p. 6). Therefore peace building methods like truth commissions should strive for authentic voice, inclusiveness, and “multiculturalism” as defined by Joseph Raz (1994, p. 74). These three factors are imperative for improving the status of *global* women on an individual, national, and international level (Tong, 2009).

Liberian Truth and Reconciliation Commission

I had never heard of truth commissions until I started researching Liberia for a grant writing course I took in graduate school. While I was Internet surfing for information on Liberian refugee women's experiences with sexual abuse and exploitation, I stumbled across the LTRC website, which talked about the Civil War and truth commission. Being an advocate for giving voice to underprivileged women, I was immediately impressed by the LTRC's efforts to access, let alone acknowledge, women's experience during the Civil War. This truth commission method appeared to be quite effective in terms of acknowledging *authentic* women's voice. From thereon, my on-again/off-again long-term love affair with the LTRC began.

Originating in the Western or "First World," the truth commission method was developed to assist countries transition from conflict to peace. Given that each country and conflict arises for different reasons, truth commissions had to boast a malleable quality, making them easy to use but difficult to define. The most common definition came from International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ) co-founder and truth commission expert, Priscilla Hayner, who defined truth commissions as, "bodies set up to investigate a past history of violations of human rights in a particular country – which can include violations by the military or other government forces or armed opposition forces" (1994, p. 600). Truth commissions are generally instated during periods of political transition and demonstrate four primary elements: they focus on past events, they look at

the “overall picture”, they exist “for a pre-defined period of time” (ending with the release of a final report), and are “always vest with some sort of authority”, who is responsibility is to gather more information, often sensitive, for the benefit of the final report (1994, p. 604). Because a truth commission is essentially a transitional justice method, I will be explaining the LTRC in context to its application to post-conflict Liberia.

The LTRC initially proposed their investigation to range from April 14, 1979 until the signing of the CPA on October 14, 2003. On April 14, 1979, a peaceful demonstration of 2,000 activists was held by unarmed indigenous Liberians in reaction to the Americo-Liberian political cabinet’s decision to increase rice prices. Rather than responding to the peaceful protest in a peaceful manner, police and military forces took to the streets and opened fire on the protestors (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Liberia, 2009). Given the unjust circumstances surrounding this situation, the LTRC decided to use this famous demonstration of Americo-Liberian power and control over indigenous Liberian peoples as their starting point for LTRC investigations. But because all of Liberia’s postcolonial history contributed to the Civil War, the LTRC mandated the truth commission’s investigation to take all of Liberia’s postcolonial history into account until October 14, 2003 (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Liberia, 2009, p. 5).

Given the large historical context attributed to the LTRC, the LTRC Committee decided to only utilize bodies of international human rights law and international humanitarian law in their investigation and determination of responsibility (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Liberia, 2009). Printed in the Preliminary Findings and Determinations Report, the LTRC Act defined, “Human Rights violations” as: “(1)

violations of international human rights standards, including, but not limited to acts of torture, killing, abduction and severe ill-treatment of any person; (2) violations of international humanitarian law, including, but not limited to crimes against humanity and war crimes... violations of international humanitarian law includes the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949 and its Additional Protocols” (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2009, p. 17-18). The LTRC was able to adopt “a coherent set of categories of crimes, standards and definitions to guide and inform its work” (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2009, p. 17).

The LTRC held public hearings for violators of human rights and victims to human rights violations to voice their experiences during the Civil War. The hearings were set up much like a judicial court hearing; people who chose to testify did so in front of the LTRC Committee and LTRC onlookers. Public hearings were gathered in each of the county capitols and in the United States for the Diaspora, a demographic which I will discuss later. Because truth commissions are not set up like a war crime tribunal, it has been argued that truth commissions may be more effective than trials because they do not criminally prosecute violators of human rights (Hayner, 1994). Truth commissions not being able to criminally prosecute acts in war has been argued to allow for war criminals to contribute their narratives, which are necessary components of a country’s reconciliation process (Hayner, 1994). However, if during testimony an individual is alleged to be guilty of violating human rights, the decision to prosecute that individual is not ultimately left to the truth commission, but may instead be referred to the national courts. Thus, the decision to prosecute is generally political, “a reflection of political realities, that is taking apart from a truth commission’s sphere of influence” (Hayner,

1994, p. 605). It is interesting to compare truth commissions' efforts to access voices... a war criminal can walk away a free person after testifying, but underprivileged women victimized during conflict may not be able to testify at all.

I often wondered to myself if the decision to use a truth commission method was the right transitional method for post-conflict Liberia to use. The reasons why the LTRC came to existence have been a source of controversy, especially since the corrupt heads of the Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy, the Movement for Democracy in Liberia, and members of the National Transitional Government of Liberia (NTGL) decided upon its implementation – not the Liberian people (James-Allen, Weah, & Goodfriend, 2010). According to a report done by the ICTJ, “Liberia’s warring factions favored it [truth commission] as a way of avoiding prosecutions; criminal accountability was preferred by some in Liberia’s civil society” (James-Allen et al., 2010, p. 3). This argument, along with evidence that the CPA was written by Americo-Liberians in Ghana, that truth commissions-including the LTRC- are constructed based on Western ideologies, laws, customs, and even language, and that indigenous women and men were left out of conversations about the LTRC’s implementation lead me to question the cultural relativity of the LTRC in Liberia. What were the non-reported purposes of the LTRC?

Because Liberia was going through a political transition, the NTGL was placed as a temporary government body. The NTGL, notorious for its bias towards Americo-Liberian interest, was justifiably distrusted by native Liberians, who claimed NTGL should actually stand for, “Nothing to Give Liberia” (Dunn-Marcos et al., 2005). As the governmental body during transition, it was given the task of sculpting the truth

commission model for the LTRC. National truth commissions are generally funded by an executive or legislative branch of government, though sometimes international sponsorship is provided by the United Nations (UN) or other NGOs (Hayner, 1994). The NTGL's first step was to find and appoint Committee members who would head the LTRC. Living up to its nickname in 2004, the NTGL's initial nine Committee members were so biased toward an Americo-Liberian agenda that the indigenous public staged a protest. The NTGL made a second attempt to find another Committee, which was put together in 2006 (Dunn-Marcos, Kolllehlon, & Ngovo, 2005).

The NTGL's second attempt for a LTRC Committee resulted in nine "experts," five male and four female educated, privileged Liberians. The Committee purposely appointed both sexes to demonstrate gender awareness during Liberia's reconciliation process (Dunn-Marcos et al., 2005; Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Liberia, 2009). Each committee member's "expertise" was defined by their higher education. Jerome Verdier, Committee chairman, was a lawyer and human rights activist, and vice-chair, Dede Dolopei, was a social worker and women's rights advocate. The other seven members' backgrounds spanned areas in law, journalism, social work, and religion (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Liberia, 2009). Once the Committee was finalized, on February 22, 2006, the actual LTRC investigations could begin.

From January 8 until May 24, 2008, each of Liberia's 15 county capitols and the Diaspora hosted public hearings which gathered over 800 witness testimonies (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Liberia, 2009). Montserrado's public hearing spanned 15 days, while the rest of the 14 counties held five-day trials. Four out of the five days were established to gather first-person testimonies, while the fifth day was set aside for county

social organizations to present information on predetermined themes, one theme being “Women.” After every testimony, the LTRC Committee members would then ask the testifiers questions related to their testimonies.

Truth commissions advocate for multiculturalism, authentic voice, national reconciliation through communication and dialogue, and the restoration of human rights and peace (Hayner, 1994). Although the LTRC mandates that publically sharing personal narratives for purposes involving national reconciliation is necessary, but I wonder if it actually is. Personally, depending on the circumstances, I find the decision of remaining silent to be as powerful as speaking out. In the United States, divulging one’s most personal information is a standard social practice, but looking at Liberian culture, personal information is to be kept personal (Dunn-Marcos et al., 2005). The opportunity for women to *decide* whether or not they wish to contribute their own personal narratives to public discourse is a relatively new development in public discourse. As I will discuss later, indigenous women who did testify in front of the LTRC did so under difficult circumstances. I doubt these women, living with awful memories and surviving on a day-to-day basis, would have *decided to publically* discuss their personal lives in front of the LTRC if they’d been given an alternative way of seeking redress. But because of the LTRC’s promises to assist the women in exchange for their most personal narratives, the women agreed to share their stories to not only the LTRC, but the world.

Not only was the LTRC the first truth commission to bring a focus to women, but it was also the first truth commission to include the Diaspora population in its investigation (Young & Park, 2009). During the Civil War, if a refugee was privileged enough, rather than being a displaced person in Liberia or a neighboring country, she or

he could flee to a country in the Diaspora, or overseas. The Diaspora was mainly the United States, England, and Canada and became a safe haven for predominantly Americo-Liberians (Young & Park, 2009). The LTRC approached the Minnesota Advocates for Human Rights (better known as The Advocates) for assistance in engaging the mainly U.S.-based Liberian Diaspora population. Minnesota is home to one of the largest Liberian populations outside of West Africa. The Advocates, whose headquarters coincidentally is in Minnesota, was a perfect partner for the LTRC. Therefore, on June 22, 2006, the U.S.-based LTRC Diaspora Project was officially launched. Acknowledging that modern transitional methods and populations can be quite lucrative, the Advocates had no issue with funding the Project as they worked off of pro-bono and in-kind donations totaling over \$10 million from 2007 to 2008 (Harrison, 2009; Young & Park, 2009).

The effort made by the LTRC to conduct public hearings was high for Liberian populations in the Diaspora. According to the senior researcher at the Institute for the Humanities in Africa (HUMA), Jonny Steinberg, each of the nine LTRC Committee members were flown to Minnesota “to convene five days of public hearings” (2). Once there, the Committee members convened barely any public hearings as many of them were cancelled. Overall, the public hearings, “yielded little insight into the American-based Liberians had played in fueling the war, a question very much on Liberians’ minds” (Steinberg, 2010, p. 2).

With regards to the LTRC’s quantitative data, the LTRC decided to outsource and use the Benetech Human Rights Data Analysis Group (HRDAG), a non-profit organization based out in California, which “provided the statistical expertise to

transform information from the statements into scientifically-defensible knowledge to create a clear historical record and help end impunity for the perpetrators of human rights abuses” (Harrison, 2009). Benetech’s HRDAG has worked with numerous other truth commissions, including South Africa’s, El Salvador, Peru, and Ghana (Kruger et al., 2009). In a statement about the partnership of Benetech with the LTRC, LTRC Chairman Jerome J. Verdier said, “Their work helped to give a voice to thousands of victims and at the same time give a human face to the LTRC process” (Harrison, 2009). Although it is commendable that Benetech was able to process more than 17,000 statements, yielding one of the highest numbers of collected statements for a truth commission, the results may not represent the entirety of Liberia’s population (Kruger, et al., 2009). I did the math, and when I divided the 17,000 statements collected by Benetech and divided Liberia’s approximate population of 3,994,122 in 2010 (World Bank, 2010), the LTRC only represented 0.04% of Liberia’s population. And which voices were recorded remains a key question.

Yes, technology does make the analysis and transferring of information quick and easy, but I fear that these progressive methods cause researchers, activists, scholars, and advocates alike to lose sight of underprivileged peoples.

Rural versus urban representation in the Final Report

Americo-Liberian women are mainly found in urban areas, settlements exceeding 2000 inhabitants (Audiencescapes, 2008). As of 2010, 39 % of Liberia's population (1,537,737/3,994,122) is rural, most of who are female (World Bank, 2010). According to Audiencescapes (2008), the only county with a higher urban population than a rural population was Montserrado County, 13% rural and 87% urban. The rest of Liberia's counties displayed at least 80% of their population as rural, with Grand Cape Mount hosting the highest rural population of 91% (Audiencescapes, 2008). Given that accessing rural Liberian populations is more difficult than urban populations, and knowing that rural testimonies are imperative to add to Liberia's conversation of conflict resolution, more of an effort to access rural voices should exist. The LTRC did reach out to each county of Liberia, but only held public hearings in the county's capitals. Unfortunately the incredible effort to access Liberians living in the Diaspora could have been allocated to the indigenous Liberians living in Liberia who actually wanted to participate in the LTRC. There could have been free public transportation provided to rural communities to safely transport them to and from the public hearings. Another idea would be to send out camera crews to the rural communities and hospitals to record testimonies in the rural environment. Providing more avenues of access of rural women would open the opportunity for them to decide whether they wish to participate, rather than not at all.

As the LTRC Final Report reminds the reader, “the data in this report only represent the data given to the LTRC by individual statement-givers who elected to give a statement. These data do not necessarily represent the patterns of violence in Liberia as a whole” (Kruger et al., 2009, p. 4).

Out of the 17,416 statements that were gathered during the LTRC, 17,160 statements were analyzed and coded (315 statements were left out due to “administrative errors”) (Kruger, et al., 2009, p. 4). From these statements, Benetech claimed to be able to gather information on “some 86,647 victims and 163,615 total violations during a period of conflict in Liberia that stretched from January 1979 to October 2003” (Kruger et al., 2009, p. 4). Benetech used what they called “countable units” - violations, victims, and perpetrators, as identifiers during data transcription.

The violations by which each statement was coded included killing, assault, forced labor, rape, amputation, cannibalism, sexual slavery, and forced displacement (Kruger et al., 2009). Following the coding of violations, warring factions (also referred to as “perpetrators”), who were guilty of the given violations were cited. Statement-givers were also asked to state what tribe(s) violated them, but interestingly, Americo-Liberians were not an option even though they do represent part of the Liberian population.

Benetech used what was called a “controlled vocabulary”, or a list of twenty-three predefined terms defined by human rights violations (Kruger et al., 2009). The controlled vocabulary provided consistency and clarity amongst both statement-givers and statement-takers during the undertaking of the LTRC and construction of the Final Report

(Guijt & Shah, 1992; Made, 2000). Without clear language and definitions surrounding the discussion of important LTRC issues, there cannot be comprehensible steps to be taken in their resolutions (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Liberia, 2009).

The controlled vocabulary definitions are referenced by Western terminology. For example, rape is defined as: “Non-consensual penetration of the mouth by a penis. Or nonconsensual penetration of the vagina/anus by penis or an implement. Occurs regardless of gender, with victim under intimidation, threat, force, intoxication or violence. Must be committed by a person on the list of perpetrators” (Kruger et al., 2009, p. 59). Perpetrators must be on the “list,” meaning that only violence perpetrated by combatants would be relevant. Violence perpetrated because of the culture and opportunities of the conflict is then left irrelevant. “The burgeoning population literature on rape all points to the importance of stereotypes and myths – defined as prejudicial, stereotyped, or false beliefs about rape, rape victims, and rapists – in creating a climate hostile to rape victims” (Burt, 1980). Rape myths perpetuate and tolerate certain constructions of sexual violence, some of which may not be applicable to rural Liberian women.

Relatively even numbers of statement-takers were dispatched to each county, except Montserrado County, which was assigned almost a quarter of the entire statement-taker staff. Benetech’s report mentions that the even distribution of statement takers risked “ ‘artificial’ evenness in the measured data because statement-takers collect statements at approximately the same rate... collecting roughly the same number of statements could mask true differences” (Kruger et al., 2009, p. 7). The additional attention provided to Montserrado County brings the issue of privileging urban voices to

light. This is particularly compelling, as according to Benetech's data, counties surrounding Montserrado exhibit the highest levels of violence; Montserrado is presented as only struggling with forced displacement (Kruger et al., 2009). Looking at this data, Montserrado appears to be a relative safe haven in comparison to the other Liberian counties. Perhaps if more testimonies were gathered using "free interaction" (Reinharz, 1992, p. 18) between statement-takers and givers, especially from rural areas, a truer acknowledgment of what happened could have been fostered.

The number of statements collected was summarized on Table 1: Number of Statement by County (Kruger et al., 2009, p. 5). In total, 17,416 total statements comprised of 8,218 female, 9,114 male, and 84 unknown sexed statements, were gathered in each of the 15 counties. Montserrado provided 22.4% of the LTRC's total statements, over twice as much as the following counties, Bong and Nimba counties, each representing 9.2% (Kruger et al., 2009). Benetech credits itself for the "significant number of statements from female statement-givers" (Kruger et al., 2009, p. 5); 896 fewer testimonies than males. Looking at each county, Montserrado, Bomi, Grand Cape Mount, and Margibi were the only counties with more female statements than male. Analysis of statements gathered from Diaspora Liberians is found in its own separate section, away from county statements. Statements from the Diaspora were represented by 1,165 testimonies, 77% from Ghana, 19.5% from the U.S.A., 2.7% from Nigeria, and 0.7% from Europe (Kruger et al., 2009).

Qualitative data versus Title I Appendix: Women and the conflict

The LTRC organized data about Liberian women and conflict in the appendix section of the Final Report, *Volume Three: Appendices Title 1: Women and the Conflict* (2009). Although section 10.3, *Women, the TRC and Conflict* is part of Final Report's main body, I wanted to highlight that the presentation of this data was seemingly othered. The information found in the *Women and Conflict* section of the LTRC Appendices was based on existing gender-focused literature plus information from the LTRC's "assessments, interviews, statement taking, hearings, community dialogue, town hall meetings, workshops, empirical data from some these activities and primary data from the TRC database" (2009, p. 2-3). The fact that most of this information is based off of existing information on Third World Women demonstrates what global feminists have argued: information on Third World women is not new, therefore it perpetuates the stereotypes of weakness, dependency, and victimization (Mohanty et al., 1991).

The Appendix explained that the section was to draw "out the complexities of gender and gender roles highlighting the multiplicity of roles that women play and looks at how transitional justice is being handled in Liberia" (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2009, p. 3). I assumed the intention behind separating this Appendix from the main text of the Final Report was to gain attention to the demographic of women, but it also draws attention to the fact that women are Other (Hudson, 2005; Tong, 2009). But, privileged and underprivileged women cannot completely relate to each other as

their race, class, *and* sex each oppress the women in different ways (hooks, 1990; Tong, 2009). In the case of the Women and the Conflict Appendix, although indigenous women are acknowledged and discussed, their actual voices are overshadowed by voices of privilege. In my opinion, I feel that universalizing of privileged Liberian women's voice is comparable to omitting indigenous women's voice.

The *Women and the Conflict* (2009) section first and foremost provided the historical context of Liberia as it was founded by American colonials, which instated a Western social hierarchy that discriminated against indigenous Liberians and privileged Americo-Liberians. The section continues by describing the *positive* impact Western ideology had on many indigenous women, allowing them the opportunity to be educated, working, monogamously married, and even divorced, if they so chose (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2009). In the 1950s, if women were landowners they even had the right to vote (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2009). Although indigenous women were given the opportunity to become 'modernized', it was at the expense of the rights they had prior to colonization (Stoler, 1997).

To make sure that Liberian women, as a whole, participated in the LTRC, the *Women and the Conflict* section stated that a Gender Committee was created with, "special mandate or expertise in working with women and female survivors of sexual violence" (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2009, p. 12). The Gender Committee, made up of mostly international NGOs, was there to support local women's participation in "outreach, statement-taking, public hearings, and research and investigation" (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2009, p. 12). The LTRC credits the Gender Committee for the Final Report's high number of women participants – one of the highest in truth

commission history. The LTRC admitted that, “The interpretation of ‘gender’ as the participation and inclusion of women and children created a tendency for investigations to focus mainly and almost exclusively on victimhood in the form of sexual and physical violations” (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2009, p. 18). According to the Gender Committee, they tried to “guard against” victimizing Liberian women in the Final Report, but that did not happen (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2009, p. 18).

From December 2006 to January 2007, the LTRC earned grant money from the Soros Foundation to facilitate 15 town hall meetings in each county, followed by “four zonal workshops targeting women organization in the counties” (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2009, p. 15). The meetings were to train the heads of the women’s organizations about the LTRC, so that they could teach their communities.

In June 2008, the grant was merged with a “Memorandum of Understanding with Women’s Campaign International, an international women’s advocacy organization based in Philadelphia, USA” (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2009, p. 15). The merge helped design education courses for local community leaders about the subjects which were being discussed in the LTRC, especially taboo subjects related to sexual violence. Although local outreach efforts, like the one mentioned above, were well received by Liberians, they were discontinued shortly after the end of the LTRC (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2009). I also found it interesting, and necessary to mention, that funding for the addition of women was given by the Foundation Open Society Initiative (FOSI), the Women’s Campaign International (WCI), and the UNDP in an effort to “increase the knowledge of women and the communities about the TRC by these organizations” (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2009, p. 12).

Unfortunately, to this day, none of the three funding organizations have submitted such reports, therefore I wonder where all the additional funding ended up being spent.

Indigenous Liberian women's voice in the Final Report

As a measure to include first person narratives in the LTRC, the public hearings were held to create space for survivors of the Civil War to share their stories. From January 8 until May 24, 2008, in each capitol city of Liberia's 15 counties and in the United States Diaspora, the public hearings gathered over 800 testimonies, 200 of which were from women (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Liberia, 2009). After every testimony, given their privilege and expertise, the LTRC Commissioners asked the testifier a series of objective questions to assert validity to the narrative. All testimonies were to be used as data for the LTRC Final Report. The testimonies were also video recorded and transcribed into documents. All of these recordings were uploaded to the LTRC website and are still digitally accessible. The LTRC's efforts to share their experience utilizing the truth commission method coincide with Charlotte Bunch's advocacy to globally connect and share experiences between women's empowerment groups (1995).

Although the LTRC held public hearings in each of the county's capitols, there existed an incredible difficulty, still, for indigenous women to attend. The dire circumstances which indigenous women had no choice but to live through – poverty, issues related to safety, displacement, fear, issues related to medical, logistics – made attending the LTRC seem virtually impossible. For example, Amelia Dimsea traveled from Bomi County to Montserrado County to share her story. She not only had to cross

counties, but she had to leave her hospital bed, where she was barely receiving medical care for infected wounds leftover from not only Charles Taylor's soldiers during the Civil War, but botched medical instruments used whilst receiving medical attention. On top of that, she was broke, homeless, and struggling to take care of her seven children in Bomi while she testified (Dimsea).

After conflict, indigenous women in rural areas live in fear with unresolved issues including impunity, lack of legal enforcement, and crumbled family and community structures (Amnesty International, 2007). According to research done by Rashida Manjoo and Calleigh McRaith on gender-based violence in post-conflict areas, "the needs of women who are victims of GBV are either over looked or inadequately addressed by transitional justice mechanisms, including truth commissions, war crime hearings, and reparation schemes" (2011, p. 12). But even with these real fears, indigenous women like Kubo Taiwteewu still traveled to the public hearings to testify. In Voinjama City, Lofa County, Kubo Taiwteewu stood before the LTRC audience to share her story about a man named Dorley. Kubo Taiwteewu not only knew Dorley as the murderer of brothers (a murder she was witness to), but Dorley had been harassing her during and even after the Civil War. Dorley, who was still free at the time of Taiwteewu's testimony, petrified her: *"Right now I am afraid because the way I finished explaining, he will start to hunt for me again, I am too scared, so your please help me, I do not want him to harm me"* (Taiwteewu, 2009).

Assuming that she would receive the protection of the LTRC for her testimony, Kubo Taiwteewu testified. Whether or not she received protection is unknown. The

reality of publically accusing a man, a dangerous murderer, would deter any person – woman or man – from testifying. Especially if the space you dare to return to has nothing, no one, to protect you.

The LTRC’s focus on men sexually violating women affected the Committee’s response to the testimony, highlighting facts contributing to the helpless victim narrative. International human rights discourse recognizes female survivors of sexual violence as ‘victims’ needing assistance, but Liberian traditional culture stigmatizes ‘victims’ as they are considered to be without value. According to Médecins Sans Frontières, “Victims of sexual violence are often rejected by their partners and family. They may be chased out of their homes, having nowhere to live” (2009, p. 13). Not only were Liberian women trying to cope with surviving violence, but the apprehension of telling their story *publically* was, and is, considered a cultural taboo. Here is where I find truth commissions going too far... people know that sexual violence happened during the Civil War, there is no doubt. But the LTRC puts the survivors of sexual violence in a position to not only be at risk of social stigmatization, but also revictimization of their experiences, in front of an audience (Weah, 2012).

Aboitha Keigar, 60 years old, unemployed, single mother of seven, from Kahnpla, Gbehlay-Geh District gave her testimony in Saniquellie City, Nimba County. Her testimony recounted an awful gang rape by rebels, which left her physically disabled, to where she cannot work:

“Those that rapped me I don’t know them; they raped me until I am not to myself today. I am suffering and my hips are hurting me as I am sitting here. They beat me all

over my body and I am having a lot of complaints today. I have nothing and nobody to help me, when I heard about you people, people said the way you can't speak English how will you speak to them and I said they are the people that will help me tomorrow and they will save my future so I have to go to them.” (Keigar, 2008)

Following each testimony, the Committee asked a series of objective questions to add validity to each testimony. As the Committee's questions were objective, the additional information was more to satisfy the Committee than the testifier. This form of questioning opposes feminist research methods, which prefer open-ended questions that allow the answerer to provide information *they* consider significant (Reinharz, 1992). Had the questions been open-ended, or even asked by fellow indigenous women, more indigenous women's voices could have been added to the LTRC narrative. As the LTRC Committee was a collective of educated Liberians who have never known rural life, poverty, their limited vision was tight.

After reading Aboitha Keigar's recorded testimony online, it was apparent that the Committee's questions were distasteful and insensitive. The testimony read as if the Committee was fishing for a particular piece of information, to the point where Aboitha interrupted the Committee and asked,

“I have a question for the other woman. What I said about women, was it bad or good?” (Keigar, 2008)

Commissioner Bull affirmed that her testimony was good, but the testimony is supposed to be an honest narrative of personal experience... there should be no good or bad, just truth. Aboitha attempted to end her testimony with, *“One person cannot die*

twice; what happened to me and what I saw is what I have said, I cannot say anything else besides this” (Keigar, 2008), but the Committee Chairman interrupted her with:

“Has your body been affected as a result of the rape and beating?” (Verdier, Sr., 2008)

“Yes, from my pelvis to my knees, I cannot feel good so I have come for your to help me, I also want your to build a house for me.” (Keigar, 2008)

“Before you leave, is there anything you want to tell the TRC?” (Verdier, Sr., 2008)

“Yes, I have come to you people to please help with treatment so that I can survive; I also want your build a house for me and my children.” (Keigar, 2008)

I felt that the Committee’s questions about Keigar’s injuries were unnecessary and objectifying. The main point that Keigar wanted to make was that she needed assistance. The Committee appeared to only want Keigar’s dramatic dialogue to move the *audience*, make them feel bad for this woman, to gain the media’s attention... it is difficult to admit, but the exploitation of tragedy is far more interesting than triumph. As much as I felt Aboitha Keigar’s story was exploited, all the while she believed that the LTRC was there to help her:

“I thank God for the TRC and I know if I come to you people I will have help from you that is why I am here, I don't have any fear as I am here before you.” (Keigar, 2008)

As I mentioned before, the LTRC public hearings set aside a day in each county to discuss “Thematic and Institutional” hearings. The themes, chosen by the LTRC Committee, included, “women, children, religious, historical review, media, education, youth, religion, culture and tradition, law enforcement, and security” (Truth and

Reconciliation Commission of Liberia, 2009, p. 73). Rather than allowing anyone to speak to these issues, the Committee chose a single representative from a single social organization which related to each topic. So, for example, Mrs. Anna J. Wreh, the coordinator of Gender Equity and Women and Children Development, spoke to women's issues in Grand Kru County. Interestingly, Montserrado County was the only county that did not host a 'Thematic and Institutional' public hearing, while counties like Nimba and Maryland, hosted two (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Liberia, 2009). The hosting of one or more thematic hearings could be due to logistical, language, or cultural issues. Maryland and Nimba counties yield some of Liberia's largest and most rural impoverished populations (County Development Committee, 2006). Perhaps this was done under the assumption that speaking to local women's organizations would allow the LTRC to cover more ground, so to speak. But, personally, I would assume the larger the rural area, the more effort you make to access the rural area. No one person can speak for 1,000s. Not to mention a woman who happens to have a Western name, is married, lives in an urban area, is education, financially stable... and so on.

The "Thematic and Institutional" public hearing held in Barclay City, Grand Kru County called on Mrs. Anna J. Wreh, coordinator of Gender Equity and Women and Children Development, to speak about the topic of women, which she did by presenting a presentation entitled, "Women Gender issues pre-war and post war: challenges and opportunities". Wreh informed the LTRC that, based on "pre-war statistics", women in Grand Kru country held jobs such as teachers, local leaders, and midwives (Wreh, 2008). Wreh also informed the LTRC that,

Women and girls of this county were advanced breadwinners to husbands and children, lovers and disable parents, caretakers, protector of human life's and continue to play an essential role in the development of sustainable livelihood. (Wreh, 2008)

Interestingly enough, according to the Grand Kru County Development Agenda, the majority of jobs are actually related to subsistence farming, with most of the wage paying jobs being NGO related (County Development Committee, 2006). So what is the real picture of Grand Kru County? Yes, like Wreh mentioned, after the Civil War, issues surrounding rape, stigma, prostitution, and drugs have ravaged the county, but what can women do to help themselves? Wreh felt assured that progress would be positive: *“This period of recovery and rehabilitation which has the full support and cooperation of the international community”* (Wreh, 2008). She ended her testimony by declaring, *“Women of Grand Kru, your destiny lies directly in your hands. Take up the challenges and move forward in Unity and peace for a new Liberia”* (Wreh, 2008). What kind of contribution of Wreh’s testimony made to women in Grand Kru County and the LTRC, I am not sure of, other than adding false realities to the Civil War’s historical narrative.

Global feminism dictates that its criticisms are not actually critical but *beneficial* towards improving existing human rights methods. Global feminism and global feminist movements acknowledge their responsibility towards the improvement of strategies and organizational ethics amidst existing First World oppressors (Casal de Vela, Trice, & Oferneo, 2006). I believe that the LTRC was incredibly beneficial for its awareness raising, but I believe that there is room for improvement, especially for accessing indigenous, rural women’s voices. I feel indigenous Liberians being promised the same privileges as privileged Liberians falls into what Maria Mies terms as a “catching-up

development” scheme (Mies & Shiva, 1993, p. 58). According to Mies, the “catching-up development” scheme does not work for two reasons: there are not enough resources to be evenly distributed and the existing “colonial world order” preserves the gap it pledges to reduce (Mies & Shiva, 1993, p. 58). I feel this is applicable to the LTRC in which there are, or could be, resources available for indigenous women, but they are disproportionately being allocated to privileged women. Also, looking at Liberia and its globalizing agenda, the development and privilege of Americo-Liberian women depends on the under privilege of indigenous women (Tong, 2009).

These women were not only forced to witness and experience some of the worst tragedies life has to offer, but they had to recount and share the events in front of an audience. And their stories are accessible for the online world to read. The women came forward both in the name of peace building, but also as a cry for assistance. Many of these women are caring not just for themselves, but for family members and children. The amounts of additional responsibility for women due to their gendered responsibilities as mothers and wives forced them to give additional care. Because their family members were killed around them, their husbands lost, they were forced to marry another man. Add poverty, physical injury, disease, and you see women who are so crippled they do not seem they can handle any more on their own. But they can and they did. And they believe, they hope, they know methods like truth commissions are necessary to give them a voice to ask for help, to share their stories, to reclaim their voices.

Discussion

Globalization, or global integration, has largely benefitted the global women's movements. This is not to say that women's movements did not exist or were any less important prior to global integration, but rather, the incredible improvement of communication methods catalyzed women's groups sharing and comparing their unique ideas and perspectives on women's progress. Since global integration, the dire status and political participation of women on a global scale became apparent. According to women's rights advocate Charlotte Bunch, "Female subordination runs so deep that it is still viewed as inevitable or natural rather than as a politically constructed reality maintained by patriarchal interests, ideology, and institutions" (1990, p. 491). Violence against women (VAW), for example, has pervasively existed throughout global history, and yet it is one of the least recognized forms of global human rights abuses in the world (UNIFEM 1998). In regards to global women, if each women's voice is not acknowledged and heard, the opportunity to address and improve their existing situations is unfeasible. In the context of rural Liberian women, if their individual voices continue to be ignored or overlooked, their daily sufferings will never receive the immediate attention they so desperately need. Yet despite the abundance of information and data from international sources Western feminist researchers are able to access via the Internet or newspapers, stereotyped identities of the Third World Woman are being reproduced.

The utilization of truth commissions in post conflict nations comes with high expectations. They can officially acknowledge, remind, or even correct historical events during a conflict. Rather than learning about conflicts from only the winner's perspective, truth commissions can hypothetically create space for survivors of the conflict, privileged to underprivileged, to contribute their personal narratives to an entire historical narrative. This new transitional method provides human faces, voices, to historical narrators (Reinharz, 1992; Oakley, 1974). It can be agreed upon that the LTRC was a significant attempt to access an array of narratives to put towards Liberia's reconciliation process but the fact of the matter was an uneven effort was made to access underprivileged narratives. As the LTRC and Final Report demonstrated, privileged populations, like those living in urban areas or Diaspora were easier to access, therefore received more recognition in the Final Report. Indigenous populations living in rural Liberian areas were difficult to access due to reasons spanning from limited funding to geographic locations. Therefore, when truth commissions are being constructed in post conflict countries, plans to address how to access underprivileged populations should be made as to not exhibit uneven representations in truth commissions' final reports.

In my opinion, the LTRC's alleged contribution to bettering truth commission methods was only for populations in the Diaspora. It just so happened that Minnesota was both home to the Human Rights Advocates *and* one of the largest Liberian populations outside of West Africa (Kruger et al., 2009). According to the UN High Commission for Refugees' 2005 Statistical Yearbook (2007), in 1996, over 780,000 Liberians were able to flee out of Liberia, past the international border. The ability to flee out of Liberia necessitates some sort of financial stability, social support, and social

privilege. These Liberians had passports, spoke English, were able to find work, and ultimately settle down on American soil. Of course any person who is able to flee a country of chaos, like war torn Liberia, would want to contribute to helping their country reconcile, but how much do you think a Liberian living in the Diaspora can relate to an impoverished, unemployed single mother of five children who has survived gang rape and is desperately trying to heal from her mental and physical wounds with no support? Therefore, it is these stories, the stories from survivors that are only applicable to a narrow context of conflict, that are so important, unmatched. Without these stories being heard and acknowledged, it is that woman – probably one of hundreds, upon thousands with the same story – that will hopelessly suffer and die.

One way that the LTRC could have accessed more indigenous peoples in rural areas was to motivate more grassroots and community activism. According to the Final Report, there were efforts made to train local leaders on what the LTRC was and how to communicate that information to other tribes people, but given issues with funding, logistics, language, even diminishing numbers of volunteers, it was difficult to accomplish such a task. Now, interestingly enough, the Final Report does mention palava huts as a community building method (there is even a picture of one on the homepage of the LTRC website). As stated in the Final Report, the purpose of the palava hut, or the traditional Liberian conflict resolution houses, its purpose being, “to afford anyone who has committed, whether knowing or unknowingly against an individual or the state, to admit the wrongful act and seek pardon from the people of Liberia” (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Liberia, 2009, p. 273). The community participants are able to define the context of residential space, identify themselves as a people, thus

denying any other society of doing so (Hill Collins, 1986). In other words, the palava hut constructs a single, communal, perspective from which an individual's actions are judged.

The palava hut is essentially a truth commission on a much smaller scale, contextualized to a village as opposed to a county or country. Truth commissions can provide social accountability, but because of their large scale, it is almost impossible to ensure that reparations are distributed, promises are, and future violence is deterred. With the palava hut, all of the goals of transitional justice are attainable. Not to mention that the construction of the palava hut is created by the community, the social accountability is recognizable, and democratization can be promoted. There is no need for funding; no desire for international acclaim... all that is necessary is safe space.

Maybe truth commissions would be successful if they were not shared with the global community? The hidden (or not so hidden) agendas involving power, greed, pride, and vanity – all these things took away from the original mandate of the LTRC... to facilitate peace. In Richard Dowden's autobiography, *Africa: Altered States, Ordinary Miracles* (2009), he discussed his experiences as a European journalist traveling through Africa and comparing the propaganda of the news media and aid agencies to the realities of what he, himself, witnessed. During one of his many colorful discussions on aid agencies in Africa, Dowden argued,

However well-intentioned their motives may once have been, aid agencies have help create the single, distressing image of Africa. They and journalists feed off each other... It is easier – and more lucrative – to portray them as victims dependent on Western charity. (2009, p.7)

It is difficult to assume aid and media agencies care when reports and human interest is stimulated by ‘human interest shock value’ (Bass, 2004, p. 10).

Comparatively, research on the Diaspora versus research on women is far more exciting as it includes global populations, technology, and - based on the millions of dollars in received donations – promises incredible financial profit (Dowden, 2009). Not to mention an entire book deal – A House with Two Rooms: Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Liberia Diaspora Project, written by The Advocates for Human Rights at the request of the LTRC (Foster, Heins, & Kalla, 2009).

Contrary to Western stereotypes, indigenous Liberian women historically occupied important places in pre-Liberian societies and African consciousness. Liberian women appeared to have been able to exercise “considerable space for socio-political maneuver” amidst “traditional ideologies of male dominance and concomitant institutions of social control” (Fuest, 2008, p. 206). During the Civil War, indigenous women acted quite contrarily to the Third World Women’s stereotype (Mohanty, 1988). They took the initiative to place their tribal differences aside and peacefully protest the war together. During the protests, they would dress in white, indigenous Liberian women sang, dance, and prayed *together* for peace. They educated both rural and urban communities about the conflict via public speaking, writing information pamphlets, drawing pictures on billboards and signs for the illiterate, and by organizing national peace protests and sit-ins (Gbowee & Mithers, 2011). They famously chanted, “We are tired! We are tired of our children being killed! We are tired of being raped! Women, wake up – you have a voice in the peace process!” (Gbowee & Mithers, 2011, p. 127). In 2003, to articulate their demands for peace, indigenous women referenced the Security Council Resolution 1325

(2000) and wrote up their own peace treaty, the *Golden Tulip Declaration of 2003* (Peacewomen E-news, 2003). Although indigenous women's peace building efforts, including the *Golden Tulip Declaration*, are relatively unknown, had it not been for their efforts, Liberia may have never seen peace.

Western culture views the world through an essentialist binary of good/evil, civil/uncivil, West/other (Hill Collins, 1986; Lorber, 1996) where "ideology is a weak glue to hold together people otherwise lacking racial, ethnic, and cultural sources of community" (Huntington, 2004, p. 12). According to Maria Mies these "all universal" ideologies must be deconstructed as to allow global women the ability to be *themselves*. As seen in the LTRC and Final Report, the geography, control over process, and lack of cultural and ethnic relativism made it difficult for indigenous women to access and relate to the commission. And when indigenous women did participate, they were represented as helpless victims (Narayan, 1997). Granted, the LTRC did attempt to provide some cultural relativism for Liberians and the LTRC participants, such as utilizing tribal leaders to educate rural women and men on the LTRC.

Indigenous Liberian women's narratives are not only testimonies of survival, they are also what raises the global consciousness of their existence, both of which are central to feminist methods, theory, and global women's empowerment (MacKinnon, 1982; Lather, 1988; Reinharz, 1992). Underprivileged women's voices have historically been overlooked, but as of late, they have been recognized for their invaluable contributions to peace building discourse and rhetoric. "The human rights movement internationally has at times allowed one set of cultures to be hegemonic, leave it open to accusations of ethnocentrism, clearly counter to our anthropological tradition of cultural relativism"

(Gruenbaum, 2001, p. 24; Hudson, 2005). Therefore, the application of a global feminist perspective onto existing security and peace building discourses would reduce the existing tendencies of marginalization (Scully, 2009).

I agree with Richard Dowden (2009), that despite colonialism, racism, discrimination, physical violence, sexual violence, despite all that, indigenous women *still* stood for peace, and *still* participated in the LTRC. The incredible efforts indigenous women made to participate in the LTRC demonstrated their approval – their hope - for the LTRC to facilitate peace in Liberia. Unfortunately, indigenous women’s hopes were not followed through, leaving many of them in a state of crisis to this day. But, women’s advocates are learning, analyzing, and constructing new methods to equally meet the needs of underprivileged and privileged women alike. Women’s rights should not be overlooked due to a political, financial, or monetary agendas, but they are. Therefore, as a global sisterhood, a line has to be drawn on how to better women’s lives *equally*. In the case of Liberia, an effort to reach thousands of indigenous women was never made. Going forward, no woman in Liberia, or anywhere else, deserves anything less than an effort.

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