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## **Gendered Dimensions of Reparations: Addressing the Harm of Wartime Sexual Violence Through African Feminist Policy Lenses**

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*Abstract*

Given various peace agreements and transitional justice programmes, the gendered aspects of reparations are frequently overlooked, resulting in inadequate retribution for survivors, the majority of whom are women and girls. The paper investigates how African feminist policy ideas might influence reparations frameworks that are both inclusive and transformational. The paper assesses the feasibility of gender-sensitive reparations programmes using empirical evidence from post-conflict settings such as Liberia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Rwanda, highlighting key actions such as establishing survivor-centered reparations funds, incorporating psychosocial care into national health services, and ensuring women's participation in reparations design and monitoring. The paper argues that by focusing on survivors' perspectives and feminist ideals of justice, reparations can serve as both a healing tool and a catalyst for gender-equitable peacebuilding and development on the continent. Finally, the paper contends that reparations must go beyond symbolic gestures and offer survivors with material, psychological, and socioeconomic assistance that truly restores their dignity, agency, and opportunity.

**Keywords:** Wartime Sexual Violence, Gender-Sensitive Reparations, African Feminist Policy, Transitional Justice.

## Introduction

The United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR 1325) on Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) was adopted twenty-five years ago, but women's rights continue to be infringed during and after conflict (Shepherd, 2021). The lack of effective justice and reparations systems for sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) in the aftermath of conflict constitutes a violation of women's rights. Gender has been brought to the forefront by women activists, and sexual assault in war is now recognised as an issue in international law and transitional justice systems. Several countries, such as Sierra Leone, Liberia, Rwanda, and the Democratic Republic of Congo, emerging from African crises have been pushed to consider gender in their transitional justice procedures, mainly as a result of the activism of women's organisations demanding reparation for the numerous instances of gender-based violation. (Sikkink et al., 2024). Reparations for victims of grave human rights violations are becoming a more widely recognised aspect in post-conflict communities dealing with the effects of a violent past.

A reparations programme is a frequently utilised transitional justice method that tries to identify and rectify previous injustices suffered by victims and/or their surviving relatives through the implementation of financial restitution and/or social services (Balasco, 2017). Reparations are increasingly being viewed as a potential path for addressing the socioeconomic structural inequities that have harmed and continue to harm victim survivors. Regardless of the growing importance of transitional justice in peacebuilding agendas, compensation for conflict-related sexual abuse is inconsistent, underfunded, and frequently unsuitable to survivors' lived experiences. Too often, programmes are established as afterthoughts to truth-telling or criminal culpability, and portrayed narrowly as one-time settlement (Moffett, 2017). In addition, most reparations schemes in Africa are ad hoc, fragmented, or externally led, with limited survivor participation and inadequate anchoring in national systems (Southey, 2025). Existing study has looked at reparations from a legal and human rights standpoint, but significantly less attention has been made to the gendered aspects of reparations and the unique issues that African survivors experience in seeking justice, health care, and economic restitution. Furthermore, while international transitional justice frameworks emphasise survivor rights, there has been little systematic consideration of how African Union (AU) frameworks and African feminist approaches might shape context-specific and long-term restitution.

This gap serves as the basis for this study. Therefore, using an African feminist theoretical perspective, the study examines how reparations for wartime sexual assault might become more

possible, beneficial, and transformational. The comparative experiences of Liberia, Rwanda, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo gives an avenue to look at the limitations of existing reparations schemes. Therefore, this study is distinct in that it bridges theory and policy by proposing a survivor-centered evaluative rubric that are compatible with African Union (AU) and Regional Economic Community (REC) frameworks. Also, it increases scholarly understanding of gender-sensitive reparations while simultaneously providing effective assistance for policymakers, civic society, and regional players aiming to ensure that wartime sexual violence reparations become a reality.

### *Methodology*

This study uses a qualitative and case-study design based on a feminist policy analysis framework. Given the intricacy of reparation, a qualitative approach is appropriate. The method enables in-depth engagement with narratives, documents, and practices that shed light on how reparations are designed, implemented, and experienced. Liberia, Rwanda, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo were chosen specifically for their differing conflict trajectories, governmental capabilities, transitional justice structures, and survivor activism. Liberia's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) generated reparations blueprint with low state uptake, Rwanda's centralised, high-capacity reconciliation architecture with strong symbolic reparative action but mixed individualised service delivery, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo's protracted humanitarian crisis with strong civil-society leadership but weak fiscal and legal anchoring all provide contrast that reveals both common mechanisms and context-specific constraints and innovations. The focus is on the post-1990 period, which corresponds to the creation of contemporary transitional justice frameworks and African Union (AU) rules on women, peace, and security. Hence, the study investigates how differences in governmental capacity, transitional justice systems, and civil society activities influence the feasibility of gender-sensitive reparations. Therefore, through purposive case selection and triangulation of documents, the methodology ensures both empirical depth and theoretical contribution.

### *Theoretical Framework: African Feminist Theory*

The struggle for women's rights is where feminism emerged from. Feminism started to grow in Europe and America in the late 1700s, when women realized they were being treated unfairly (Offen, 2000). In reality, feminism focused on the concerns of middle-class white women in Britain and America while pretending to be a movement for the freedom of women all over the world. Feminism asserted its objective as the liberation of all women from sexist oppression, although it neglected to acknowledge the unique circumstances of Black women. African feminisms encompass many types of equalist assumptions and initiatives aimed at improving the condition of African women. African feminists believe that men benefit from patriarchal benefits at the expense of women (Amaefula, 2021). In addition, women's experiences are differentiated by age, displacement, disability, class, ethnicity and sexual orientation. Thus, efforts are made towards reversing perceived injustices instituted against woman, across the ages. The African feminist theory therefore, provides a diverse, context-based corpus of thought that focusses on African women's experiences. African feminist theorizing, developed in dialogue with global feminist currents, is especially apt for a study of reparations for wartime sexual violence because it refuses 'add-women-and-stir' approaches and rather demands transformative outcomes that restore agency, strengthen social bonds, and change the conditions that made violence possible (Leatherman, 2024).

Beyond conceptualizing reparations as technical or legal remedies, the theory advances insight in three key ways. Firstly, it highlights relational personhood, demonstrating that justice must be based on community and social relationships rather than individual recompense. Secondly, it emphasizes intersectionality, highlighting how gender interacts with class, ethnicity, and displacement to influence survivors' experiences and demands. Lastly, it presents a transformative vision in which reparations are about more than just recovering what was lost, but they are also about reconstructing the conditions that allowed violence to occur initially (Moffett, 2023). In basic terms, African feminist theory reframes reparations for wartime sexual abuse as rights-based, survivor-governed, and system-integrated processes that emphasize transformation over restoration. This theoretical viewpoint expands understanding of reparations by connecting material retribution to larger struggle for gender justice and structural transformation in post-conflict African societies.

Wartime sexual violence is a deliberate and systematic tool of violence that armed groups use to terrorise, humiliate, punish, and destroy targeted populations, according to analyses by well-known feminists like Cynthia Enloe, Ruth Seifert, Rhonda Copelon, and Carolyn Nordstrom. These feminist researchers have been instrumental in uncovering the gendered aspects of armed conflict and redefining how wartime sexual assault is perceived within international policy and justice frameworks. For instance, Cynthia Enloe's key work on militarism and gender, for example, highlighted how war is based on deeply gendered power relations, demonstrating how women's bodies and labour are routinely instrumentalised in both conflict and post-conflict reconstruction (Enloe, 2000). Enloe's insistence on 'making the personal political' in international relations paved the way for sexual violence to be recognised as a state obligation rather than a private tragedy. Building on this, Ruth Seifert's seminal account of wartime rape saw sexual violence as a deliberate military strategy used to terrorise populations, split communities, and assert ethnic or political dominance (Seifert, 1996). Her work helped to change legal and policy discourse away from considering rape as opportunistic wrongdoing and towards understanding it as a weapon of war, bolstering arguments for social and structural forms of compensation. Rhonda Copelon expanded feminist legal thought by connecting wartime sexual assault to international human rights and humanitarian law. Her renowned study argues that sexual violence is torture and a serious violation of international law, calling for accountability, survivor-centered solutions, and reparative justice (Copelon, 2000). In addition to these legal and political analyses, Carolyn Nordstrom's anthropological work shed light on the everyday reality of war-affected communities and the lived effects of violence outside of formal battlefields (Nordstrom, 2004).

Therefore, the systematic and widespread rape of women during wartime has led to a clearer understanding of the micro-level elements that lead to the use of sexual violence as a weapon of war in feminist studies. Particularly, some feminist academics have criticised how the worldwide criminalisation of sexual violence during times of conflict can minimise or deny women's sexual agency (Kozioimtzis, 2020). Postmodernist feminists have also argued that Western feminists have frequently focused on rape as the universal experience of women, overlooking the diverse realities of victims and the intersecting forms of marginalisation they face. In doing so, it has tended to portray women as passive and vulnerable subjects of law, whose identities are shaped rather than contested through their subjection. It also singles out women's sexuality as the primary source of oppression, thereby reinforcing the notion of the sexed body as an unavoidable site of sexual violence (Carrington, 2017). Understanding the complexity, contradiction, and diversity of sexual violence perpetrators, victims, and legal solutions is therefore, made easier with the help of these feminist critiques. They

offer deep and complex insights into sexual abuse and the various ways that helplessness and marginalization might appear.

While embracing intersectionality, African feminist thought insists on grounded analysis. Kreft (2019) asserts that there is no generic ‘woman’ that is affected by wartime sexual violence. It impacts women in rural and urban areas differently, as well as teenagers and widows, displaced people, women with disabilities, sex workers, and LGBTQ+ individuals. Also, it frequently transcends racial and religious boundaries. Reparations created through this lens broaden eligibility criteria, guarantee anonymity, allow for various access methods, and allocate funds for appropriate accommodation. Intersectionality also reframes children born of rape as rights-holders in need of documentation, education, and protection from discrimination, which are the essential parts of reparative justice rather than peripheral benefits (Kreft, 2023).

Furthermore, African feminist theory recommends strategic engagement and collaboration with legitimate customary authorities to reinterpret norms in ways that promote women's rights, while drawing clear red lines when practices repeat harm (O’Rourke, 2017). For reparations, Dunn (2017) they contend that they may include community-vetted land allocations for survivors, backed by statutory titles, or traditional apology ceremonies supported by state-funded medical and economic packages. Also, African feminist thought emphasises that acknowledgement is more than just acknowledging damages; it is about reinstating agency. Across the three case studies, Liberia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Rwanda, truth-seeking tools addressed sexual abuse, but survivors' ability to shape reparative rules was limited.

The case studies highlight the friction between legal pluralism and rights baselines, bringing to essence African feminist analysis that points to pragmatic negotiation that involves customary actors where they can help reduce stigma or facilitate local land allocations, but binds those negotiations to statutory protections (Atim et al., 2018). In practice, this calls for data security to avoid re-victimization, decentralized, trauma-informed delivery, and streamlined evidential standards that acknowledge the realities of sexual violence. Fletcher and Weinstein (2002) avers that one common issue is that survivors are left vulnerable when reparative procedures are implemented without concurrent protection changes. African feminist frameworks emphasize that restoring a person necessitates restoring the social structures that uphold dignity (Gouws & Van Zyl, 2015).

Hence, it is imperative to note that the hurdle is not a lack of ideas, but rather the politics of enacting those ideas in legislation, budgets, and organisations. African feminist theory does not provide an easy technological solution, but rather the political strategy required to guide technical designs towards justice that is locally legitimate, long-lasting, and emancipatory. This approach serves as the foundation for the paper's literature review, case analysis, and policy recommendations, ensuring that the proposals are analytically sound while grounded in African-led solutions.

## **Overview of Wartime Sexual Violence in Africa**

Sexual violence during wartime is arguably one of the most horrifying and poorly understood aspects of modern conflict. Wartime sexual assault has been prevalent in several African conflicts. Ofongo (2024) contends that it is a pervasive, diverse issue that has marked many of the continent's conflicts from the late twentieth century to the current moment, such as conflicts in Central African Republic (CAR), Chad, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Ethiopia, Nigeria, Somalia, and Sudan, as well as in Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, and northern Uganda. The term 'wartime sexual violence' refers to a variety of coercive sexual acts that are committed by state actors, non-state armed groups, militias, and opportunistic civilians during periods of armed violence and displacement (Kushner, 2021). These acts include rape, sexual slavery, forced prostitution, forced pregnancy and childbearing, sexual mutilation, enforced sterilisation, and sexual humiliation (Nordås & Cohen, 2021).

Rape has always resulted in direct physical pain, trauma, and social isolation for the victim. Wilson and Cook (2021) affirm that women are increasingly, and sometimes intentionally, infected with HIV through wartime sexual rape. Sexual violence was rampant during Sierra Leone's violent conflict. Thousands of women and girls of various ages, ethnicities, and socioeconomic backgrounds were exposed to widespread and systemic sexual assault, including individual and gang rape. Velte (2023) avers that rape was committed by both sides, but mostly by rebel forces of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC), and the West Side Boys, an AFRC splinter organisation. During Algeria's civil war, armed Islamist groups kidnapped women and girls from nearby communities, raped them, slaughtered the majority, and held others captive to cook and perform other household duties (Flood, 2017). In northern Uganda, young girls were forced into sexual servitude as 'wives' to Lord's Resistance Army commanders, who expose them to rape and other sexual assault (Gustafsson, 2023). According to Fitzpatrick (2016), at least 200,000 women

were raped in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, over 60,000 in Sierra Leone's civil war, and over 40,000 in Liberia's conflict. Between 100,000 and 250,000 women were raped in Rwanda during the 1994 genocide, which lasted three months.

Survivors face far-reaching and diverse consequences. Physically, survivors may suffer acute injuries, sexually transmitted infections like HIV, obstetric difficulties, and illnesses such as fistula; many require long-term medical care, which is typically unavailable in post-conflict contexts (Tenaw et al., 2022). In terms of psychology, Yigzaw et al. (2023) assert that sexual violence during conflict causes higher rates of anxiety, sadness, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and complex grieving, which are made worse by the disintegration of social networks. Economically, survivors frequently face loss of livelihoods, isolation from markets, being denied inheritance or land rights, and dependency, which can exacerbate impoverishment (Atim et al., 2018). Socially, stigma and humiliation can result in ostracism, marital breakdown, or destructive customary reconciliations that emphasise community cohesion above survivors' rights (Pitino, 2021).

Sexual violence prominence has led to both international and continental normative and legal developments, such as the acknowledgement of systematic rape as a crime against humanity and a war tactic, historic indictments and convictions by national and international courts, and policy frameworks that prioritise women, peace, and security (Wasserman, 2016). Internationally, the acknowledgement of wartime sexual violence under international criminal law, as well as the adoption of UN Security Council resolutions on women, peace, and security, have resulted in obligations and redressal mechanisms. The International Criminal Court and ad hoc tribunals have prosecuted sexual violence as a crime against humanity, setting significant precedents (Altunjan, 2021).

## **Global Perspectives on Reparations and Gender**

Global viewpoints on reparations and gender have shifted dramatically over the last three decades, from a minor concern in transitional justice to an increasingly significant, although still contentious, strand of both normative discourse and policy practice. According to Pam (2020), wartime rape is now explicitly considered as a crime beyond a crime; a violation of 'humanness' and an infraction against all of humanity. Rape and other sexual violence are now officially and publicly recognised as unique crimes that are punishable under international criminal law. Laverty (2024) asserts that this

change in thinking has affected the policy recommendations of international organisations, which now support trauma-informed procedures, privacy protections, decentralised delivery, integrated packages of psychological, medical, and financial support, and survivors' participation in planning and monitoring. Thus, wartime sexual impacts are slowly being seen as separate types of effects that need unique ways to make things right.

The global agenda has been dominated by efforts to prevent and respond to wartime sexual violence. Much of the international community's efforts have been directed on building the normative and institutional frameworks necessary to hold individuals criminally accountable under international law. Clark (2017) avers that the 1998 Rome Statute, which established the ICC, broadened the definition of crimes against humanity and war crimes to include rape, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, forced pregnancy, enforced sterilisation, trafficking, and all other kinds of sexual violence. The Hague-based International Criminal Court (ICC), established as the first permanent international criminal tribunal, was created as a court of final resort to punish offences where national courts faltered (Plagbe, 2023).

Durbach et al. (2017) assert that during the first reparations hearings in Lubanga, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which took place between 2012 and 2016, the ICC found some use for the demand for transformative reparations for victims of sexual violence during wartime. In their arguments, the ICC's Trust Fund for Victims and the Women's Initiatives for Gender Justice urged the court to think about creating transformative reparations principles that would apply to all of the case's victims, including women and girls who were sexually abused during the war (Ainley & Kersten, 2024). The 2007 Nairobi Declaration on Women and Girls' Right to Remedy and Reparation stressed that 'reparation must promote post-conflict reform of socio-cultural injustices, and political and structural disparities that define the lives of women and girls.' (Williams & Opdam, 2017).

In addition, the United Nations Security Council has passed at least three resolutions addressing wartime sexual violence. Security Council Resolution 1888, adopted on September 30, 2009, recommends that the United Nations Secretary-General designate a Special Representative on the subject and form a team of specialists to collaborate with nations to avoid and resolve it (Patton, 2012). Security Council Resolution 1820 (2008), which calls for 'the immediate and complete cessation by all parties to armed conflict of all acts of sexual violence against civilians with immediate effect', and Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000), which discusses the effects of war and conflict on women and emphasises the need to protect women and girls from human rights abuses, preceded

the adoption of Resolution 1888 (Swaine, 2009). The mandates of several multilateral peacekeeping missions in Africa, such as those in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), Burundi (BINUB), Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI), Darfur (UNAMID), and Liberia (UNMIL), have also included clauses on the protection of civilians and the advancement of human rights, including references to sexual and gender-based violence (Day, 2020).

The realisation of the right to reparations in post-conflict settings is profoundly shaped by the context in which it is exercised, including the legal and institutional frameworks for claiming reparations, the scope of eligible claims, and the capacity of states and institutions to support reparations awards. It is further influenced by the need to reconcile competing political priorities such as national security, reconciliation, reconstruction, and development as well as by determinations of eligibility and responsibility. Consequently, despite its international recognition, the right to reparations is often realised only partially or symbolically. Additionally, according to Anyeko et al. (2021), reports indicate that postwar procedures such as truth commissions and prosecutions, as well as formal justice, view sexual violence as a female problem and portray women as helpless victims in need of male rescue. It is significant to emphasise that providing justice to women who suffered systematic abuses during wartime sexual violence is a crucial component of nation's post-conflict reconstruction. Global viewpoints show a continuous paradigm shift; reparations are increasingly seen as tools for social repair and structural transformation rather than only as compensation for past wrongs. Now, gendered dimensions play a key role in that change.

## **African-led Approaches and Grassroots Initiatives**

African-led efforts and grassroots attempts to combat wartime sexual violence are distinguished by their rootedness in local contexts and pragmatic hybridity, which combines customary, religious, and statutory practices. Among the various ways to tackling histories of brutality and violence, Miyamoto (2024) contends that some progress can be found in the understanding of the necessity to address gender-based human rights violations as a key aspect of coping with the social scars of conflict. Indeed, several African cases have been praised as ground-breaking, considerably increasing the awareness of gender and the need for reparation. These initiatives not only copy international patterns, but also recast reparative goals into culturally comprehensible, politically navigable, and institutionally practicable forms that respond to constrained state capacity and the pressing needs of victims (Brandão, 2023).

African discussions on transitional justice have sparked debate about the possible role of traditional peace and justice systems, as well as whether they can be tailored to meet the requirements of societies that have witnessed mass violations (McEvoy, 2017). The most well-known example is Rwanda's gacaca court system, which many see as a good revival of the application of indigenous knowledge of justice and reconciliation (Mokoena & Nshimiyimana, 2025). At the end of the genocide in 1994, an estimated 120 000 culprits were detained, and it was projected that it would take more than 110 years to bring charges against all of the detainees in national tribunals (Horovitz, 2015). Thus, gacaca courts were established to expedite the procedure. These were meant to be community courts, presided over by village elders in front of the entire community, and anyone might be asked to testify during the session. According to Hinton (2015), the court sentences were often remedial in nature, requiring the criminal to engage in community-oriented work.

Instead of relying primarily on international players, African coalitions have forced national legislatures and ministries to establish victim-sensitive evidence standards, confidentiality safeguards, and funding lines for reparations (Alegejuh, 2025). Local women's coalitions and survivor networks have achieved significant jurisprudential and policy victories through innovative litigation, parliamentary advocacy, and regular engagement with truth commissions. These advocacy victories are frequently the result of a combination of grassroots pressure and the strategic use of national and regional human-rights procedures. For example, Ubuntu is the Zulu and Xhosa word for a concept that has to do with the essential human virtues, including compassion and humanity. Ubuntu appeared in South African English literary and political thought during the Black Consciousness era. Associated with African humanism and socialism, Patel et al. (2024) aver that ubuntu aims to combat European greed, selfishness, and the demeaning treatment shown to black South Africans. Ubuntu was crucial to the TRC's attempt to combat a lingering sense of victimhood and a desire for vengeance. Women were the caretakers of household and communal morals, thereby keeping ubuntu alive (Dladla, 2024). Furthermore, in the TRC, forgiveness was feminised, and women's voices were frequently exploited to make decisions about whether forgiveness would be granted and humanity bestowed (Anofuechi, 2022).

In many cases, grassroots organisations have negotiated hybrid solutions that turn community allocations into enforceable legislative entitlements. For instance, having a community-endorsed land or housing allocations, which are then turned into legally registered titles through streamlined titling pathways, facilitated by local women's networks and paralegal groups (Zawati, 2023). These hybrids

maintain communal acceptance while safeguarding survivors from future expropriation; this is a realistic reconciliation of multiple legal orders that balances cultural legitimacy and legal security. Faced with persistent underfunding, many grassroots efforts draw on community finances, rotating savings plans, and contributions from diasporas to maintain services (Enyia, 2024). In other cases, local efforts have persuaded extractive corporations to contribute to community reparative funds, while diaspora bonds or targeted crowdfunding have supplemented state and donor contributions. Fernandes (2022) assert that while these mechanisms are frequently stopgaps, they also exhibit budgetary inventiveness and community ownership. Hence, African-led and grassroots initiatives offer a pragmatic, culturally sensitive, and transformational reparations pathway. Their initiatives demonstrate that reparative justice can be locally valid, experientially meaningful, and politically viable.

## **Empirical Case Studies: African Experiences with Gender Reparations**

The country case studies below demonstrate how African-led solutions are not simply local alternatives, but normative assets of reparations that provided a blueprint for continent-wide policy.

### *DRC*

According to Banwell (2020), the DRC is one of the most severe, protracted, and complicated theatres of conflict-related sexual violence in Africa. Mass rape, sexual slavery, and systemic gendered attacks are well documented. However, in 2003, the DRC established a Truth and Reconciliation Commission as part of its peacebuilding efforts, with the goal of addressing wartime sexual violence. The TRC, established under the conditions of the 2002 peace deal, was intended to examine widespread human rights violations. Rose (2025) asserts that a noteworthy advance in the issue of reparations has been the delivery of reparations by military tribunals in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Seven army soldiers were found guilty in April 2006 by a military court in Mbdandaka of mass raping over 119 women (the UN estimates that the number was over 200) at Songo Mboyo in 2003, and they were convicted in accordance with the Rome Statute, which the DRC signed in 1998 (Scanlon & Muddell, 2009). This was the first-time rape was tried as a crime against humanity in the DRC, and it was also the first-time military men were sentenced for such crimes. The officers had turned against their superiors and assaulted the villages of Songo Mboyo and Bongandanga. They

received life terms for the destruction of the villages and the mass rape, and the ruling compelled each victim's family to receive US \$10,000 in restitution (Rose, 2025).

Furthermore, humanitarian and medical actors, such as Panzi Hospital, have provided crucial clinical and psychosocial care while also pushing for reparative justice at the national, regional, and international levels (Vidale-Plaza, 2024). The DRC has witnessed a patchwork of reactions in the areas of law and reparations. Gesase (2019) contends that international mechanisms such as ICC proceedings and the ICC Trust Fund for Victims (TFV) have provided assistance and reparations for some victims, that domestic courts have occasionally issued awards, and that numerous NGOs and local women's organisations have piloted livelihood projects, mobile clinics, and one-stop centres. The Trust Fund's mission in the eastern DRC demonstrates how international reparative instruments can provide concrete medical, psychosocial, and community rehabilitation programmes when perpetrators are unable to pay. However, the TFV initiatives also reveal constraints, including incomplete coverage, slow deadlines, and the inability of foreign programs to replace state-led, systemic reparations anchored in health, justice, and social safety systems (van den Buijs, 2025). African-led solutions in the DRC demonstrate resilient, contextually relevant methods, such as trauma-sensitive surgical and mental health care, cooperative reintegration, and survivor-led advocacy, which inform what reparative programming can look like on a large scale. The DRC demonstrates that international reparations and aid can catalyse services and set standards. However, sustainability and legitimacy depend on centring African players and institutionalising reparative commitments into national budgets and service systems (Ainley & Kersten, 2024).

### *Liberia*

The Liberian civil wars (1989-2003) resulted in widespread and systematic sexual and gender-based violence, which the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) meticulously recorded and classified as a war tactic. Varela Baltier (2019) argues that the TRC's final report included specific suggestions for reparations to survivors of sexual violence, including both material and community-level measures, and called for institutional improvements to prevent repetition. Advocates continue to point out discrepancies between aspirational suggestions and the realities of survivors' access to health, psychosocial care, land, and livelihoods, and successive administrations have been sluggish to turn TRC recommendations into funded, institutionalised programmes (Gorpuđolo, 2019). In areas where government responses were inadequate, civil society organisations, particularly women's groups and survivor networks, have played a crucial role in maintaining pressure for reparative

measures, launching psychosocial services, and establishing economic cooperatives for survivors (Stella, 2018). A fundamental lesson from Liberia is highlighted by the continuation of impunity and the unequal political will for reparations. However, truth commissions can produce a reparative blueprint; recommendations remain primarily aspirational in the absence of institutional ownership, budgeted state commitments, and legal mechanisms (Traore, 2025).

### *Rwanda*

A different but informative example is provided by Rwanda's post-1994 transitional justice system, which was based on Gacaca courts, national prosecutions, and various social and memorialisation initiatives and according to Mwambari (2023), Rwanda explored several social repair strategies, such as commemoration, local-level restorative processes, and efforts to incorporate survivors into national healing programmes, in response to the magnitude and severity of genocide rape, which created an urgent need for acknowledgement and assistance. However, professionals and scholars point out that although Gacaca was a pioneer in gaining access to community-level justice, it was not always successful in providing gender-sensitive reparations due to unequal confidentiality protections, a lack of uniform integration of trauma-informed medical and psychosocial services into the post-Gacaca reparative architecture, and economic measures that frequently failed to address long-term needs like land or sustainable livelihoods (Oomen, 2016). The long-term socioeconomic harms unique to survivors of sexual violence and children of rape remained unresolved despite the government of Rwanda's push for national unity and swift reconciliation, which includes significant symbolic reparative acts like commemoration sites and legal reforms for women's rights and land (Gavrielides, 2020). Large-scale community justice systems can increase access to justice, as demonstrated by Rwanda's experience, but in order to prevent injustice from being repeated, intentional, concurrent investment in gender-sensitive reparative services and legal protections is needed.

The case studies above highlight some level of similarities and differences. All three situations demonstrate that acknowledging sexual violence in official truth-telling or justice tools is important but insufficient for reparative results; administrative ability, political will, and public funding are needed for translation. Practical innovation is constantly driven by African-led civil society and survivor organisations, but their reach is limited when state mechanisms are unable to adopt and scale successful trials (de Coning & Tchier, 2023). When used in survivor-centred ways, customary authority and community processes can legitimise restitution and lessen stigma. However, they can also reinforce retraumatizing norms if rights-based protections are not accompanied. When the case

studies are compared, it becomes clear that Rwanda's robust state capacity enabled national memorial and legal reforms but left gaps in individualised reparative services; Liberia's TRC produced thorough recommendations but limited implementation. The DRC's humanitarian and medical response, primarily led by practitioners, highlights the need to align reparative law and funding with clinical excellence. Three operational priorities are shared by the lessons learnt from the three cases they are integrating reparations into the current health and social protection systems; institutionalising survivor participation and co-governance of reparations funds; and developing hybrid financing models that combine international trust funds, resource-linked mechanisms, and national budgets while maintaining state accountability (Alegejuh, 2025).

## **Discussion of Findings**

The African feminist movement has played and continues to play a defining and varied role in avoiding, documenting, challenging, and resolving wartime sexual violence. Rather than a single, monolithic actor, this movement is a dense system of grassroots survivor networks, local women's organisations, feminist legal clinics, faith-informed women's groups, academic centres, regional coalitions, and global alliances. Collectively, these players have transformed sexual abuse from a private shame into a public policy concern, redefined the norms of reparative justice, and produced realistic models for delivery and oversight (Howe, 2018). At the level of agenda-setting, feminist movements have played an essential part in reframing wartime sexual violence as a rights violation with systemic causes and long-term implications. Women's coalitions used sustained activism to force truth commissions, parliaments, and international actors to include sexual violence in mandates, recommend restitution, and address gender-differentiated harms in official findings. This political activity altered the policy landscape; where formerly sexual violence was an unintended consequence of conflict; it now features in transitional justice programmes and national gender strategies.

For instance, grassroots feminist groups have utilised a variety of techniques to demand that their issues be addressed during peace talks in Sudan, Uganda, and Liberia, among others. In 2003, Liberian women organised under the auspices of the Women in Peacebuilding Network (WIPNET) to seek an unconditional ceasefire, a negotiated settlement, and the presence of the international community in Liberia (Rountree, 2019). A group of women convened a parallel meeting during the 2003 Ghanaian peace negotiations, which was attended by no women, and produced 'The Golden Tulip Declaration'. They then used their bodies as human shields to blockade the stalled peace

negotiations physically and insisted that an agreement be struck. (Scanlon & Muddell, 2009). These instances show to a large extent that feminist movements are not peripheral but integral to the design and delivery of reparations.

Furthermore, violence shatters networks of belonging. Ubuntu-inspired approaches, for example, emphasise both individual (medical care, legal recognition, livelihood support) and collective measures (memorialisation, women's centres, safe spaces). This supports the theoretical premise that reparations must progress beyond compensation to become transformative measures of social reconstruction. This implies two things. In order for survivors to reintegrate into society without stigma, reparations must first be both individual and collective. This means that, in addition to providing medical care, income support, and legal recognition, community-level initiatives such as memorialisation, public apologies, women's centres, safe markets, and social norm changes must also be implemented. Second, to address the institutions that confer safety and dignity in daily life, non-repetition assurances need to be both relational and structural (Diouf et al., 2023). This is significant because the previous section of this study found persistent shortcomings in reparations: low survivor participation, fragmented initiatives, and poor integration into governmental structures. Feminist activism addresses these gaps by framing sexual violence as a rights violation requiring structural solutions and by modelling participatory approaches that centre survivors in programme design and monitoring. It also embeds reparations within broader struggles for social and gender transformation, rather than merely restoring an unequal pre-conflict status quo.

On the legal and policy front, feminist movements have engaged in strategic litigation, drafted legislative proposals, and advocated for gender-sensitive rules and confidentiality protections. They have compelled courts to identify sexual violence as a component of reparable harm, pushed parliaments to create budget lines for victims, and collaborated with truth commissions to transform recommendations into tangible reparative measures (Batagol & Seear, 2024). The growing use of popular tribunals by women's groups reflects developing efforts to balance two core concerns among women's human rights advocates. The first is to mitigate the risk of re-victimisation for women victims of gender crimes in formal, top-down legal proceedings. The second is to express a commitment to 'objective' ideals of justice, transparency, and accountability, and to appropriate the legitimacy and power of the law to promote genuine equality and human rights for women (Foday, 2025).

It is vital to note that, while conventional frameworks promote restoration (back to the pre-conflict status quo), African feminisms urge for transformation because the pre-conflict status quo was inherently gender unequal. Thus, African feminist movements serve as the driving force behind reparative innovation. They identify needs, develop culturally appropriate solutions, urge governments to act, provide frontline services, establish accountability mechanisms, and prioritise survivor dignity. Their combination of ethical advocacy, pragmatic co-design, and institutional ingenuity renders them essential to any meaningful reparations' strategy. For reparations to be transformative, governments must not only listen to feminist movements, but also establish formal, sponsored collaborations that translate grassroots legitimacy into legislative rights and viable public systems.

## **Conclusion and Contribution to Knowledge**

Reparations for wartime sexual abuse in Africa are more than just a moral or symbolic gesture; they are a legal requirement and a practical demand for peacebuilding, social justice, and gender equality. The analysis of Liberia, Rwanda, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo shows that, while acknowledging sexual assault within truth commissions and transitional justice systems as an important initial step, it does not provide substantial reparation. The literature on gender sensitive reparations suggests that it should address systemic hurdles prior to the war and not only repair, but transform (Gamakharia & Cárdenas, 2025). Transformative reparations must attempt to rebuild economic, social, and political ties that oppress and expose women to violence.

The necessity to consider wartime sexual violence against women and its consequences in post-conflict circumstances has provided a vital foundation for the emergence of gender justice concerns. However, there is growing concern that focusing on wartime sexual violence in African contexts may obscure the need for a more comprehensive approach to women's rights. Another issue is that existing women's organisations and movements are sometimes overlooked when developing transitional justice procedures. It is critical to note that the scope of wartime sexual violence against women, as well as the resources required to manage its long-term consequences, necessitate the use of a variety of approaches. The various forms of women's hearings, such as transitional justice processes, have distinct limitations: the number of participants is limited, as is the mandate and capacity to provide reparations. However, perhaps the most significant reparative strategy is the establishment of a secure

and responsive forum for women survivors to articulate their suffering, one that is planned and administered in collaboration with survivors and their advocates.

Furthermore, ongoing implementation gaps limit the scope and transformative potential of reparations. These shortcomings emphasise the key premise of this paper, that is, reparations that are not survivor-centred, gender-responsive, and structurally anchored within national systems will remain fragmented and ineffectual (le Roux, 2025). African feminist theory offers a paradigm for overcoming this deadlock by reframing reparations as transformational, relational, and participatory. Hence, the contribution of this research to knowledge is divided into three sections; conceptually, it connects African feminist theory to transitional justice practice, providing a normative framework that prioritises agency, negotiation, intersectionality, and structural transformation. Empirically, it compares three high-impact African cases, emphasising the successes, limitations, and innovations of African-led interventions in those cases. In practice, it transforms theory into a rigorous evaluation rubric and a sequential implementation path based on survivor priorities. Therefore, reparations are reframed as a cornerstone of gender-equitable peacebuilding and governance in Africa, rather than a post-conflict afterthought.

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## **Declaration of Interest Statement**

The author has reported no potential conflict of interest.

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