



Armed Conflicts, their resolution, and a post-conflict society's reality

A qualitative study of the Central African Republic's post-conflict society

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Abstract

This paper will investigate what role human rights can play in the reconstruction of a post-conflict society. The true root causes of conflict are not addressed by prior peace interventions, often governments are unable to deliver to their populations what they were promised. This thesis is guided by an overarching research interest in how during these situations, peacebuilding, human rights, and the construction of a new, accountable social contract can go hand-in-hand. The case study of the Central African Republic's conflicts will be used to investigate the hypothesis. Nurturing and restoring society's trust in the peacebuilding process is often underestimated. To break the vicious cycle of self-enforcing conflicts and their recurrence, a revitalisation of the social contract may be a strategy to optimize working towards reconciling the post-conflict society. The research finds that a human rights-rooted social contract approach in a post-conflict society can impact the peacebuilding positively.

Keywords

Civil armed conflict, post-conflict society, restorative peacebuilding, social contract, human rights

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List of Abbreviations

CAP	Central African Republic
DDR	Disarmament, Demobilisation, Reintegration
PKO	Peacekeeping Operations
UCDP	Uppsala Conflict Data Programme
PSED	Power-Sharing Event Database
UN	United Nations
UNSC	United Nations Security Council

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1. Introduction

Since the end of World War II, the world has faced more conflicts than ever before (UCDP, 2022). Especially the number of civil wars has increased, and many of these have proven extremely hard to end. In conflict theatres like the Democratic Republic of the Congo, or South Sudan and Darfur, we have seen conflicts reoccur again and again. Often, the true root causes of conflict are not addressed by prior peace interventions, and despite the occasional peace agreement, often governments are still unable to deliver to their populations. This thesis is guided by an overarching research interest in how during these situations, peacebuilding, human rights, and the construction of a new, accountable social contract can go hand-in-hand.

Therefore, this research project is employing a social contract lens, and constructs a theoretical framework that has its core at the idea that peacebuilding interventions can reshape the social contract after a disruption caused by war – but hypothesizes that this is sometimes not responsive enough to human rights and might fail to sustainably resolve conflict. In order to test this assumption, this paper applies the theoretical framework of social contract theory to four peacebuilding tools, and one country context – while also parsing out how considerate these are (or are not) of human rights. We define social contract as an agreement between a government and its citizens that defines rights, responsibilities, and expectations of both parties – which is interesting to study because a breakdown of social contracts is both a symptom of these violent crises, but also a consequence – which shows how hard it can be to reach peaceful co-existence.

In the chapters that ensue, this research paper a) conceptualizes the research question; b) reviews prior research on the topic; c) explains the theoretical background and places this report's framework within broader social contract theory. It then moves to d) more practically explaining the methodology, and e) analysing peacebuilding tools such as demobilization, disarmament, and reintegration (DDR), power sharing, peacekeeping, and transitional justice, and f) draws empirical insights from applying the social contract lens on the investigation of human-rights responsive peacebuilding in the Central African Republic (CAR).

2. Conflict (resolution) and post-conflict society

2.1 Relevance and goals of this research

The emergence of internal armed conflicts within a country is not only the consequence of societal tensions and deep divisions. The death, grief, and destruction that comes with armed violence make these divisions even deeper – which makes conflicts self-reinforcing and very hard to end (Collier, 2003, p.21). Situations such as in Syria, Somalia, or Sudan come to mind – in which the basic rules, norms, laws, and government institutions that usually guide society stop to work as they are required.

It is a key interest of many international actors to engage in these crises, resolve tensions and end the ongoing violence in order to bring these societies back to a more peaceful path, where mutual understanding, cooperation, rights and laws determine everyday life in society. The term peacebuilding encompasses the many different ways in which international actors try to bring about peace. The UN's definition of peacebuilding can be summarized as such: "Peacebuilding is aimed at preventing the outbreak, escalation, continuation and recurrence of conflict, addressing the root causes of conflict, assisting parties to conflict to end hostilities, facilitating national reconciliation, and moving towards recovery, reconstruction, rehabilitation and development (...)" (United Nations, 2022).

2.2 Delineation of the research question

Considering the sensitivity of conflicts and the vast dimension they can take upon in their aftermath, it is only natural that political, social, and economic scholarship have been investigating for decades what approach can be the most suitable one when confronting conflicts, their settlement and resolution. The extent of armed conflicts is often hidden to the public eye, but the impact armed conflicts can have on a society are severe. Oftentimes, a state of conflict means a non-reliable transmission of the real situation within the conflict country. Some refer to a state of lawlessness that reigns in conflict affected states, which stresses the disorder a civil armed conflict can cause. Naturally, a disorder of that intensity easily derogates basic and human rights (Mohamedou, 2003, p.18). A state of disorder signals an abnormality in a society and therefore strikes a strong contrast to what a modern society usually looks like: 56% of the world's countries are either liberal or electoral democracies (Lührmann et al., 2018, p.68). This means that everything usually perceived as self-explanatory needs to be questioned when in a state of conflict.

Human rights are rights every individual is born with, they are inalienable, indivisible; interdependent and interrelated. States are the accountable entities to ensure their citizens are entitled to the rights. But what does an entirely disrupted social order mean for civilians during conflict? When nobody is willing to be held accountable for what is referred to as the Rule of Law, human rights cannot be guaranteed anymore. The social contract that a society usually functions with automatically is broken. This leads me to pose the following question for my research project: How can the social contract be brought into reality to secure human rights in a post-conflict society?

2.3 The sub-concepts of interest to this research: The Toolbox of Peacebuilding

The research question poses the question of how the social contract can be brought into reality to secure human rights in a post-conflict society. But what exactly does the term peacebuilding entail? In this research project I will take a closer look at a “toolkit” of peacebuilding mechanisms that are very frequently used in peacebuilding – and of particular interest when thinking about how a broken social contract can be reconstructed in civil war contexts. For the purpose of this paper, I will more closely investigate a) Demobilization, Disarmament, and Reintegration of ex-combatants (DDR); b) Peacekeeping Operations by the United Nations; c) Power Sharing Arrangements between governments and rebel groups; and d) Transitional Justice approaches. It is worth noting that these four do by no means constitute a conclusive list of what is being done in order to build peace, but rather four concepts that are of particular interest to this research. It is also worth noting that often, these concepts are employed in a concerted way, together, and work in an interrelated way. Sometimes, they can also overlap – but this will be elaborated in more detail in chapter 6.

2.4 Human Rights and the social contract

The fact that the social contract is involuntarily broken during an armed conflict results in dire consequences for the civilians. Most rights, privileges, and perceptions a life is built on, become suddenly unavailable. It seems to be a vicious cycle without escape. Once conflict emerges, in one way or another, almost everyone is affected by the consequences. The right to the security of person, the right to freedom of residence, the right to social security, and many more are jeopardised if not restricted completely (UN General Assembly, 1948). Human Rights also mean that the accountable legal entity to ensure these rights to each individual are the respective state

governments and have to be recognised and respected by everyone else. This condition is most commonly not met in civil conflicts.

It is these rights-abuses indeed, that some of the tools this research analyses are trying to address. For example, transitional justice tries to bring justice to the victims of grave human rights violations and help them deal with the past. This paper uses the definition of transitional justice from Wendy Lambourne who defines it as “*transitional justice is implemented in the context of a process of transition from violence or mass violation of human rights to some more peaceful and democratic state*” (translation by the author, Lambourne, 2009, p.29). DDR, if done rightly, seeks to find rights-based approaches to reintegrate former fighters and their families back into society – often enabling rights to education, housing, nationality to be granted for the first time (HRW 2019, USAID). United Nations Peacekeeping Operations and Power Sharing often can have a big effect on civil and political human rights, because they can open the doors for elections and also rule of law after civil war. To break the vicious cycle of self-enforcing conflicts and their recurrence, a revitalisation of the social contract may be a strategy to optimize working towards reconciling the post-conflict society. This paper will investigate what role human rights can play in that challenge.

3. Prior Research on Ending Conflicts and Building Peace

This section will frame a contextualisation of this investigation within the preceding research area. The guiding question will be the research question of how social contracts can be brought into post-conflict society to secure human rights. The motivation to investigate this question is finding a feasible approach to realise sustainable peacebuilding in post-conflict societies.

3.1 Contextualisation

The number of emerging conflicts increases every year. This makes it challenging to maintain a steady research progress seen that the emergence, recurrence, or resolution of one conflict can affect other countries’ conflicts. To resolve a conflict and successfully build peace for the post-conflict society requires a highly sensitive peace negotiation. The settlement of belligerent factions presents a chance to create a peaceful environment for a country that may have been separated by political disagreement for decades. Since the 1990s, civil conflicts have become two times more likely to be settled with a peace negotiation instead of a one-sided victory (Howard and Stark,

2018, p.127). This development is a promising beginning towards identifying best practices to ensure non-recurring conflict through peacebuilding.

Scholarship agrees that it is throughout settlement negotiations that the destiny for the post-conflict society is decided (Hartzell and Hoddie, 2003, p.330). This means that the future for a country, albeit short-term or long-term is agreed upon and signed by the parties that have led the country into conflict. One characteristic of civil conflict is that the belligerent parties represent the extreme political opinions of the society which results in the two extremes fighting against each other (Prechel and Berkowitz, 2020, p.53). When these two political extremes then agree on settling for peace, how can the citizens' representation be ensured? The fact that these negotiations are finalised with a peace agreement on paper highlight the importance of investigating this process very closely. The social gap that a conflict can cause is severe and is to be attended in a highly careful and well-planned way. The challenge to build peace after years of conflict is a great obstacle. This represented the motivation for the UN to create a commission dedicated to precisely that (United Nations Secretary General, 2000).

In most civil armed conflicts, the international community is welcomed to guide through peace negotiations as a mediative power. When succeeding in negotiating with the belligerents to put down the arms, *“the combatants are forging a new social contract with the government and the international community, which act as impartial mediators; the combatants render the security and economic surety that their weapons provide, in exchange for opportunities and assistance in finding new peaceful livelihoods”* (Knight and Özerdem, p.506). Academia agrees that the role of the international community in peacekeeping, peace negotiations, and post-conflict processes can be a stabilising one (Hartzell and Hoddie 2003, Mross *et al.* 2022). As defined by the UN, peacebuilding aims at realising a wide range of political, developmental, humanitarian and human rights programmes and mechanisms designed to prevent the outbreak, recurrence or continuation of armed conflict (UN Security Council, 2001). Considering that conflicts' character has changed between 1946 and 2020, namely conflicts have become more in quantity, but less deadly (Roser *et al.*, 2016), it is clear why the international community's role is a deciding factor in building peace. The changing nature of conflicts will be discussed in more extent in Chapter 6.

3.2 International Support

Drawing from an example in the past, the Marshall Plan is a suitable comparison to current peacebuilding in order to explain the difficulty international aid can bear. The key factor identified in the success of the Marshall Plan was a tangible consensus and existing democratic institutions in Western Europe. The willingness to cooperate according to the plan's terms demonstrate a collective commitment to agreeing on long-term objectives and priorities. This combination of factors turns out to be unique – Panić (2008) explains that it is extremely unlikely to recreate these exact criteria of a small group of countries with similar institutions, interests and at a comparable level of economic development in the contemporary world (Gleditsch 2002, Keegan 1999).

It seems like a paradox – while international engagement in conflict contexts can indeed be a stabilising one, the clear opposite is agreed on by scholars just as much. Different angles on peacebuilding demonstrate that the extent of international aid in post-conflict episodes can be multi-faceted. One facet not to be disregarded is the support for democratising post-conflict societies. While striving for peacebuilding and the prevention of recurring conflict, democratisation can facilitate the process towards building sustainable peace (Mross *et al.*, 2022). The perceptions of international aid and a top-down supremacy of the international community's actions can sometimes result in a critical perspective – especially when military force is involved. Krebs and Licklider (2016) point out one significant learning for international support. International peacebuilders have often encouraged the formation of a new national army for the sake of integrating former combatants in a reconciling aspiration. However, experience demonstrates clearly that this branch of reconciliation efforts is not only weak, but also cannot compare to alternative, more peaceful reintegration measures. They conclude that it is “*unwise and unethical for the international community to press military integration on reluctant local forces*” (Krebs and Licklider, p.93).

One other strong appeal from scholars focussed on global health is that instead of generalising practices to implement in peacebuilding post-conflict episodes, a more context-specific approach is required. If the prior studies are more specific and adapting to the conflict environment, this could build up to informing “*local policy and programming decisions, rather than generalising results between different settings and populations*” (Seguin and Roberts, 2017, p.823).

3.3 Alternative Attempts of Peacebuilding

One optional fragment of the DDR programmes is reinsertion, which refers to mainly economically inspired reintegration efforts. Scholarship has found most limited reinsertion efforts to be sustainable in a post-conflict society due to reinsertion measures increasing the risk of recurrence of the conflict. Respectively, Sharif (2018) reflects that *“once the state begins to cash-respond to every threat of remilitarization or mutiny, a cycle of rent-seeking rebellions begins: recurrent mutinies against army commanders or local political leaders by armed constituents selling a larger share of the resources dispensed by the government”* (p.6). Knight and Özerdem (2004) present *“five primary issues [that] must be addressed when planning cash reinsertion assistance: the mobilization of funds, differentiation criteria, the amount of the allowance, financial education and the development of a non-corruptible identification system”* (p.511). Predominantly studying the economic tier of postwar reconstruction, Cowen and Coyne (2005) found:

“Expectations play a critical key role in the macro-economic order. If the expectations of economic actors are that macro-variables (i.e., fiscal and monetary policy, regulations, etc.) will remain unstable, they will shift their behavior accordingly. As with the political reconstruction process, expectations must be managed such that the citizens can realistically coordinate their activities. Credibility and stability must be signaled, and the populace must expect that communicated policies and reforms will in fact be undertaken” (p.42).

Most academic opinions regarding post-conflict episodes meet in identifying that the civilians’ trust in restoring peace is an essential ingredient for managing a post-conflict episode sustainably and peacefully (Phayal, 2019).

Another theory on peacebuilding involves the role of security forces in a post-conflict context and identifies transparency and a diverse re-appointment within security forces as the safest way to prevent a renewed conflict creation (Berg, 2020, p.1310). Although some international peacebuilders have spoken up in favour of military integration in the post-conflict peacebuilding context, it is yet questionable whether it facilitates the cause and prevents recurrence of conflict (Krebs and Licklider 2016, White 2020). Mross et al. (2022) strike this dilemma in summarising *“the effect of most types of external peacebuilding support appears to depend on the combination with other elements of support or with certain context factors”* (p.2). They conclude that

combinations of peacebuilding initiatives have not been explored sufficiently. I will reflect upon that perspective in the following section.

3.4 Peace Agreement

Seen that the armed conflicts investigated in this thesis are terminated and settled with a full peace agreement, a closer look at what the defining factors are to a peace agreement is following. Commonly, it is defined as “*a formal agreement between at least two opposing primary warring parties, which addresses the disputed incompatibility, either by settling all or part of it, or by clearly outlining a process for the warring parties plan to regulate the incompatibility*” (Pettersson *et al.*, 2019, p.2). The purposes include the division of land, labour, capital, and trade among the elites into the settlement, and it excludes other elites from accessing these resources and productive activities. Moreover, it commends ex-belligerent factions, government, and rebel signatories, to comply to the agreement’s terms even in the case of ex-agreement parties challenging them (Ottmann, 2020, p.621).

Two examples for what peace agreements and their post-conflict situation can result in are South Sudan in 2005 and Timor Leste in 1999.

In South Sudan, the government continued to compete for former factions’ loyalty by financial allures. This resulted in immediate riots requesting more financial support and eventually led to recurrence of conflict (Berg, p.1313). Licklider (1995) argues that forceful responses might end insurgency quickly, but they frequently involve atrocities that fuel grievances and remobilisation later.

In contrast, East Timor provides an illustration of how successful peacebuilding can arise from empowering civilians. When forceful military endeavours to quell insurgent uprisings led to the resurgence of a civil war, the remedy lay in broadening civilian influence over the post-conflict restoration process. The engagement of civilians played a pivotal role in East Timor's journey to democracy and the cessation of its civil war, ultimately achieved through a referendum (Berg, p.1314f.). Ottmann (2020) identifies a red thread of ‘extra-agreement violence’ and post-conflict riots which can be “*traced back to power imbalances within the postwar state*”.

3.4.1 Peace Agreements as Social Contract

A more contemporary orientation studies the option of a peace agreement equalling a social contract. This school of thought pursues a highly effective peace settlement that entails a renewed social contract from the beginning on. Peace agreements can have a uniquely significant and transformative value following a conflict episode. Academia poses the question why not to take advantage of negotiating a peace agreement and ‘use’ the opportunity for a comprehensive social contract (Knight and Özerdem 2004, Mezzera 2022). Of course, a social contract is not a written agreement, but rather refers to both, a clear objective and commitment for positive societal transformation within the peace agreement. However, as enticing as this pursuit seems, in reality it is rarely feasible. Mezzera phrases peace agreements as an “*opportunity to (re)write the social contract or ground rules for a given country, where a common vision is discussed and agreed upon*” (p.3). While recent developments are promising for a future implementation of this vision, currently peace agreements often lack the comprehensiveness and legitimacy. One reason has seemed to be the externally driven interests in peacebuilding while not offering sufficient room to local actors (Mezzera 2020, Phayal 2019). McCandless argues that local resilience plays a key role in peacebuilding contexts that aim for restoring peace (2019, p.90).

A renovation of the social contract often happens through a new constitution, or an inclusive peace agreement, a peace deal. In that sense, peace agreements and peacebuilding can bring about moments of change and windows of opportunity. But during and right after civil conflict, large parts of the citizen are found at a vulnerable and insecure moment. To make peace sustainable, the peacebuilding has to be realised in an inclusive way. “*It is thus during the negotiation phase that it becomes crucial that the interest of more vulnerable and marginalized groups are brought to the forefront and are properly dealt with. Recent peace agreements, and especially the Conclusive Peace Agreement in Nepal in November 2006 and the one concluded in 2016 between the government of Colombia and the FARC seem to signal a trend for more inclusiveness in this respect*” (Mezzera, p.2).

Özerdem appeals to prioritise social reintegration in peacebuilding efforts, as the process of social acceptance of former combatants represents a key ingredient for “*reconciling fragmented communities*” (Özerdem, 2002, p.62).

4. Theory:

4.1 Social Contracts Background

Social Contract Theory has its roots in the works of prominent 17th and 18th theorists like Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, or Jean-Jacques Rousseau. In the original vision, this theoretic approach assumes that individuals voluntarily come together and form a society, based on a certain consensus about rules, institutions, and norms – with the aim of promoting order, cooperation, and basic set of rights for everybody (Dryzek, Honig and Phillips, 2008, p.45f.). More recent works of John Rawls are also based on social contract theory, but go one step further by incorporating explicitly perspectives of justice and fairness that should be granted in a social contract (Rawls, 1999, p.30). Through his "veil of ignorance" – concept, Rawls suggests that when individuals make decisions about the rules, laws, and institutions in the social contract, they should imagine themselves behind a hypothetical "veil of ignorance," unaware of their own personal characteristics, such as their social status, wealth, talents, or personal preferences. This approach aims to ensure impartiality and fairness, as individuals would make choices without knowing how these choices might advantage or disadvantage them personally. Rawls believed that this method would lead to the creation of a just society, where principles, laws and policies are designed to benefit everyone, regardless of their particular circumstances (Rawls, 1999).

Social contracts are still a very timely topic, since for example in European societies, social contracts have been put under strain during polarizing debates on Covid-19, climate change, or migration policies. But as already stated above, this paper focusses on contexts where finding middle ground around a social contract is even more difficult: Civil wars and armed conflicts within a society. Looking at countries where the social contract has collapsed, because violence broke out and the very security that a social contract is meant to provide has been violated, this paper will employ a contract theory lens while looking at peacebuilding approaches and human rights. This will form the theoretical underpinning for the subsequent analysis section of this paper.

4.2 Social Contracts and Peacebuilding

Interestingly, there is not a lot of academic literature on how exactly social contracts are rebuilt after war – but it is also certainly an area that spans across several thoughts of school: State-building, Peacebuilding, Conflict Resolution, Democratization, and Rule of Law. The basic ideas of social contracts in societies in transitions has been applied to different spheres of when societies

are reconfiguring or facing existential challenges and problems such as contestation, lack of cohesion, conflict potential, or also climate change consequences (Cloutier *et al.*, 2021). The conflict trend since the end of the cold war has been clearly marked with an increase of intrastate conflicts, which have recently ticked up in intensity and duration (Sundberg and Melander, 2013). In many cases the reasons for outbreaks of violence stem from a frustration with the government, including repression or a perception of socioeconomic mishandling and discrimination– or a combination of all these (Collier and Hoeffler, 2004). In other words, conflict is often preceded or fuelled by a social contract that is perceived as unfair.

However, large scale violence quickly interrupts any institutions that priorly channelled and managed conflicts in peaceful, accountable ways and exercised governance and laws (courts, police, taxes, etc). In such a situation of “breakdown” of social contracts, the conditions deteriorate quickly and form a vicious cycle – because grievances, polarization, and hate become stronger within societies in civil war – but at the same time make a formation of a new social contracts less likely and more challenging.

In order to sustainably solve conflicts and prevent their recurrence, it is paramount that once fighting stops, a reformed social contract is negotiated. This would typically include creating functional institutions that “*deliver to the people*” (UNDP, p.14) and allow for participation in politics. But likewise, it is just as important that a new social contract encompasses immediately perceivable changes. For example, for people to have access to food, housing, water, sanitation, and a job. How can these social contracts be re-built in divided societies? And how to make sure that the new social contract does not perpetuate inequalities or discriminations that that led to conflicts in the first place? For example, a series of armed conflicts during the “Arab Spring” aimed to overthrow repressive governments. After a decade, the situation has stabilized but the new governments are little if any less repressive (International Crisis Group, 2020)

4.3 Social Contracts and Human Rights

This leads me to connect this theoretic underpinning to the original research question addressed in this paper: “How can the social contract be brought into reality to secure human rights in a post-conflict society?” Scholars have already examined how a focus on human rights can help rebuild trust between citizens and the state, foster accountability for past atrocities, and provide a foundation for democratic governance in the aftermath of conflict. Indeed, if a person would find

themselves in a post conflict situation, where there were efforts to comply with human rights, then this would constitute a very strong, inclusive new social contract for that society – and surely something that would be an almost ideal outcome if departing from Rawls’s veil of ignorance. Despite this potential of Human Rights consideration in post-conflict peacebuilding, the reality often shows contrary approaches. Militarized responses to conflicts are one of the tools maybe most frequently used. However, these are often interventions that try to enforce peace without considering sufficiently the populations quest for access to socioeconomic and political rights – for instance the interventions in Afghanistan or Mali come to mind. This in turn also means, that in order to mark a sustainable transition away from war, a social contract must not only be considerate about human rights, but also inclusive to marginalized groups. The more inclusive a social contract is, the better it will work in providing peace and decent living conditions. There is broad evidence for that in practice, such as by recent work by the UN and the World Bank (World Bank, 2018).

This chapter has outlined an interesting interplay between peacebuilding, human rights, and renovations of social contracts after conflict. Drawing from research by McCandless (2019), but also practical insights from the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR, 2020), and the World Bank (Coulter, 2021), this paper employs the following **hypothesis**: From a social contract lens, peacebuilding tools need to be more considerate of Human Rights approaches.

5. From Theory to Practice: Methodologic approach to analysing Human Rights, Social Contracts, and Peacebuilding

The rest of this paper will draw from the abovementioned theoretic argument and look at how human rights feed into different tools, that are meant to contribute to a re-shaping of a new social contract. This chapter will pave the way towards the analysis, by explaining methodological and practical considerations that will shape the investigation’s character. It will conclude by outlining two key guiding questions that will be the leitmotif for the analysis part.

5.1 The Research Question, Conceptual Clarifications, and Limitations

The prior chapters and literature review revealed why looking at peacebuilding from a social contract theory lens is a relevant research question with important human rights considerations.

But when working with concepts as broad as “peacebuilding”, “human rights”, “rule of law” and “institutions”, it is important to clearly define what – given the limited extent of this paper – will be realistically covered by the analysis, and what will not. A partial contribution by this paper has already been to a) summarize relevant literature on ending conflicts and building peace (Chapter 3); and b) order and sort the complex concepts of peacebuilding, social contracts and human rights, and situation them within broader political theory (Chapter 4). Therefore, and re-stressing the limited extent of this paper, the subsequent analysis and discussion is rather added in order to illustrate how the web of a theoretical and conceptual framework from prior chapters looks in actual country context. That being said, applying the theoretical framework to different country contexts as done below (Chapter 6) can also yield some deductive insights (that is, to test the theoretical claims/hypotheses against realities) as shown in the discussion section (Chapter 7).

5.2 The Justification and selection of the four peacebuilding tools

It is important to highlight that there are numerous actions and tools that actors use to achieve peace – from diplomacy to military intervention, economic sanctions, closed-door negotiations (that can lead to power sharing), transitional justice, and many more. These actions and tools are all mutually related and almost never *not* overlapping – which is why it’s important to state that this research projects has taken a more limited approach – narrowing down the research to four peacebuilding tools (in more detail Chapter 6.1). The abundance of academic literature attests vast research area that peace and conflict studies have become, and the many different peacebuilding interventions that could be studied in this research. However, given the limited extent of this paper I will apply the Social Contract Theory to “only” four different peacebuilding tools/approaches that I consider most relevant and interesting in order to investigate the research question. These are:

- a. Disarmament, Demobilisation, and Reintegration Programmes
- b. Peacekeeping Operations
- c. Power-Sharing Arrangements
- d. Transitional Justice

This also means that other areas that might be considered peacebuilding activities too, will not be given deeper consideration.

5.3 The Case Selection of Countries (CAR 2000-2021)

As mentioned above, a significant part of this research project is also its theoretical contribution by logically connecting and analyzing the complexity of the concepts of human rights, peacebuilding, and social contracts in post-conflict scenarios. However, in order to illustrate how these concepts interact in a given crisis context, this research project extends this reflection by adding a short empirical analysis, looking at how the proposed theory and hypothesis materialized in an actual post-conflict situation. The aim of the selection is to have a telling case study -- which combines human rights and peacebuilding activities that tried to shape a new social contract. There was a myriad of conflicts and conflict contexts of interest, therefore, it was crucial to define and limit a certain range of conflicts eligible for the case study.

I narrowed down my area of interest to post-conflict societies that have experienced and resolved civil conflict and finalised it with a peace agreement, because social contracts can only be rebuilt once fighting has stopped. The research area, but also the design of the four conflict resolution- and peacebuilding tools that will be analysed are constantly expanding and changing. This is especially true for DDR-programmes, where a lot of research and development has fundamentally changed how they are implemented, if comparing to 20 years ago. Therefore, it was important to look at more recent post-conflict societies that have been in touch with DDR programmes. This allows to filter out earlier attempts at implementing DDR programmes that have applied different philosophies than the more recent ones. Knight and Özerdem agree that a DDR programme's success or failure is decided by the willingness among the belligerent signatories and the country's political situation (Knight and Özerdem, p.500). Further they argue that "*poorly conceived and executed DDR[R] programmes can themselves also become a factor in the creation of future conflicts. The incomplete disarmament in Mozambique contributed to the proliferation of weapons not only throughout that country, but also in neighbouring countries such as South Africa, Zambia and Malawi*" (Knight and Özerdem, p.501).

By applying these different criteria, I have been mainly interested in four countries: Afghanistan, CAR, Colombia, and Mozambique. These four countries' recent civil conflicts share many characteristics documented in the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) (Davies *et al.*, 2022). All these four cases shared three characteristics – as per my explanation above – from data based on UCDP's records:

- x conflict by an insurgent group against government YES/no
- x full peace agreement YES/no
- x DDR programme YES/no

The very dynamic and volatile situation in CAR is particularly interesting for this research question, because the big UN-Peacekeeping mission is carrying out an extensive peace intervention, that includes many human rights components – however it has not really been a successful turning point for CAR. Only recently the constitution of the country was changed to assimilate that of more autocratic states (OHCHR, 2023), which raises doubts about a social contract that delivers to the population equally. Given the close congruence between CAR’s political and conflict developments with the theory and purpose of this research project, I decided to examine the conflict of the CAP throughout the years 2000-2021 as this research’s case study – which makes the design of the case selection one where it is “most likely” to find certain patterns that the theory sets out (Levy, 2008).

5.4 Operationalisation and Method: Process tracing

The qualitative investigation of CAR’s post-conflict society working to restore peace in a similar environment aims to lead to insights into what the essential differences in succeeding are. In this investigation, I will specifically focus on the CAR’s armed conflicts from 2000 to 2020.

In order to investigate the most recent data within peace and conflict studies, I filter the conflicts within the time span of 2000 to 2021. The UCDP is tracking conflicts globally on a weekly basis. I therefore made use of the data set they provide and classified 374 conflicts they registered between 01.01.2000 and 31.12.2021. The UCDP defines conflicts as a dispute that “*concerns government and/or territory where the use of armed force between two parties, of which at least one is the government of a state, results in at least 25 battle-related deaths in one calendar year*” (Gleditsch *et al.*, 2002). Out of the 374 conflicts between 2000 and 2021, 29 could be categorised as a) finalised with a Full Peace Agreement, and b) a conflict led against government (Davies *et al.*, 2022).

By seeking to apply the theoretical framework to the case study, the method could be categorized as a light version of process tracing, because the following chapters will analyse whether the framework between peacebuilding, human rights and social contract has been present in the

reviewed case of the CAP. Process tracing is a method that involves meticulously tracing the causal links between events and outcomes by examining specific instances of how mechanisms unfold within case studies (Beach, 2017). In other words, this means checking whether the theoretical argument offers explanatory to the observed reality. Therefore, the examination of the case studies will be guided by lead questions for the case study:

1. To what extent were peacebuilding tools (DDR, Peacekeeping, Power Sharing, Transitional Justice) deployed in order to renew the social contract – and did they make advances to that end?
2. How much human rights considerations played into the peacebuilding process, and did the human rights approach culminate in a new social contract that is more advanced on human rights?
3. What are shortcomings of the analyzed post-conflict context? Are human rights violations or conflict risks still present? Are root causes that caused the conflict initially still present?

6. Analysis

6.1 The Peacebuilding Mechanisms

When looking at the emergence of conflicts after World War II, there are many civil conflicts that have lasted for several decades. One central characteristic of conflicts has changed during the years. The more time passes, the less deadly the conflicts become. However, the number of conflicts increases steadily (Roser *et al.*, 2016). While for many decades of conflict sounds like politically inspired disagreement and institutional debates, for the civilians and combatants experiencing the conflict directly, it also means a decade-long societal division and distance. Countries that have experienced conflict once have a tendency of running the risk for recurring conflict. Records show that two-thirds of conflicts between 1960 and 2012 were followed by recurring conflict (Berg, p.1308). Therefore, scholarship is attempting to identify factors that may have an influence on the recurrence of conflicts in fragile states. Some explain the phenomenon as fragile states' "conflict-poverty trap" which refers to an endless cycle of poverty causing conflict and conflict causing more poverty. Verner and Heinemann (2006) explain that "*widespread poverty and inequality, rapid urbanization, and high youth unemployment [...] result in high social risks and demands on weak state institutions for basic services*".

In the following, I will unravel four approaches the international community has used when confronting the challenge of building peace in a post-conflict society.

6.1.1 DDR

Adjusting to modernity, the international community realised that sustainability might be the solution for peacebuilding when striving towards a low risk of conflict recurrence. One key ingredient for building sustainable peace is by now the implementation of peacekeeping and, in post-conflict contexts, DDR programmes. Knight and Özerdem (2004) recognise that a key ingredient for a DDR process' success is the willingness of the conflict's former factions to make compromises and be interested in finding an agreement. DDR processes can be seen as an extension of the UN's Peacekeeping Missions which are defined as "*an action to identify and support structures which will tend to strengthen and solidify peace in order to avoid a relapse into conflict*" (Boutros-Ghali, 1992, p.204).

Facing an increase of armed conflicts all over the world, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) created Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) programmes. These programmes are a part of the UN Peacekeeping Operations (PKO). PKOs are a framework for peacebuilding work in countries that are going through or have recently ended conflict. The DDR programme can be a part of PKOs as an initiative for "*restoring social capital and promoting long-term peace*" (Sharif, p.3). First realised in the years after the cold war, the programmes have proven to stabilise the post-conflict setting (United Nations Secretary General, 2000, p.113).

Both states and international organisations, such as the United Nations, have invested in research to finding a solution how to safely guide a divided society from conflict to a long-lasting peace environment. The establishment of DDR programmes which are designed to not only maintain peace after the resolution of a conflict, but also (re)build a healthy and self-functioning society, have become one of the best practices by now. The UN highlights that "*even if full disarmament and demilitarisation prove unachievable, a credible programme of DDR may nonetheless make a key contribution to strengthening confidence between former factions and enhancing the momentum toward stability*" (United Nations Secretary General, p.113).

The first component of the programme's design is the 'Disarmament' which encompasses the "*collection, control and disposal of small arms and light weapons and the development of*

responsible arms management programmes in a post-conflict context” (Knight & Özerdem, p.499). The second aspect ‘Demobilization’ refers to working for a less threatening environment by retreating and redistributing former combatants and cantonments. Here, the task is not completed by simply initiating a national demobilization. Instead, *“the former combatants and their families must establish themselves in a civilian environment”* (Knight & Özerdem, p.500). This partly relates to the third component of the DDR programmes, the Reintegration, which is focussing on revitalizing a social, economic, and political safety network for former combatants. The economic aspect is often considered to exclusively represent the Reinsertion, but Reinsertion work in the DDR context encompasses much more than only economic stability. The importance of DDR programmes remains unquestioned, but the increase of experience of implemented programmes with differing results show that it is yet to be improved and finetuned to specific cases. Knight and Özerdem highlight that *“the reintegration of displaced populations and former combatants may have an impact on the recurrence or development of conflicts”* (p.501).

It is a non-negotiable that DDR processes are extremely sensitive. In Nicaragua, a DDR programme was agreed on *“by all parties during peace negotiations, [was] fully supported by the international community and [was] well funded. However, the cantonment of former combatants encountered the same problems, delays, inadequate facilities and an undermining of the peace process”*. This highlights the argument that *“if the DDR process is inefficient and poorly implemented, and if it fails to perceive disarmament from a social contract point of view, doubts will be cast on the outcome of the wider peace process, resulting in an undermining of the peace agreement”* ((Knight and Özerdem, p.507ff.).

6.1.2 PKO

UN PKOs can be understood as precedent for DDR programmes. While PKOs are in place during a conflict, DDR processes are embarked on after the settlement of that same conflict. As agreed before, DDR processes are expected to be the most successful when both belligerent factions and civilians are willing to collectively work towards building peace. This goal proves to be most feasible when the PKO has left a positive resonance with the population (Knight and Özerdem, p.506). Knight and Özerdem also argue that *“UN peacekeeping missions, by virtue of the fact that they physically represent the will of the international community and are the first of the implementing organizations to come into contact with the combatants, cannot be underestimated”*

(p.506). The challenge of governing armed forces is one of the most difficult tasks for the international community when assisting conflict (Berg, p. 1308). As post-conflict reconciliation processes can last several years, it is of crucial importance for the Peacekeeping to leave with a positive impression. As Berg (2020) states, the process arches from *”negotiating the peace agreement to haggling over laws, policies, and appointments- restructuring security forces not only clarify parties’ intentions and capabilities, it also has longer-term consequences for their share of power and state resources”* (p.1310).

Peacekeeping’s goal is to maintain peace and prevent recurrence of conflict. One central step towards achieving that goal is to ensure that if the *“benefits derived from the peace agreement exceed the benefits which government and rebel signatories could possibly acquire through a return to a civil war, they will credibly believe that the other side will not resort to arms again”* (Ottmann, p.621). Once again, the success of PKOs is embodied in facilitating an individualised DDR process for the post-conflict society. The goal is to increase potential for former combatants and their families’ reintegration into civil society. As DDR is a sub-initiative of PKOs, they represent *“the largest intervention in nearly all of the UN’s ongoing large-scale peacekeeping missions tasked with restoring social capital and promoting long-term peace”* (Sharif, p.3).

Peacekeeping Missions can represent a significant support for a post-conflict society’s attempt in developing *“new modes of governance that allow [...] to control and tax the population and territory that they [elites] claim to rule, and redefine the ‘social contract’ binding them to different groups”* (Themnér and Utas, 2016, p.257). Academia finds that international peacemakers must *“engage in post-conflict peacebuilding in order to prevent an informalisation of the state where local actors tend to adapt new conditions to their own social logics, if necessary by bending, circumventing or contesting formal state institutions”* (Themnér and Utas, p. 258f.).

6.1.3 Power Sharing Deals

The occasion of belligerent signatories committing to a peace agreement exclusive to them is conclusive for the sensitivity of the following post-conflict process. In the years 2000 to 2020 there have been numerous attempts at striving for the best-fit post-conflict DDR process, partly involving power-sharing arrangements. In general, it is clear that *“post-war rebellions are often caused by armed groups outside of the negotiated settlement. These actors are not bound by the terms of the peace agreement. Credible commitments created through power-sharing therefore do*

not apply to them” (Ottmann, p.619). The power-sharing approach suggests a more equal distribution of power in a post-conflict context. Instead of limiting the peace agreement terms to the belligerent factions, instead it should include civilians, elites, and former factions for the sake of the entire country’s prospect (Hirshleifer 1995, Ottmann 2020, Ottman and Vuellners 2015).

There are two power-sharing practices: personalised or structural. Personal power-sharing arrangements are often determined by the nature of the civil war and other contextual factors. Academia cannot find a consensus whether or not power-sharing should count as a peace-restorative strategy. Respectively, personalised power sharing *“might limit elites’ abilities to prevent postwar rebellions”*. However, there are also examples of successful implementation of personalised power-sharing. In Sierra Leone, *“military reforms integrated large numbers of ex-combatants into the army which reduced the pool of battle-hardened recruits for any potential postwar rebellion”* (Ottmann, p.622).

Structural power-sharing, on the other hand, consists of proportional representation, territorial decentralization, and limited access to power for political parties. It also promotes proportionally represented electoral systems and parliamentary quotas to allow *“sharing of power on the basis of demographic criteria or political affiliations”* (Ottmann, p.622). However, Choi&Raleigh (2015) argue that structural power-sharing favours excluded elites and their attempts to organize postwar rebellions. As Themnér and Utas agree, *“war-to-peace transitions can generate what is commonly referred to as ‘structural holes’ – network gaps that prohibit communication and interaction between different groups of individuals – in sociology”* (p.261).

6.1.4 Transitional Justice

Transitional Justice *“refers to how societies respond to the legacies of massive and serious human rights violations”* (International Centre for Transitional Justice). It is a concept that has a lot of potential to contribute to both human rights and peacebuilding objectives, because it is an area of significant overlap between the two. It serves as a vital tool in addressing the lasting impact of widespread human rights violations and fostering sustainable peace by preventing the resurgence of conflict. In academia, Transitional Justice is usually separated into four of its subcomponents: Truth Finding, Reparations, Prosecution, and Guarantees of non-repetition. However, in reality, these are sometimes less separate and more fluent – but by employing mechanisms such as truth

commissions, trials, reparations, and institutional reforms, transitional justice can contribute to accountability, empowerment of victims, and establishment of a culture of (human) rights.

Transitional Justice is a powerful tool, that not only promotes justice and healing but also can contribute to the overall stability and social cohesion that is necessary for sustainable peace. This, in turn, can go a long way in reassembling a social contract that is acceptable even to those who have had their rights violated properly. The social contract is often shattered in conflict-ridden environments due to widespread human rights abuses, loss of trust in institutions, and divisions within society. Transitional justice mechanisms like truth commissions, trials, reparations, and institutional reforms can play a vital role in restoring this social contract. It can provide a platform for truth-telling and acknowledgment of past crimes and Human Rights violations; and these mechanisms address the grievances of victims and survivors, while also aiming to hold perpetrators accountable. If implemented cohesively and successfully, this process can foster a sense of justice and reparation, which are crucial for rebuilding trust in the government and institutions. Furthermore, the inclusion of affected communities in transitional justice processes empowers individuals to participate in shaping the future of their society. This involvement helps bridge the gap between the government and its citizens, allowing for a possible reconstruction of a more inclusive and participatory social contract. By addressing the root causes of the conflict and addressing historical injustices, transitional justice can also contribute to systemic changes that address the grievances that led to the initial rupture of the social contract in the first place.

To recapitulate, scholars agree that even the most promising peacebuilding strategy is dependent on citizens', elites', and ex-combatants' commitment to collectively restore peace (Groff, 2022).

The four tools of peacebuilding that will be applied to the Central African Republic's conflicts in the following section are the following:

DDR programmes have been introduced after the Cold War and are striving for a multi-faceted restorative peace process by realising social, political, military, and economic reintegration.

Peacekeeping Operations have the power to pave the way for a successful DDR implementation. PKOs are less practical peace missions that encompass the restoration, maintenance, and promotion of long-term peace. Due to PKOs usually being the first international on ground peacekeepers in a conflict-affected country, I have found PKOs to hold the chance to create trust within the post-conflict society to invest in a collective effort for restoring peace.

Power-sharing arrangements seek to balance the sudden flood of new power to be redistributed in a post-conflict context. The opinions are controversial whether or not power-sharing is to be referred to as peacebuilding: usually scholars either claim that power-sharing deals are granting elites too much or too little power.

Transitional Justice aims at mending the conflict society with the post-conflict society and bridging the gap in between. The concept entails Truth Finding, Reparation, Prosecution, and Guarantees of non-repetition. These subsidiary bodies can contribute to accountability, empowerment of victims, and establishment of a culture of rights. In addition, the process often inspires and offers room for individuals to participate in shaping the future of their society.

These four tools of peacebuilding in connection to the social contract theory discussed above will be applied when analysing the Central African Republic's conflict history. The hypothesis posed is: From a social contract lens, peacebuilding tools need to be more considerate of Human Rights approaches as a priority.

6.2 Civil armed conflicts in the CAR and its impacts on society

Between 2000 and 2021, the Central African Republic (CAR) grappled with a tumultuous history of human rights violations and fragile peacebuilding efforts. The country's political landscape was marred by frequent upheavals, internal conflicts, and coups that undermined governance and stability. Rampant human rights abuses plagued the population, with reports of extrajudicial killings, widespread sexual violence, and forced displacement becoming distressingly common (Welz, 2014, p.601).

Prior to the concentrated conflict decades, the CAR was a French colony, and witnessed several crises since independence from France in 1960. The Ex-President Patassé lost public benevolence soon after being elected in 1993 because of “*widespread discontent over prevailing social and economic problems, non-payment of salaries, and claims of ethnic favouritism in the army*” (Welz, p.602). The attempt to stage a *coup d'état* against Patassé prefaced the following decades of conflict and got the international community to become involved (Ndiyun, 2022a, p.301).

During the following years, the country passed dark times of grave human rights violations, armed violence, insecurity, and child soldier recruitment, all while also experiencing famine, drought, and poverty (Potts, Myer and Roberts, 2011). Both various armed groups and government forces

were implicated in these violations, exacerbating the sense of insecurity and mistrust among citizens (UCDP - Uppsala Conflict Data Program, 2022). This period saw not only a deterioration in the protection of basic rights but also the erosion of social cohesion, as intercommunal tensions often intersected with political rivalries, fuelling cycles of violence (Petersson *et al.*, 2022).

International actors, including the United Nations and regional organizations, worked to address the CAR's challenges by supporting peace agreements and reconciliation initiatives. However, translating these efforts into tangible progress proved arduous due to the intricate nature of the conflict and the proliferation of armed factions (Knoope and Buchanan-Clarke, 2017). Despite instances of relative calm and intermittent peace, the CAR struggled to sustainably address its human rights crisis and forge a durable peace. The limited capacity of state institutions, coupled with the volatile security environment, hindered the effective implementation of peacebuilding measures. In this context, the years between 2000 and 2021 stand as a sobering reminder of the intricate web of factors that must be addressed to foster lasting peace and human rights protections in the CAR.

Between 2000 and 2021, the CAR witnessed the negotiation of four significant peace agreements to address the ongoing conflict and instability. While these agreements aimed to bring about peace and stability, their effectiveness varied due to the complex and fluid nature of the situation (Knoope and Buchanan-Clarke, 2017 p.2).

A brief outline of the four peace agreements follows:

Libreville Agreements (2008-2013): A series of agreements signed in Libreville, Gabon, aimed to address the power struggle between the government and various rebel groups. These agreements focused on disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) of combatants, as well as power-sharing arrangements. However, these agreements had limited success in bringing lasting peace, as some armed groups were excluded from negotiations, and sporadic violence continued.

Brazzaville Agreement (July 2014): This agreement was signed between the CAR's transitional government and various armed groups. It focused on establishing a ceasefire, forming a unity government, and integrating armed groups into the national security forces. However, implementation challenges arose due to the diversity of armed factions and their varying levels of

commitment. The agreement marked a first step towards political reconciliation but struggled to achieve lasting peace on the ground.

Khartoum Agreement (February 2019): Negotiated under the auspices of Sudan, this agreement was signed between the CAR government and 14 armed groups. It focused on political representation, power-sharing, and security sector reform. While it led to the formation of a new government and the integration of some armed group members into the security forces, violence and clashes persisted in certain regions due to the fragmented nature of the conflict and the limited control of some signatory groups over their fighters.

Bangui Agreement (June 2021): The Bangui Agreement, also known as the Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in CAR, was signed between the CAR government and a coalition of armed groups. This agreement emphasized security sector reform, disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR), as well as national reconciliation. The agreement aimed to provide a roadmap for long-lasting peace and stability in the country, with a focus on addressing the root causes of the conflict. The effectiveness of this agreement depended on its successful implementation and the commitment of all parties involved.

(Azou-Passonda *et al.* 2019, Ndiyun 2022a, UCDP 2022).

In each of these peace agreements, the challenges of implementing the provisions, reconciling diverse interests, and maintaining a unified commitment from all parties were significant hurdles. The fluid nature of the conflict, the presence of numerous armed groups with differing motivations, and the complex socio-political dynamics in the CAR made achieving sustainable peace a difficult task.

Various peacebuilding efforts were implemented over the years in an attempt to address the country's political instability, conflict, and human rights challenges. Among the different attempts of peacebuilding were Conflict Resolution and Mediation, a Security Sector Reform, Reconciliation and Community-Based Initiatives, Electoral Processes and Political Reforms, and Humanitarian Assistance and Development. While all types of peacebuilding were valid approaches, the following section will nonetheless focus on the four tools discussed above (UCDP 2022, UNDP 2022).

6.3 Application of peacebuilding tools on the CAR as hypothesis

In this section, the discussed peacebuilding strategies will be applied to the conflict history of the CAR in order to reach a conclusion for the research question of this thesis: *How can the social contract be brought into reality to secure human rights in a post-conflict society?*

Three guiding questions for this analysis were drafted which will support the approximation to the discussed hypothesis: *From a social contract lens, peacebuilding tools need to be more considerate of Human Rights approaches as a priority.*

6.3.1 Implementation of peacebuilding tools

Guiding Question 1: To what extent were peacebuilding tools (DDR, PKO, PS, TJ) deployed in order to renew the social contract – and did they make advances to that end?

Groff (2022) offers the observation that a social contract can be considered a collection of “*shared democratic values that precede policy actions*” (p.721). This observation is to be kept in mind when following along the evaluation of the CAR’s journey through four civil armed conflicts throughout 20 years.

Several peace agreements and years of practiced peacebuilding work in the CAR demonstrate that high efforts have been made to restore peace. However, it is also clear that a wide range of socio-economic dynamics and political disagreement has been a great hindrance to secure a long-lasting peace, hence leading to recurring conflicts. Although there is a palette of potential cause for the conflicts’ outbreak, including religious polarisation, academia finds that the “*struggle for power among political elite*” is the key causing factor (Siradağ, 2016, p.86).

UN peacekeeping missions, such as MINUSCA (Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic), were deployed to provide security, protect civilians, and support the implementation of peace agreements. These missions worked alongside local authorities and security forces to stabilize the situation on the ground. It is important to note that the effectiveness of these peacebuilding efforts varied over time due to the complexity of the conflict, the shifting political landscape, and the challenges of implementing reforms in a fragile environment (UN Peacekeeping, 2014).

The significance of a signed peace agreement seems to be clear. It represents the willingness to find a solution for a prior state of conflict. However, the CAR is an example of the contrary truth: a failure to comply with DDR terms will “*result in a return to the exclusionary politics which have proven so divisive in the past*” (Knoope and Buchanan-Clarke, p.13). According to peace researchers, a recurring meeting of a conflict country’s politicians is desirable to maintain an active dialogue about the country’s future. In the CAR, the peace negotiations, such as the 2015 Bangui National Forum, remained isolated events of bringing together the country’s elites. In a post-conflict country, which runs the risk of returning to conflict constantly, this results in the idea of weak state institutions. Instead of striving for stabilising the country for a temporary period, scholars call for a more specific addressing of the root causes of conflict for the sake of creating stability and building trust (Groff 2022, Knoope and Buchanan-Clarke 2017).

In peace negotiations in the CAR, DDR programmes were established to encourage armed combatants to surrender their weapons and reintegrate into civilian life. These programmes aimed to provide former fighters with education and livelihood opportunities, helping to prevent a return to violence. Nonetheless numerous efforts, the integration of former combatants into society and security forces has been incomplete. The lack of resources, inadequate support mechanisms, and the failure to address the root causes of recruitment into armed groups have hindered effective reintegration and sustained peace (Azou-Passonda *et al.*, 2019 and Pettersson *et al.*, 2022).

The efficiency of peacebuilding measures in the CAR from 2000 to 2021 has been marked by a mix of progress and challenges. While some initiatives have shown promise, the overall results have been limited by a complex web of factors: The CAR's conflict landscape has been characterized by a multitude of armed groups, each with varying motivations and interests. This fragmentation has made it challenging to achieve comprehensive peace agreements that address all stakeholders' concerns, leading to difficulties in implementing reforms and maintaining ceasefires (Pettersson *et al.*, 2022). The history of coups and armed uprising left behind a hesitation for many when entering into peace processes – a “*crisis of confidence*” (Azou-Passonda *et al.*, 2019, p.482).

The conflict history in the CAR is rooted very deeply. The government’s exploitation of the country’s natural resources for years has “*fed the jealousy of marginalised individuals and factions and moved some to take up arms*” (Crisis Group Africa, 2010, p.15). The country has had one of

the lowest Human Development Index for decades, and scholars have drawn attention to “*the dire health situation throughout the country*” (Potts, Myer and Roberts, 2011, p.13) for years before the conflict episode 2000-2021. These persistent socio-economic issues have not improved sufficiently to regain civilians’ trust to find a different solution: while in 2017 1 in 5 Central Africans were displaced internally or externally, in 2021 it was 1 in 4 Central Africans (UNDP 2021, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs 2021). Considering that the trend for displacement is rising although the latest conflict was settled with the fourth peace agreement negotiated in 2019, the question whether Central Africans trust in the peace process of their country remains answered with a clear ‘No’.

Sustainable peacebuilding requires addressing these structural issues to create an environment conducive to reconciliation and development. Inadequate local-level reconciliation and healing processes have blocked the reestablishment of social cohesion. Groff stresses that the priority of renewing social contract should be shifted from the current focus on what citizens can contribute to the social contract to a more community-rooted one of “*what citizens receive from allegiance to the social contract*” (p.722). Moreover, the CAR has seen frequent political changes and leadership shifts, affecting the continuity and commitment to peacebuilding efforts. Transitions in power have often disrupted the implementation of agreements, leading to policy inconsistencies and undermining trust in the peace process. Knoope and Buchanan-Clarke complement that observation when stating that humanitarian assistance has been continuous but is struggling to adapt to both the needed duration of assistance and tackling the number of CAR citizen remaining dependent on aid (2017, p.5). In summary, reconciliation between communities and addressing intercommunal tensions have been insufficiently prioritized in the CAP’s peacebuilding efforts. While some progress has been made through peace agreements and international interventions, achieving lasting peace requires a holistic approach that addresses the intricate interplay of political, socio-economic, and security challenges.

Kastner (2020) explains that recently, transitional justice has been merged if not replaced by ‘societal resilience’. He argues that the concept of transitional justice and societal resilience do indeed share common traits: “*individuals and communities undergo significant changes in conflict and post-conflict situations; they need to adapt, find strategies to cope with various forms of violence and develop the ability to survive through and after periods of significant stress*” (Kastner

2020, p.369). The recent shift towards societal resilience may facilitate to tackle the concept of transitional justice. Societal resilience connects well with the appeal for social cohesion during post-conflict episodes. For example, reparations are one of the main means by which truth commissions and similar processes seek to achieve national and individual reconciliation, and they result in common psychological consequences in each case (Hamber and Wilson, 2002, p.38).

In the CAR, transitional justice is an episode wanted by both the CAR and the international community and were introduced in the Peace Agreement. The establishment of the first steps towards Transitional Justice in the CAR was a key to mechanisms like reparation and reconciliation (Ndiyun, 2022b, p.120). In the 2019 peace agreement, the belligerent factions included transitional justice in their settlement terms in order to foster national reconciliation and provide reparation to the victims (Ndjyun 2022b).

6.3.2 Human Rights prevalence and Social Contract

Guiding Question 2: How much human rights considerations played into the peacebuilding processes, and did the human rights approach culminate in a new social contract that is more advanced on human rights?

Due to the recurring nature of conflicts in the CAR, the peacebuilding process has changed its objectives, evolved, relapsed, and eventually improved significantly with time. The conflicts originate in marginalised groups surging for power, consequential state disintegration and inter-ethnic cleavages (Crisis Group, 2015). The belligerent factions in CAR represent diverse religious beliefs and, with their power surges, generate intermittent peace, disorder, and distrust. The International Crisis Group argues that “*the [...] approach to disarmament [the Bangui Forum in 2014] underestimates both the extent to which the conflict is now communal, and the criminalisation and fragmentation of armed groups*” (2015, p.ii).

While the 2015 peace agreement centrally envisioned reconciliation for the CAR, the strategy within the DDR programme was unrealistic. Moreover, some of the armed groups that attended the negotiation rejected the agreement. The emergence, warring, solution, settling, and then re-emergence of conflict indeed seems like a vicious cycle in the CAR. The International Group states: “*The appointment of armed group leaders to government posts generally results in internal tensions. Combatants criticise their former leaders for not distributing the spoils of victory and*

for “betraying their cause”. [...] *The notorious political and financial opportunism of the militia leaders in CAR means they are not trusted by their combatants* “(2015, p.7). But that also results in no accountable person in the armed groups. Although peacekeeping has attempted to loosen the strong web combatants are caught in, the absence of a someone accountable leads to failure in communicating. This means that all the armed groups within the CAR are structured in a very provisional manner that limits the options to realise formal negotiations with them (Crisis Group, p.7).

Despite attempting to prioritise human rights protection in the post-conflict episodes and peacekeeping, the objective has not been fulfilled (Potts et al, 2011). When looking at CAR’s recent political history from the social contract lens, the willingness to keep trying to find a suitable agreement to settle the conflict once and for all seems promising. The peace agreements’ different emphases led to the most recent one, the 2021 Bangui Agreement especially encompasses national reconciliation and revised DDR programme (UCDP 2022). Comprehensive Agreements, like the Bangui Agreement, “*target the core underlying issues of a conflict to find common ground between the interests and needs of the protagonists and substantially resolve the dispute*” (Ndiyun, p.303). The collective interest in finding ways to restore peace for everyone resembles the original idea of a social contract again.

6.3.3 Shortcomings, challenges, and risks

Guiding Question 3: What are shortcomings of the analysed post-conflict context? Are human rights violations or conflict risks still present? Are root causes that caused the conflict initially still present?

The International Crisis Groups argues: “*in a country brought to its knees by military coups, the creation of an armed group often ensures its leaders of a place on the political chessboard* (2015, p.6). The high risk of conflict recurrence in the CAR continues, currently without any promising substantial prospects for sustainable peace. The repetitive character of armed civil conflict in the CAR suggests a pattern. Azou-Passonda *et al.* point out a Central African phenomenon of “*an extreme personification of power, a real patronage system and mismanagement of state resources. The regimes are used to misappropriating the natural resources of the country. This was the case*

with the granting of forestry and mining permits” (p.483). The distrust the Central African society has experienced is difficult to completely turn around for the sake of a collective-fuelled restorative peacebuilding. The country’s history of abusive democracy by seizing power by the head of state has created a political distrust (Azou-Passonda *et al.*, p.486). This represents an arduous starting point for international support in post-conflict episodes and, as long as the economic sector is run by the head of state, stagnates the recurrent origin of conflict: unequal distribution of resources, power, political participation.

The guiding question encompassing risk for recurrence of conflict will have to be answered with a slightly negative outlook. This paper evaluated the central peacebuilding tools used in the CAR, the society’s reaction to them, and the success’ extent. Although the peace negotiations have become more community-oriented and more accessible with time, there is still a long way to go to realistically restore peace. Research has shown that the combination of socio-economic, political and cultural factors that characterise the CAR, are extremely entwined. It will be a challenge requiring joint effort, both by the Central African and the international community to find a fair, peace restoring agreement that will allow every citizen, albeit ex-combatant, civilian, or elite, to have fair chances within the society. After 30 years of oppressive governance, armed civil conflicts and societal cleavage – a new approach is required (Diatta, 2021).

Briefly evaluating the CAR’s 2019 Peace Agreement, the following aspects are the most important ones:

“The agreement called for an immediate end to all hostilities and forms of violence between the armed groups and against the government, UN staff, and other humanitarian actors, as well as the civilians. Some rebel units would be integrated into the government forces. The armed groups promised not only to put an end to all forms of recruitment efforts but also to participate in the disarmament, demobilization, reintegration, and repatriation program. The government promised to facilitate the disarmament, demobilization, reintegration and repatriation process and include the participation of the armed groups in all structures of the process. The armed groups agreed to put an immediate end to recruitment into armed groups. Regarding the incompatibility, the agreement emphasized that the armed groups would respect "the legitimacy of the country’s democratic institutions, the constitutional order, and the territorial integrity and

unity of the State of the Central African Republic, as well as its republican and secular character" and they would "agree to abstain from any attempt to access or retain power by force." The government agreed to adopt a new act on decentralization. [...] The parties also agreed "to support the organization of elections at the presidential, legislative, regional and municipal levels in a climate of peace." The government also committed to establishing an inclusive Government. The leaders of the signatory groups were offered positions in the government following the agreement.."

(Pettersson *et al.*,2022) – (underlined parts are of interest to prior findings)

These aspects of the 2019 Peace Agreement stand out to be the most characteristic ones in regard to this research project. The paraphrased extract of the Peace Agreement highlights the changed nature of common ground the former belligerent faction were able to identify in CAR. The years of fighting, negotiating, and settling must have left an imprint on the country, both in terms of desiring peace and in working and improving the peace negotiations. In recent years, more displaced Central Africans have returned to the CAR, partly because of the MINUSCA creating a safe space, and ideally a sign for the mending of social cohesion (Crisis Group Africa, 2018). A MINUSCA Officer working in a prison in the CAR wants to change “*the position and perception of women...in the field of security*” by sparking women’s interest in non-traditional roles (Serefio, 2022). The return of formerly displaced people and the community interest in political participation are two highly promising signs for a peacebuilding future in the CAR.

Evaluating all identified tools to attempt a successful peacebuilding process, I conclude that indeed the social, collective cohesion may have a significantly positive impact on restoring peace in the CAR. Mending connections that have been broken for decades caused by external factors like governance and conflict, can help restore trust in the power of community and result in positive concepts like political participation, restoring the rule of law, or entrepreneurship kick-started by DDR programmes or – a renewed social contract.

I believe the findings of the past sections with the CAR as case study shows that the approach of peacebuilding in post-conflict societies does indeed need an alteration. The hypothesis posed in the beginning was: *from a social contract lens, peacebuilding tools need to be more considerate*

of Human Rights approaches as a priority. The impact a more human rights-centred peacebuilding approach could have, will be discussed below.

7. Discussion and Conclusion

This research project started with questioning the role human rights play in peacebuilding measures in post-conflict societies. Post-conflict refers to the episode after an armed conflict's settlement. Peacebuilding measures are an essential part of the post-conflict society to reconcile or rebuild the conflict-affected society. The four components of peacebuilding this thesis has evaluated are UN Peacekeeping Operations, DDR Programmes, Power-Sharing Deals, and Transitional Justice. The precise interest was triggered by employing a social contract lens when pursuing the idea that peacebuilding interventions can reshape the social contract after a disruption caused by war – but hypothesising that this is sometimes not responsive enough to human rights and might fail to sustainably resolve conflict.

The four peacebuilding concepts were investigated closely in the post-conflict context and then applied to the Central African Republic's conflict history from 2000 to 2021. The heavily conflict-affected country is trapped in a vicious cycle of renewing conflict, while battling poverty, drought, and malnutrition. The application of the peacebuilding tool paired with the social contract lens granted interesting insights. The ultimate objective was to identify the role human rights play in this complex pattern.

7 central findings have been identified:

1. Nurturing and restoring society's trust in the peacebuilding process is often underestimated when addressing needs for a post-conflict society.
2. Out of all the tools in Peacebuilding that were investigated, the concept of Reintegration seems to be the most important one when rebuilding a society.
3. Academia finds that very few peacebuilding practices are sufficiently specific for the individual case of a post-conflict society.
4. The role of the international community's contribution is usually welcomed, but precautions should be taken in order not to undermine local peacebuilding efforts.

5. Economic peacebuilding initiatives like cash (re)insertion are often ending in feeling of injustice and then run risk to develop into more severe problems.
6. Concepts or tools like DDR, PKO, Transitional Justice or Power-Sharing can be methods for deployment of post-conflict reparation to the civilians. Other settlement terms are not as accessible to the public, but these tools have the power to promote peace by suggesting social cohesion.
7. Human Rights are often addressed as a non-negotiable part of the agenda, but rarely advocated or seen as a priority. The focus is oftentimes on new governance, institutions, and economic and political recovery for the country.

As discussed above, states are the accountable entities to ensure their citizens are entitled to and granted their rights. Living in an entirely disrupted social order consequently means that the Rule of Law as civilians were used to, is not implemented anymore and therefore an individual's rights cannot be guaranteed anymore. We have defined social contract and its breach as both a potential symptom and consequence for conflict. The contract refers to an unwritten agreement within the society, including rights, responsibilities, and expectations.

But again, how can the social contract be brought into reality to secure human rights in a post-conflict society? I propose envisioning a renewed human rights-rooted social contract approach for peacebuilding in a post-conflict society. Drawing on Groff (2022) claiming that a social contract can be considered a collection of "*shared democratic values that precede policy actions*" (p.721), it seems fitting to build a new approach to peacebuilding on the foundation of human rights as a shared component: rights every individual is born with, and counting with inalienability and indivisibility.

We have established that during and after conflict, civilians cannot count on their basic rights, governance, or society as they know it – and as they have a right to. Some refer to this state as lawlessness that reigns in conflict affected states, which stresses the disorder a civil armed conflict can cause. In lawlessness, academia suggests pursuing a minimum humanitarian standard (Mohamedou, 2003). Now, if the challenge of working for restoring peace was guided by pursuing human rights based on a reciprocal principle ensured by the social contract, the impact this approach could have on post-conflict societies is significant.

In order for this to be realistic, a long way is ahead. Although peacebuilding has managed to represent a very honourable mission in international aid, there is plenty of room to improve – ideally through social cohesion. Re-defining peacebuilding work by including Human Rights in the agenda, seems a promising measure in order to regain civilians’ trust in a renewed, contemporary social contract.

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