

No Readership for Peace? American News Media Coverage of Transitional Justice in South
Africa and Sierra Leone

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Submitted to the graduate degree program in African and African-American Studies and the
Graduate Faculty of the University of Kansas in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of Master of Arts.

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Date Defended: April 29, 2014

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Date approved: May 16, 2014

Abstract

This thesis examines how the *New York Times*, *Chicago Tribune*, and *Los Angeles Times* covered and represented the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and Special Court for Sierra Leone in Sierra Leone. This work discusses the complexities of transitional justice, especially focusing on the role of amnesty and the question of effectiveness in each country's process. Literature analyzing Africa in the American media and the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission in the South African media is also considered in order to highlight how Africa has been covered in the media, and why this research—the first to look at African transitional justice in the American media—is unique. The methodology investigates the frequency of reporting on the processes in each newspaper, and how the coverage and characterization of peacebuilding differs between the two countries. The South African Commission received steady coverage in all three newspapers, while Sierra Leone's processes saw little reporting in comparison to the ongoing conflict in neighboring Liberia. How, and how often, these transitional justice processes were written about reveals that American media consumers receive information about peace and peacebuilding in African countries that is driven largely by a focus on crisis and high-profile figures, as well as a biased and stereotypical view of conflict in Africa.

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Introduction

We often hear criticism of the news today in the United States as being too negative, too violent. The idea that the news focuses on a crisis narrative is not a new one. The dominance of this narrative has the potential to influence not only the types of stories that are reported on, but the inability of a publication's or channel's audience to put together an image of the world as a whole. The African continent, for instance, becomes a fragmented entity that is characterized only by ethnic conflicts and civil wars that have no end in sight, with headlines dominated by self-obsessed, power-hungry politicians and dictators. In fact, few African countries have historically received any attention from the American press at all, regardless of any states of peace or conflict. For example, in the magazines *Time* and *Newsweek* from 1989 to 1991, nearly all of the African coverage focused on South Africa, with only a single article on Kenya, and a few others considered Africa as a whole.¹ While coverage of the African continent today has become more extensive, especially with the growth of the internet, the media still seems to rely heavily on the slogan of "if it bleeds, it leads." Even more important is whether or not the "bleeding" at hand is of interest to the international community.

What about when wars and crises *do* end? Or when countries start the processes of rebuilding their governments with new leaders, laws, and constitutions? What kind of coverage, if any, do those countries see at the end of the bloodshed? It probably comes as no surprise that coverage of peace is often minimal at best. While South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) saw extensive coverage in the American news media, few other post-conflict processes have garnered the same amount of press. The governments of South Africa and Sierra Leone, the two countries of focus in this thesis, each utilized transitional justice processes—

¹ Jerry Domatob, "Coverage of Africa in American Popular Magazines," *Issue: A Journal of Opinion* 22, no. 1 (Winter-Spring 1994), 27.

Truth and Reconciliation Commissions in both countries, as well as a war crimes tribunal in Sierra Leone—in their attempts to rebuild their nations following years of unrest and turmoil. South Africa was transitioning out of the tumultuous era of apartheid into a new democracy, and Sierra Leone was beginning to rebuild after a decade-long civil war that destroyed the country economically, politically, and socially. Even though these were peaceful processes, intended to foster reconciliation and rebuilding, telling truths and rewriting histories, American mainstream news coverage still tended to focus on big names and stories of crisis: what awful truths were revealed in amnesty hearings rather than how the average citizen responded to these stories, or the ongoing conflicts in neighboring countries instead of the attempts at peacebuilding already occurring.

Whether or not these kinds of processes even receive coverage is often largely dependent on the American readers' perceptions of the countries themselves and their place on the world stage. South Africa's TRC received nearly continuous coverage, while the Commission in Sierra Leone received practically none. Stories of South Africa questioned the role of amnesty, or the future of race relations within the country; stories of Sierra Leone were overshadowed by the conflict next-door in Liberia, and the question of intervention in order to ensure peace in not only the country, but the entire region. A vocal contingent of Americans were heavily invested in seeing a successful new democracy emerge in South Africa, as in the 1980s they had led anti-apartheid protests and pressured the U.S. government into placing sanctions on the apartheid government. Perhaps one could argue that Americans were less interested in ensuring a peaceful transition in Sierra Leone—but the U.S. government's involvement in the peacekeeping operations in neighboring Liberia indicated at the very least a diplomatic interest in promoting and maintaining peace in West Africa. Most coverage relating to Sierra Leone focused either on

the warlords on trial through the Special Court for Sierra Leone (SCSL), the country's war crimes tribunal, or, to a greater extent, indictment and vilification of Liberian president Charles Taylor by the SCSL and the international community, respectively. Could a lack of coverage of Sierra Leone's TRC indicate an obsession with personality over peacemaking, as well as an obsession with "saving" African nations rather than actually seeing them succeed once their conflicts have ended? How does this contrast with the interest in and reportage of the Commission in South Africa, whose situation American citizens had already expressed an interest in for over a decade?

It is my intent for this project to analyze American media coverage of the TRC in South Africa, and the TRC and SCSL in Sierra Leone in order to understand the characterizations of these transitional justice processes. The world had its eye on South Africa and its transition into a new democracy; however, the American media paid much less attention to other similar processes across the continent. How do major newspapers report on transitional justice in South Africa versus in Sierra Leone? Specifically, what aspects of the methods and operations do they focus on, and how do they differ between the two countries? Through the coverage of these different processes, I will show how the crisis narrative and obsession with high-profile figures, as well as a biased and stereotypical view of conflict in Africa, drives what information we receive, or do not receive, about peace and peacebuilding in these countries. In my first chapter, I will discuss the processes of transitional justice used in each country, and examine the scholarly research that has looked at Africa has been covered in the American media. Because of the lack of scholarly work analyzing American media coverage of the TRC or SCSL, I will also discuss analyses of South African media coverage of the TRC, in order to see what *has* been explored

regarding transitional justice in the media, and how this research has informed my own conclusions.

In my second chapter, I will analyze the American news media's representation and characterization of the practices in South Africa and Sierra Leone. My primary source research will be taken from three major American newspapers: the *New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, and *Chicago Tribune*.² Each of these newspapers, during the time periods analyzed, had either their own Africa bureaus or Africa-based correspondents who reported from the continent. I will analyze news articles and op-eds published during the two-year timeframes in which the transitional justice processes in each country occurred: 1996 to 1998 for South Africa, and 2002 to 2004 for Sierra Leone. Because I intend to focus on characterization and representation, I will read selections from each newspaper and analyze what is discussed, as well as attempt to place this study into the context of the scholarly discussions of Africa in the media and TRCs. My focus will rely on specific themes or topics that saw the most coverage, and discussions of why they received such attention. Are there differences and similarities between the three newspapers in what, or who, dominates the headlines in each post-conflict peacebuilding process? Does each newspaper report on topics in similar ways? My analysis of South African-related headlines focuses on the question of amnesty and on specific personalities, specifically the cases of Steve Biko, Amy Biehl, Winnie Madikizela-Mandela, and P. W. Botha. Analysis of Sierra Leonean-related headlines will focus on personalities, specifically that of Liberian president Charles Taylor, and crisis in the region. While many articles focus specifically on the TRC in South

² I have been asked why I have not chosen the *Washington Post*, and this is due to a lack of available online archives for the years that I am examining. The *New York Times*, and the *Los Angeles Times* to a lesser extent, are praised for their international coverage. The *Chicago Tribune*, while less praised, offered a comparable amount of original coverage of the topics discussed here. It can be noted that one of the *Tribune*'s Africa correspondents, Paul Salopek, has received numerous awards for his coverage of Africa, including the 2001 Pulitzer Prize for International Reporting. "Paul Salopek – Biography," *The Pulitzer Prizes*, accessed April 9, 2014, <http://www.pulitzer.org/biography/2001-International-Reporting-Group2>.

Africa, fewer exist that look at either Sierra Leone's TRC or the SCSL. It is important to see in what other ways Sierra Leone is mentioned during this time period—namely, within the context of neighboring Liberia's conflict, as well as in discussions of the role of Western, especially American, intervention in the region. The media highlighted the peace process in South Africa, but preferred to focus on conflict in West Africa, ignoring the reconciliatory and retributive procedures in Sierra Leone that could have offered another perspective on the potential for peace in Liberia. This in particular is where I will address the issues of representation and characterization in the media.

Transitional Justice and Africa in the Media

Defining Transitional Justice

The International Center for Transitional Justice defines transitional justice as “an approach to achieving justice in times of transition from conflict and/or state repression” which includes “criminal prosecutions, truth commissions, reparations programs, and various kinds of institutional reforms.”³ Kingsley Chiedu Moghalu describes it as a “phenomenon and processes by which a society utilizes legal and quasi-legal institutions to facilitate *fundamental change* from one political order to another or the construction of a new reality against the background of a profound historical memory.”⁴ The process emphasizes looking to the past in order to confront wrong-doings in a nation or society’s history, as well as looking to the future in terms of rebuilding and reconciling that nation or society.⁵ Pierre Hazan outlines its three stages of growth: the first phase was characterized by the truth commissions in Latin America in the 1980s and 1990s, followed by the establishment of international courts in response to “the multiplication of ethnic identity conflicts” in countries such as Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s, and finally, to its current phase in which it is considered “a utopia for rebuilding societies,” but has also seen “the institutionalization and ... professionalization of its institutions and practices.”⁶ This third phase includes the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa, and the TRC and Special Court in Sierra Leone, the focus of this work.

³ “What is Transitional Justice?” International Center for Transitional Justice, accessed April 10, 2014, <http://ictj.org/about/transitional-justice>.

⁴ Kingsley Chiedu Moghalu, “Prosecute or Pardon?” in *Peace Versus Justice? The Dilemma of Transitional Justice in Africa*, ed. Chandra Lekha Sriram and Suren Pillay (Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2009), 75. Moghalu worked with the United Nations from 1992 to 2006, and served as the Special Counsel and Spokesman of the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 75.

⁶ Pierre Hazan, *Judging War, Judging History: Behind Truth and Reconciliation* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), 29.

Transitional justice as we recognize it today initially arose as a mechanism used throughout Latin America following the dismantling of numerous. The truth commissions in countries such as Argentina and Chile offered an opportunity for the public to finally learn outright what had happened to loved ones, political figures, and others affected by state-sponsored terror such as disappearings, imprisonment and torture. At the same time, the commissions were a compromise, a peaceful option: while trials may have led to further destabilization in countries that were already on unstable ground, “truth commissions seemed less confrontational while still not ignoring the violations and doing something for victims.”⁷

Transitional justice has since developed into a variety of processes and mechanisms on an increasingly international level. For example, truth commissions have transformed into truth and reconciliation commissions (TRC) and have practically become a go-to method of healing for societies in transition from oppressive regimes or periods of conflict, such as the end of apartheid in South Africa or following the civil wars in Sierra Leone and Liberia. Other forms of transitional justice have also been used, such as the *gacaca* courts in Rwanda and the Special Court for Sierra Leone, both of which focus on criminal prosecutions rather than truth-gathering and –telling as the main forms of reconciliation and rebuilding. The case of the *gacaca* courts in Rwanda is particularly interesting. In 1994, the U.N. Security Council established the International Criminal Tribunal of Rwanda (ICTR) to try those deemed to hold the greatest responsibility for genocide. While the ICTR continues to be responsible for trying leaders in the genocide, the *gacaca* courts were established to handle the immensely crowded prisons, filled

⁷ Naomi Roht-Arriaza, “The new landscape of transitional justice,” in *Transitional Justice in the 21st Century: Beyond Truth versus Justice*, ed. Naomi Roht-Arriaza and Javier Mariezcurrena (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 3.

with around 120,000 Rwandans who played a role in the genocide.⁸ Traditionally, *gacaca* courts were utilized to settle cases of significantly smaller magnitude: “land rights, inheritance rights, loans, minor attacks and damage to property.”⁹ The modern, post-genocide *gacaca* courts are similar to the traditional courts in that they emphasize reintegration of prisoners into their communities, but unique because they are not simply local entities designed to deal with local problems; rather, the *gacaca* courts are placed within a national context of reconciliation and recovery, highly restricted by the national government.¹⁰ Andrew Iliff notes that the *gacaca* courts received significant international support and funding largely because of how the government marketed it as a “traditional” form of justice that held true to Rwandan values and methods: “the discourse of ‘tradition’ and its implication of grassroots participation and endorsement have helped legitimate the outcome of the *gacaca* process as one implicitly endorsed by Rwandans,” and in turn has helped legitimize the Rwandan government in the eyes of the international community as well.¹¹ The *gacaca* courts are a unique form of transitional justice, then, in that they blend reconciliatory and retributive justice on the local, national, and international levels.

Transitional justice has transformed from practices which varied enormously from country to country in terms of conduct and purpose, to institutions guided by both the international community and local processes—such as in the *gacaca* courts discussed above—and which all seem to value truth-telling, national narratives, and reconciliation, as well as retribution in certain instances. Rosalind Shaw and Lars Waldorf call out the “disconnections

⁸ Helen Scanlon and Nompumelelo Motlafi, “Indigenous Justice or Political Instrument? The Modern *Gacaca* Courts of Rwanda,” in *Peace Versus Justice? The Dilemma of Transitional Justice in Africa*, ed. Chandra Lekha Sriram and Suren Pillay (Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2009), 301-3.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 304.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 306-7.

¹¹ Andrew R. Iliff, “Root and Branch: Discourses of ‘Tradition’ in Grassroots Transitional Justice,” *The International Journal of Transitional Justice* 6 (2012), 261.

between international legal norms and local priorities and practices,”¹² which often involve the question of what victims will receive from the process (if anything), as well as the acceptance or rejection of amnesty, if amnesty is involved. The issue of localizing the processes is a complicated one, as it questions how to include as many people as possible without alienating them or stifling their voices. As well, one must take into account the fact that some people or communities would prefer to be silent, even to “forgive and forget,” rather than speak of their experiences. For example, “for people in face-to-face relationships in conditions of unending insecurity, it may be truth-telling that subverts the process of living together, while in some contexts survivors may shape silence into a modality of reintegration.”¹³ Rosalind Shaw saw this in Sierra Leone, where she found that reintegrating perpetrators into their communities was more about proving that they could be contributing, productive members of society and less about admitting the sins of the past—a focus on rebuilding rather than retelling.¹⁴

Truth and Reconciliation Commissions are probably the most well-known forms of transitional justice today, and much of the discussion surrounding TRCs focus on their effectiveness and their scope, along with amnesty and public participation. Charles Villa-Vicencia writes that:

a primary responsibility of TRCs ... is the initiation of a process that seeks to draw all parties that have been involved in a conflict ... into a national conversation that is honest and thoughtful and motivated by a desire to maximise truth-seeking, truth-telling, and acknowledgement.¹⁵

¹² Rosalind Shaw and Lars Waldorf, ed., “Introduction: Localizing Transitional Justice,” in *Localizing Transitional Justice: Inventions and Priorities After Mass Violence* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), 3.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 13.

¹⁴ Rosalind Shaw, “Memory Frictions: Localizing the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Sierra Leone,” *The International Journal of Transitional Justice* 1 (2007), 94-5.

¹⁵ Charles Villa-Vicencia, “Inclusive Justice: The Limitations of Trial Justice and Truth Commissions,” in *Peace Versus Justice? The Dilemma of Transitional Justice in Africa*, ed. Chandra Lekha Sriram and Suren Pillay (Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2009), 45.

The purpose is to create a national dialogue that includes the voices of those affected by conflict, including many whose voices would likely otherwise not be heard, and perpetrators who took part in or benefited from the conflict. In many cases, we see that the line between victim and perpetrator is blurred—such as in Sierra Leone, where many perpetrators started off as child soldiers forced into the civil war. By bringing in the option to speak openly and freely about the past, TRCs have the potential to open up not only the possibility of reconciliation, but also the chance to come to terms with the complicated realities of conflict and the difficulties of where to place blame.

Retributive forms of justice, on the other hand, are focused on punishing perpetrators through legal methods, and they are frequently a mixture of the country’s national court system, and international laws and methods. In some ways, criminal trials could be considered another means of reconciliation in that penalizing those responsible for crimes might give peace to victims and survivors who wish to see their abusers put on trial and in prison. Criminal tribunals are often driven by the international rule of law, such as with the SCSL or ICTR, both of which were run either in full or in part by the UN. This is intended to allow for trials and prosecutions to follow international standards, especially in countries that do not have functioning judicial systems, as well as an attempt at impartiality within those countries. Moghalu notes that “some argue that criminal trials are a form of vengeance,” and that while this is a fair criticism, it should be considered vengeance against “individuals who engage in deviant behavior on a massive scale”—in other words, it punishes those who acted against society in unacceptable ways, such as participating in the killing and injuring of innocent civilians.¹⁶

¹⁶ Moghalu, 91.

Truth and Reconciliation in South Africa

The South African TRC could probably be considered the most-often discussed transitional justice operation, at least out of those that have happened on the African continent. It often stands as the main example of what a TRC can accomplish, what it can leave out, how it can be set-up, and what can be improved upon in the process. The TRC was set up initially as a section of the 1993 Interim Constitution and later as an act of Parliament in 1995 following the end of the apartheid regime, and had the following objectives:

- (a) establishing as complete a picture as possible of the causes, nature and extent of the gross violations of human rights which were committed during the period from 1 March 1960 to the cut-off date [...];
- (b) facilitating the granting of amnesty to persons who make full disclosure of all the relevant facts relating to acts associated with a political objective and comply with the requirements of this Act;
- (c) establishing and making known the fate or whereabouts of victims and by restoring the human and civil dignity of such victims by granting them an opportunity to relate their own accounts of the violations of which they are the victims, and by recommending reparation measures in respect of them;
- (d) compiling a report providing as comprehensive an account as possible of the activities and findings of the Commission contemplated in paragraphs (a), (b) and (c), and which contains recommendations of measures to prevent the future violations of human rights.¹⁷

The belief was that the truth would help reconcile and rebuild the nation, by contributing to the healing process and allowing South Africans to move on from past abuses. Archbishop Desmond Tutu headed the Commission, which was staffed by seventeen South African commissioners.¹⁸

The TRC had three committees that handled different types of cases: the Committee on Human Rights Violations, which heard victim testimonies; the Committee on Amnesty, which handled amnesty applications by those who had committed or been involved in gross acts of violence; and the Committee on Reparation and Rehabilitation, which recommended who would receive

¹⁷ “Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act 34 of 1995,” Truth and Reconciliation Commission, accessed December 1, 2013, <http://www.justice.gov.za/legislation/acts/1995-034.pdf>.

¹⁸ Alex Boraine, “South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission from a Global Perspective,” in *Peace Versus Justice? The Dilemma of Transitional Justice in Africa*, ed. Chandra Lekha Sriram and Suren Pillay (Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2009), 138.

reparations from the government.¹⁹ Tutu also expressed a spiritual component of the TRC: that of *ubuntu*, the concept of human kindness, in which the nation's reconciliation would include its people saying, "My humanity is caught up, is inextricably bound up in yours."²⁰

Much has been written on the TRC's effectiveness, whether or not its goals were achieved and if South Africans feel it helped to heal their society. James Gibson, for example, discussed its contributions to reconciliation, stating that "the truth process facilitated reconciliation because it was able to apportion blame to all sides in the struggle over apartheid."²¹ He especially makes valid points about the TRC's media penetration making it accessible to everyone across the country, and "allowing ordinary people to tell their stories largely unhindered by adversary-style proceedings."²² On the other hand, its perceived effectiveness often differed between ethnic groups: Jay A. Vora and Erika Vora conducted a survey of Xhosa, Afrikaner and English South African university students in Cape Town to examine these varied perceptions. What they found was that Xhosa respondents were most likely to think the TRC was effective, but that none of the three groups necessarily perceived the TRC "as effective in bringing about reconciliation."²³ Meanwhile, Daniel Backer conducted a two-wave panel survey looking at public acceptance of amnesty—in 2002-3, "91 percent of respondents...agreed that amnesty was essential to avoid a civil war," but in 2008 only 20.4

¹⁹ "South African Truth Commission," *Cornell University Law School Legal Information Institute*, accessed April 10, 2014, http://www.law.cornell.edu/wex/south_african_truth_commission.

²⁰ Hazan, 36.

²¹ James L. Gibson, "The Contributions of Truth to Reconciliation: Lessons from South Africa," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 50 (2006), 411.

²² *Ibid.*, 416.

²³ Jay A. Vora and Erika Vora, "The Effectiveness of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission: Perceptions of Xhosa, Afrikaner, and English South Africans," *Journal of Black Studies* 34, no.3 (Jan. 2004), 310. They unfortunately do not indicate when the survey was conducted in relation to the TRC and the publication of this paper.

percent approved of amnesty.²⁴ Backer showed how studies of the TRC's effectiveness should not be assessed from only one point in time, but continuously, as more distance from the process allows for more hindsight, and a chance to see if any of the recommendations of the report are actually put into place (and if so, how). What we see from Backer's study, especially, is that over time, perceptions of the TRC changed—usually in response to shifting political and socioeconomic conditions. How South Africans remembered the TRC and its findings are altered by this landscape: for example, whether or not reparations had been awarded, or if those who were not granted amnesty ever faced trial and prosecution.

The discussion of amnesty here is crucial, as the amnesty hearings were some of the most highly publicized aspects of the TRC. Was offering amnesty fair to victims? Did it help to move the nation forward as a whole? In order to receive amnesty, applicants had to prove that their crimes were politically motivated, and they had to make a full disclosure. If the committee members felt that a testimony contained dishonesty or concealment, amnesty would not be granted. Indeed, only 849 applicants were granted amnesty out of a total 7,112 heard.²⁵ The possibility of amnesty became an important aspect of the Commission because it encouraged perpetrators to speak up about their involvement in acts of violence. The Commissioners hoped that, through offering conditional amnesty instead of blanket amnesty, the victims of apartheid would not feel as if perpetrators were receiving preferential treatment for the sake of national reconciliation. Alex Boraine notes that the amnesty clause “help[ed] to prevent collective amnesty and also introduce[d] the possibility of reintegration of perpetrators into society.”²⁶

Pierre Hazan points out that this way of using amnesty was relatively new and unheard of: during

²⁴ David Backer, “Watching a Bargain Unravel? A Panel Study of Victims’ Attitudes about Transitional Justice in Cape Town, South Africa,” *The International Journal of Transitional Justice* 4 (2010), 452.

²⁵ “TRC/Amnesty Hearings and Decisions,” *Truth and Reconciliation Commission*, access April 10, 2014, <http://www.justice.gov.za/trc/amntrans/index.htm>.

²⁶ Boraine, 139.

the Cold War, “amnesty was considered the catalyst for reunification *par excellence*,” a reunification that could only be “achieved through *silence* [emphasis mine].”²⁷ In South Africa, however, the idea that amnesty could be used to bring the truth forward, rather than to silence it, became a major topic of discussion.

Transitional Justice in Sierra Leone

Four years after the release of the South African TRC’s report in 1998, Sierra Leone embarked on its own post-conflict transitional justice processes, utilizing both retributive and reconciliatory methods through the Special Court for Sierra Leone, and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Though unintended, both operations began in 2002, which caused distrust among participants, especially perpetrators, who feared a connection between the two—and that admitting to crimes in the TRC would lead to prosecution in the SCSL.²⁸ The SCSL also received significantly more funding than the TRC, though both faced issues of underfunding. The TRC’s budget reached \$4.5 million, while the SCSL had a working budget of nearly \$60 million.²⁹ Unlike in South Africa, the TRC and SCSL were staffed by both local and international figures, “intended to ensure a requisite balance of impartiality and local legitimacy.”³⁰

The 1999 Lomé Peace Accord led to the establishment of the TRC in 2000, which would not begin work for another two years due to a period of renewed hostilities. Sierra Leone’s TRC

²⁷ Hazan 38.

²⁸ Rosalind Shaw, “Linking Justice with Reintegration? Ex-Combatants and the Sierra Leone Experiment,” in *Localizing Transitional Justice: Inventions and Priorities After Mass Violence*, ed. Rosalind Shaw and Lars Waldorf with Pierre Hazan (Stanford: Stanford University Press), 119-20.

²⁹ Proscovia Svärd, “The international community and post-war reconciliation in Africa: A case study of the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission,” *African Journal on Conflict Resolution* 10, no. 1 (2010), 42. Beth K. Dougherty, “Right-Sizing International Criminal Justice: The Hybrid Experiment at the Special Court for Sierra Leone,” *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-)* 80, no. 2, Israeli-Palestinian Conflict (March 2004), 320.

³⁰ Boraine, 140.

sought to “address impunity, break the cycle of violence, provide a forum for both the victims and perpetrators of human rights violations to tell their story, and get a clear picture of the past in order to facilitate genuine healing and reconciliation,” by collecting and hearing testimonies that reached back to the war’s official start in 1991 to its end in 2002.³¹ The Commission saw heavy involvement from the international community: funding came through the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, and it was staffed by four Sierra Leonean commissioners and three international commissioners.³²

As in South Africa, amnesty was essentially used as a way to move forward. However, in Sierra Leone, a blanket amnesty was offered to the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) through the 1999 Lomé Peace Accord, in order to end fighting and push towards establishing peace in the country. One could argue that this signaled a return to the previous use of amnesty as a silencing mechanism, and that this is what triggered an outcry from the international community. But in Sierra Leone, even the blanket amnesty was utilized to end the war and start the reconciliation process; in the TRC’s final report, the Commission notes that the controversy arose because the international community had, by 1999, changed its mind on the effectiveness of blanket amnesties, saying that offering it would only put a band-aid on the wound rather than heal it.³³ William A. Schabas points out that “disallowing amnesty in all cases is to deny the on-ground reality of violent conflict and the urgent need to bring such strife and suffering to an end.”³⁴ Amnesty offered a way for all sides to end the fighting, and backtracking on that amnesty would have undermined the treaty and possibly lead to a resurgence of violence. The question of

³¹ “Volume One, Chapter One: The Mandate of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission,” Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission, accessed December 1, 2013, http://www.sierraleonetr.com/index.php/view-report-text-vol-1/item/vol-one-chapter-one?category_id=19.

³² Svärd, 42.

³³ William A. Schabas, “The Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission,” in *Transitional Justice in the 21st Century: Beyond Truth versus Justice*, ed. Naomi Roht-Arriaza and Javier Mariezcurrena (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 29.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 29.

whether or not to use amnesty, we see, is not one that can be answered with a simple yes or no: while not a perfect resolution to conflict, amnesty has its purposes, especially in coming to a compromise between parties and/or bringing conflict to an end. It also highlights the differences between how the international community believes post-conflict transitional justice should be accomplished versus local views about how to settle conflict and move towards reconciliation.

This issue of localizing the process has been a topic of conversation as well. Rosalind Shaw discusses the Commission in Sierra Leone, and how the process was criticized for failing to take into account to how the majority of Sierra Leoneans hoped to heal—which was not through truth telling but through, as Shaw puts it, “social forgetting.”³⁵ She explains this preference to “forgive and forget” as a method rooted in both fear and in traditional methods of dealing with trauma and violence: “people still have personal memories of the violence[,] but speaking of the violence—especially in public—was (and is) viewed as encouraging its return, calling it forth when it is still very close and might at any moment erupt again.”³⁶ Many Sierra Leoneans preferred to reintegrate people into their communities and to move on via economic growth and prosperity, which they did not receive through participation in the TRC.³⁷ Gearoid Millar continues this discussion by asking whether or not truth-telling helps a person’s psychological healing: while it is widely accepted that revealing the truth and working through it by speaking up is an integral part of healing (a train of thought that has grown in popularity since the South African TRC) he argues that there is no evidence of the effects that truth-telling has, “good or bad, on either political and institutional reforms or individual or collective

³⁵ Rosalind Shaw, “Rethinking Truth and Reconciliation Commissions: Lessons from Sierra Leone” (*USIP Special Report 130*, Washington DC, United States Institute of Peace, February 2005), 3.

³⁶ Shaw, “Rethinking,” 9.

³⁷ Shaw, “Rethinking,” 8-9.

psychological hearing.”³⁸ Millar, who conducted research in Sierra Leone on the impact of the TRC in psychological healing, found that while educated, elite interviewees found the TRC to be personally helpful to them, non-elites were less accepting of its work and largely rejected the message of truth-telling as problem-solving.³⁹ This ties into Shaw’s conclusions about the preference for “social forgetting,” and the desire for economic growth. Those experiencing economic stability were more likely to accept the TRC’s goals and methods, while those whose lives were less stable felt more wary of the process.

While I have discussed Sierra Leone’s TRC thus far, what I have found is that much of the coverage of Sierra Leone’s post-conflict processes in the American mainstream media actually focused on the Special Court for Sierra Leone (SCSL), the country’s war crimes tribunal. The SCSL’s objective was to prosecute those believed to “bear the greatest responsibility for serious violations of international humanitarian law and Sierra Leonean law committed in the territory of Sierra Leone since 30 November 1996,” the year of the failed Abidjan Peace Accord.⁴⁰ The blanket amnesty had led to the end of the war and the government’s ability to establish transitional justice mechanisms; however, the main leaders and perpetrators of the country’s conflict were put on trial, showing that the blanket amnesty did not completely rule out the option of prosecuting perpetrators. Established as a joint venture between the Government of Sierra Leone (GSL) and the U.N., the SCSL was not funded directly by the U.N., but rather by donations by member states, and both the U.N. and GSL appointed judges.⁴¹

³⁸ Gearoid Millar, “Assessing Local Experiences of Truth-Telling in Sierra Leone: Getting to ‘Why’ through a Qualitative Case Study Analysis,” *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 4 (2010), 482.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 488-9.

⁴⁰ “About,” The Special Court for Sierra Leone, accessed December 1, 2013, <http://www.sc-sl.org/ABOUT/tabid/70/Default.aspx>.

⁴¹ Dougherty, 318.

Discussion of the SCSL has centered around comparisons with the International Criminal Tribunals for the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda (ICTY and ICTR, respectively). While the ICTY and ICTR became, in the eyes of the international community, inefficient entities that took on massive budgets and have continued to drag on, the SCSL was seen as a new opportunity to create a criminal tribunal that could be both efficient and effective. Some have praised the SCSL for its ability to complete its work with limited funding and time constraints; others have criticized the international community for not doing more to support the SCSL and its endeavors, claiming that it was given unrealistic expectations of productivity that detracted from its mission. Beth Dougherty points out that the budget, revised from its original \$114.6 million for three years to \$57 million, never reached the intended amount: “By December 2001, only \$14.8 million had been received for the first year of operation, and only \$20.4 million had been pledged for the next two years of operation,” totaling only \$35.2 million for its three years—more than \$20 million below budget.⁴² At the same time, its time constraint of three years meant that they would not be able to prosecute many people—likely only 15 to 20. In 2004 the Court had indicted 13 people.⁴³

Kristin Xueqin Wu also compared the SCSL to the ICTY, but saw the venture as a successful one because of its efficiency, as well as because of its cooperation with the GSL and outreach to the Sierra Leonean public. She writes that “the [SCSL] is widely held to be the one court that has done almost everything right at the right time with the right conditions”—in that it was able to adequately complete its goals, as well as build and maintain public support for the

⁴² Ibid., 320.

⁴³ Ibid., 321.

program.⁴⁴ This included using the country's media resources to encourage public discussion and questioning of the proceedings, and producing "audio and video summaries of the Court's proceedings in local languages" in order to allow as many citizens as possible to engage in the proceedings.⁴⁵ It is interesting that the SCSL worked so hard to make the proceedings accessible to as many as possible, and kept video and audio recordings of the trials. A criticism of the TRC was the lack of such archiving, or of accessibility to any archives. Millar noted that the TRC's hearings "were not broadcast on television outside the capital, Freetown, and although all hearings were recorded, the recordings have not been reused except for a production called 'Witness to Truth,' which was circulated mainly overseas."⁴⁶ Though the SCSL faced issues of underfunding, it was still able to reach out to and engage Sierra Leoneans, whereas the TRC continued to face criticism for its inability to connect with the public.

Africa in the Media: Peace or Conflict?

Although we have now looked at these specific transitional justice processes in South Africa and Sierra Leone, before we can approach the question of how they were discussed and/or characterized in the American mainstream media, we must first look at what kind of coverage Africa itself has received in the American media. Are peacebuilding processes frequently reported on, or has the media shown the most interest in war, conflict, and crisis? Not only will I approach the discussions about Africa in the media, but I also will look at analyses of coverage of the South African TRC within the South African media. There has not been an equivalent study done of the South African TRC within the international media, nor of the Sierra Leonean

⁴⁴ Kristin Xueqin Wu, "Experiences that Count: A Comparative Study of the ICTY and SCSL in Shaping the Image of Justice," *Utrecht Law Review* 9, no. 1 (January 2013): 61, accessed April 10, 2014, <http://www.utrechtlawreview.org/index.php/ulr/article/view/212>.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 67.

⁴⁶ Millar, 485.

TRC or SCSL in local, regional or international media, which is why I will use analyses of the South African media as examples of this type of discussion that have guided my own work.

Africa in the American Media

In the 1990s, a fair amount of scholarship discussed the coverage of Africa in the American media, and questioned whether or not Africa saw balanced reporting. Jerry Domatob examined Africa-related stories in *Time* and *Newsweek* from 1989 to 1991, especially looking at what kinds of articles and which countries get the most attention. *Newsweek* focused primarily on “crisis and disaster stories” while *Time* focused more on “politics and government” (but also had a fair amount of crisis and disaster). One particularly intriguing finding was that nearly all of the articles focused on South Africa, with only one on Kenya, and any others on Africa as a whole rather than highlighting any specific country. Not only did they focus largely on South Africa, but “in both magazines, whites dominated the reports.”⁴⁷ Jo Ellen Fair also examined the racially-focused coverage that Africa received in various top American newspapers through the late ‘80s and early ‘90s. She found, for example, from June 1986 through December 1990,

some 169 stories of violence [in South Africa] that were racially labeled as “black-on-black.” What is important about the use of the term “black-on-black” is that it explicitly assigns to violence a racial meaning. The violence is not labeled as political or economic. It is ‘black.’⁴⁸

However, when she examined how *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* reported on the Liberian civil war from January 1990 to June 1992, she found that the conflict was never labeled as “black-on-black,” concluding that “the term ‘black-on-black’ is used to segregate

⁴⁷ Domatob, 27.

⁴⁸ Jo Ellen Fair, “War, Famine, and Poverty: Race in the Construction of Africa’s Media Image,” *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 17, no. 5 (1993), 14.

‘black’ groups and ‘black’ issues from ‘white’ groups and ‘white’ issues.’⁴⁹ In South Africa, a country with clear racial divides, it becomes important to denote when violence is apparently racially-tinged; however, in the rest of Africa, it does not become as important to denote a group’s race when discussing conflict or crisis. Instead, the characterization of both the “black-on-black” violence and the conflict in Liberia each involve a certain level of “othering.” On the one hand, the South African violence is labeled only in racial terms rather than looking at it through political or economic lenses within the context of the system of apartheid, indicating a failure to understand or analyze how the apartheid government actively encouraged or sponsored racial tensions and violence. The Liberian conflict, however, is most often labeled as “tribal,” a word that allows for the reader to distance themselves from the conflict, while again ignoring the political and economic aspects of the conflict—identifying it as an “ancient” African problem that only Africans can solve.⁵⁰

Multiple studies have looked specifically at coverage of Africa in *The New York Times*, one of the most influential news organizations in the country and the world due to its readership, its scope, and its connections to numerous other news bureaus.⁵¹ The *Times* employs its own foreign correspondents, and in 1990 had four African bureaus in Nairobi, Cairo, Johannesburg and Abidjan. El Zein and Cooper studied Africa’s representation in the *Times* and found that, from 1976 through 1985, “only a total of twenty-five countries received any coverage,” and that only nine saw more than five stories.⁵² For this same time period, tales of crisis dominated, namely “reports on unrest/dissent and war/terrorism/crime.”⁵³ By the mid-1980s, South Africa

⁴⁹ Ibid., 15.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 15-6.

⁵¹ Hassan M. El Zein and Anne Cooper. “*New York Times* Coverage of Africa, 1976-1990,” in *Africa’s Media Image*, ed. Beverly G. Hawk (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1992), 131.

⁵² Ibid., 140.

⁵³ Ibid., 141.

dominated coverage, though not in an anti-apartheid light. The agenda of the Cold War and the Reagan administration influenced the angle of the stories, which presented the ANC as a “pro-Soviet” organization, likely in attempts to garner support for Reagan’s policies towards South Africa.⁵⁴ By the early 1990s, with the release of Nelson Mandela, this had changed to championing an end to apartheid, but stories still framed the discussion distinctly within the race lens by connecting it to the American civil rights movement, an analogy that American readers would understand. Certainly, race *was* an important factor in the discussion, but focusing on race leaves out the important analysis of apartheid as not only a system of racial oppression, but economic and political oppression.⁵⁵ It is not enough to simply report on events happening; articles are often couched in a way that will appeal to readers—whether or not the story truly gives an accurate depiction or analysis of those events. This appeal is also usually based on what readers already “know” about Africa, meaning stories tend to play on stereotypes of Africa as tribal, primitive, and backwards.⁵⁶

Because of the need to connect the stories to what American readers are interested in and what is considered relevant to U.S. foreign policy, most countries are not covered. They are simply not viewed as important enough to be reported on. Not only does it matter to know what *is* covered—which countries and topics—but we must acknowledge what the media leaves out as well.⁵⁷ When reporters covering African events only write on crisis and conflict, they send the message to readers that only crisis and conflict exist on the continent. And when they only focus on South Africa and a handful of other countries, they send the message that nothing of note is

⁵⁴ Bosah Ebo, “American Media and African Culture,” in *Africa’s Media Image*, ed. Beverly G. Hawk (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1992), 19.

⁵⁵ Beverly G. Hawk, “Introduction: Metaphors of African Coverage,” in *Africa’s Media Image*, ed. Beverly G. Hawk (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1992), 12-13.

⁵⁶ Fair, “War, Famine, and Poverty,” 10.

⁵⁷ El Zein and Cooper, 143.

happening in most other African nations. Finally, when they fill these stories with racial or ethnic analyses, they ignore the roles of local, regional and global politics and economics, and thus misinform their readership about the full nature of the conflicts or crises. While the news is intended to highlight changes in the world, and not necessarily stories of static situations, the tendency to pinpoint only negative changes in the world, and to ignore the positive stories of peacebuilding and economic success, insinuates that conflict and crisis are the only changes worth noting.

Schraeder and Endless also examined *Times* coverage, this time from 1955 to 1995, and found again that Southern Africa dominated the conversation, followed by North Africa.⁵⁸ They also note, however, that by 1995, coverage of Southern Africa was declining, as by that point “the existence of civil conflict [had] emerged as the defining characteristic of whether a country makes it into the top-10 list of media attention.”⁵⁹ South Africa was in a state of transition, but one without conflict, and in the 1990s the media preferred to turn its eyes and ears to stories like Rwanda, Liberia, and Somalia. Similar to findings discussed above, they too found that overall, African coverage in the media focused on the system of apartheid and the white minority in Southern Africa, partnered with the ethnic cleansing in Rwanda—essentially setting up race and ethnicity in African settings as the main analytical framework from which to approach most conflicts and crises in Africa, save any instances of famine or disease.⁶⁰

Knowing what the media chooses to report on, and what they expect their audience will respond the most to will also be helpful in assessing what kinds of knowledge readers held of issues in Africa at the time of the transitional justice processes in South Africa and Sierra Leone,

⁵⁸ Peter J. Schraeder and Brian Endless, “The Media and Africa: The Portrayal of Africa in the *New York Times* (1955-1995),” *Issue: A Journal of Opinion* 26, no. 2, The Clinton Administration and Africa (1993-1999), (1998), 31.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 32.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 33.

and how that knowledgebase might shape what is reported and how those situations were discussed. The timeframe of articles analyzed in the scholarship discussed here was taken from a period prior to the TRC in South Africa, as well as before the end of apartheid and the start of the Sierra Leonean civil war. While incidents that occurred later in the 1990s may have changed the focus of news coverage or informed more American readers of issues pertaining to Africa—civil wars in Sierra Leone and Liberia, genocide in Rwanda—it is important to understand what kind of background knowledge readers may have of the continent and the conflicts occurring there. If most of the news coverage in the past had focused almost solely on South Africa, and especially on whites in South Africa, as well as on disaster and war, then how does that shape the readers’ perspectives of the news later on?

The South African TRC in South African Media

While we have seen what type of reporting the continent of Africa in general received in the American media at the end of the twentieth century, little examination has looked at African transitional justice processes in the American media. Scholars have only analyzed the South African TRC in this way, and only through the lens of the South African media. While I do not focus on the South African news media, examining how the TRC was portrayed in the South African media—and how scholars have analyzed this portrayal—is a starting point for how to discuss coverage of transitional justice in the American media. This allows us to question how South Africans received information about the TRC and whether or not a bias existed in that media, and thus gives us a way to compare and assess representations in the American media. What most scholars in this area have found is that, even within South Africa, the media has the tendency to sensationalize the TRC by focusing on horrific events and the revelations of the

perpetrators without placing them within the historical context of apartheid.⁶¹ The South African media in many ways had a clear interest in promoting national reconciliation through the TRC, and the media is credited with helping the Commission to succeed by allowing it to “communicate its message to the nation” through the mediums of radio, newspapers, and television reporting.⁶² Annelies Verdoolaeye explains how “journalists had to act responsibly and adopt a human rights perspective” when covering the Commission because of the emotional aspects of the hearings: it was impossible to present them in an unbiased way, which did contribute to sensationalism and simplification in the stories.⁶³ This sensationalism existed in the focus on perpetrators over victims, and on high-profile figures such as Dirk Coetzee, Eugene de Kock, and Winnie Madikizela-Mandela.⁶⁴ Verdoolaeye also points out that the media supposedly “made the world look rather ‘black-and-white’, by especially focusing on black victims and white perpetrators.”⁶⁵ Perhaps this type of media focus was in part due to the nature of the TRC itself. Because the Commission’s aim was not to pick apart the structure of society that was built under apartheid, but to focus on gross violations of human rights, what came out of the media was sensationalized, racially-polarized coverage.

Verdoolaeye analyzed one specific television program—the *Special Report* presented by the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC)—and how it may have contributed to the TRC’s success and to reconciliation in South Africa. She concluded that representations of the TRC in the *Special Report* included the features of sensationalism, partiality and simplification, but that “each of these three features could have promoted the political project put forward by the

⁶¹ Edward Bird and Zureida Garda, “Reporting the Truth Commission: Analysis of Media Coverage of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa,” *International Communication Gazette* 59, no. 4 (1997), 339.

⁶² Annelies Verdoolaeye, “Media representations of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission and their commitment to reconciliation,” *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 17, no. 2 (December 2005), 186.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 187.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 188.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 190.

TRC” in that the programs attempted to give the full-scope of the findings and thus appeal to the public as to the TRC’s usefulness.⁶⁶ Edward Bird and Zureida Garda conducted research on South African media coverage of the early stages of the TRC, and how it was represented to South Africans. They analyzed TV, radio and print media in multiple languages in order to get a wider idea of the differences (or similarities) in reporting. How did reporters represent the TRC and its goals, and what were the differences in terms of the type of media and the audience for each one? Certainly, variations occurred between English, Afrikaner and African-language media, especially in questioning the purpose of the TRC and its ability to lead to reconciliation. One important finding was the “frequent tendency to reduce the survivors to victims and to limit a victim’s experience to the level of their news value”—in other words, a focus on the shock and awe rather than telling the whole story.⁶⁷ They further discussed how victims and perpetrators were represented, and how the media really failed to “explain the meaning of many of the horrific events.”⁶⁸ This question of full coverage and disclosure versus shock-and-awe is a major concern. In order to gain interest and readership, the media focuses on dramatic turns of events and on certain styles of reporting, and in doing so is unable to adequately depict the truths and the horrors of apartheid that were revealed in the TRC.

The English, Afrikaner and African-language media had different interpretations of the Commission’s purpose and success. For example, at the start of the Commission’s work, *The Citizen*—at the time an English-language, conservative newspaper—accused the TRC “of one-sidedness and of engaging in a witchhunt.”⁶⁹ The importance of the media in portraying to the public the nature and findings of the TRC, and the fact that different media outlets had varying

⁶⁶ Verdoolaage, 189.

⁶⁷ Bird and Garda, 337-8.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 339.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 336.

perspectives, is likely a major factor in different groups' perceptions of the TRC's success. This ties back into the Vora and Vora study discussed earlier, in which Afrikaners were less likely than Xhosa or English groups to believe that the Commission had boosted South Africa's global image, and tended to believe that it had a negative effect on the country's politics. Similarly, both Afrikaner and English groups tended to agree that the Commission did not have a particularly positive effect on society overall.⁷⁰ Different groups were likely reading different newspapers and listening to different radio programs, and each publication and programs understands their audiences' perspectives, as well as what those audiences expect to hear. This feature, however, is a critical difference between how South Africa's media covered its own TRC, and how it was received in the American media: South Africa's media was able to give readers many different perspectives, due to the fact that the TRC was occurring in their country, and directly impacting their lives. American media, on the other hand, would have limited space to try and represent any varied opinions towards the TRC and the revelations that came out of it.

Conclusions

In looking at the transitional justice processes in South Africa and Sierra Leone, differences and similarities stand out. South Africa focused on restorative justice, while Sierra Leone utilized both restorative and retributive justice. South Africa's TRC saw large public support and participation, while Sierra Leone's was faced with skepticism and scrutiny. South Africa's was run entirely by South Africans, while Sierra Leone's TRC and SCSL relied heavily on the support and participation of the international community. However, they both faced similar criticisms from the public: Sierra Leoneans claimed that participating in the TRC did not ultimately help them to heal, as it did not offer the economic reparations necessary to rebuild

⁷⁰ Vora and Vora, 318-9.

their lives. Backer's survey, as discussed above, showed a decline in support for amnesty in South Africa, as the passage of time and changes in society led to altered perceptions of what the TRC did, if anything, for South African society. Does truth-telling actually heal a nation, or lend itself in any way to reconciliation?

These questions are not only present in scholarly literature, but within the news media as well. The media had the opportunity, and in some cases the obligation, to question the role of transitional justice in these countries as the processes were occurring. But did they ask these questions? If so, how did they answer them; and if not, then why not? In understanding the type of coverage within South Africa's media, and how that representation could effect readers' perceptions of the TRC, we can think about how that could tie into the American media. The media's coverage of the TRC arguably played a different role in South Africa versus the rest of the world: while it was meant to inform in both respects, in South Africa it was expected to help usher along reconciliation, or at least keep the dialogue going. However, we have seen that even in South Africa, a strong focus on sensational stories and events, and a tendency to leave out historical context, led to what some believe to have been simplified and emotional coverage, as well as a tendency to focus on racial divides rather than economic and political context. If this kind of focus is possible in South Africa, where people had familiarity with the process and with the system of apartheid, how might those issues be amplified in the American media, whose readers have different perspectives and knowledge of the TRC and apartheid? What I have found is that the focus on specific people to highlight aspects of the TRC, as well as the inclination to simplify the TRC's findings and events, occurred in the American media as well.

At the same time, we can examine why the American mainstream media would focus so heavily on the TRC in South Africa, while almost completely ignoring the transitional justice

mechanisms in Sierra Leone. Media, or media consumers, expressed an interest in transitional justice by so thoroughly covering the TRC in South Africa; what led to disinterest in analyzing Sierra Leone's TRC and SCSL? Were readers truly more interested in hearing about ending a gruesome war in Liberia, rather than the efforts at peace occurring next door? As will be discussed, the overwhelming majority of articles related to post-conflict Sierra Leone were actually about the continuing conflict in neighboring Liberia, with brief mentions of the SCSL's indictment of Charles Taylor. The Liberian conflict was constantly characterized as a regional conflict with no real order or purpose—a useless war that would not end.⁷¹ The focus in the media remained largely on what it would mean for the United States to get involved in Liberia, and what it would mean for U.S. image. While the media chose to analyze the South African TRC and what reconciliation meant in South Africa, its approach to Sierra Leone and West Africa would focus solely on continuing conflict nearby and the role of the international community in bringing peace to the region, not on the ongoing attempts at peace already occurring.

⁷¹ David Keen discusses the notion of “pointless” wars as a way to describe conflict without explaining the conflict's origins or driving forces. This is usually paired with “savage” or “tribal” reasoning. This is a key feature of Afro-pessimism, as mentioned earlier. David Keen, “‘Who’s it between?’ ‘Ethnic war’ and rational violence,” in *The Media of Conflict: War Reporting and Representations of Ethnic Violence*, ed. Tim Allen and Jean Seaton (London: Zed Books, 1999), 81-2.

Analyzing Coverage of South Africa and Sierra Leone

Covering the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission

What information about the Truth and Reconciliation Commission do American readers receive when the media focuses heavily on high-profile figures and cases? Covering a single figure rather than an entire group makes it easier to boil down the purpose of the TRC: the role of amnesty, the purpose of collecting and revealing truths, and the goals of the commission. In some cases—such as those of Steve Biko and Amy Biehl—the media focused on the hearings regarding victims of violence in order to discuss the controversial subject of amnesty. In others—such as with P. W. Botha and Winnie Mandela—the media discussed the controversies surrounding the commission itself, and whether or not it was an entity to be taken seriously.⁷² In all cases, however, the media also emphasized the commission’s potential role in either calming or exacerbating race relations within South Africa: would revealing the truth lead to more understanding between whites and blacks, or would relations worsen under the alleged targeting of a single group?

Pinpointing coverage of four different cases offers an opportunity not only to highlight how the media approached the TRC and gave a brief window into the world of apartheid, but also to see how the TRC itself was characterized. In the *New York Times*, Suzanne Daley wrote that the commission “is meant to be a kind of compromise offering truth without the expense and political difficulty of prosecutions.”⁷³ In the *Chicago Tribune*, the TRC was described as an “exorcism,” meant to “[summon] forth the most vicious demons of the nation’s apartheid past”

⁷² I chose these four individuals due to the fact that they were covered in all three newspapers, and at a fairly consistent rate across all three. Please refer to the table on page 33 for more detail.

⁷³ Suzanne Daley, “In South Africa, Confessions To Dark Era’s Worst Crimes,” *The New York Times*, January 29, 1997.

in order to expel them.⁷⁴ However, in all three papers coverage often focused largely on the truth-gathering aspects of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and less on the reconciliatory goals. In fact, when referring to the commission at all, it was often called the “truth commission” rather than by its full name or even its acronym. The tendency to focus on amnesty hearings and perpetrator testimonies further emphasizes the prioritizing of truth over reconciliation. While articles touched on the effects that the TRC could have on strengthening race relations and the government, they usually only reported on what was said—and not said—within hearings and failed to place those revelations within the larger context of the changing sociopolitical landscape of South African society.

Before discussing the specific cases below, background and context of each case is necessary to clarify why I have chosen each of the figures as topics of discussion. In 1977, police arrested and detained the 30-year-old anti-apartheid activist and Black Consciousness leader Steve Biko, who eventually died while in custody. The high-profile case garnered international attention at the time, as the five policemen tried for his murder were eventually found not guilty. Their story was that Biko had gone “berserk” during questioning and “threw himself against a wall,” and had not faced any violence from the police.⁷⁵ The Biko case was cited frequently in the articles analyzed here as the turning point in the international community’s relations with South Africa, as soon after the U.S. imposed sanctions on the country.⁷⁶ When the policemen applied for amnesty through the TRC, they stated that they had handled Biko “robustly” but with no intention of killing him.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ “A Struggle With Many Truths,” *Chicago Tribune*, February 15, 1997.

⁷⁵ “5 Seek Amnesty in South Africa for Biko Killing,” *The New York Times*, January 28, 1997.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

Amy Biehl, a Fulbright student from Stanford University, was killed in 1993 by a mob of black youths in the township of Soweto. Biehl's work involved "voter education and women's rights projects," and had been driving friends home to the township when she was attacked.⁷⁸ The mob had come from a political rally, and Biehl's killers stated that while they knew their actions were wrong, they had been politically motivated due to the rhetoric of the rally, especially the slogan of "one settler, one bullet."⁷⁹ A notable aspect of the amnesty hearings was the presence and support of Biehl's parents, who eventually chose to not oppose the killers' amnesty applications, and openly voiced their support for the TRC's reconciliatory goals.⁸⁰

The Commission subpoenaed two leaders who were implicated in other hearings: P. W. Botha, former president and prime minister, and Winnie Madikizela-Mandela, the former wife of President Nelson Mandela and an anti-apartheid leader with a strong following into the post-apartheid era. Botha served as the country's final prime minister from 1978 to 1984, and its first president from 1984 to 1989. Testimonies in the TRC implicated him in the 1988 bombing of the South African Council of Churches headquarters, and the Commission issued a subpoena in order to hear his testimony in regards to that bombing and other incidents of state-sponsored violence.⁸¹ Botha refused to stand before the TRC, however, ignoring three subpoenas and calling the Commission a "circus."⁸²

Winnie Madikizela-Mandela did not defy the subpoena, and even asked for a public hearing over a private one. She was a front-runner for the spot as the African National Congress' (ANC's) Deputy President in the upcoming elections, but faced criticisms due to the details that came out about her association with violence, murders, and intimidation in the 1980s and early

⁷⁸ James F. Smith, "Killers Seek Amnesty in Amy Biehl Slaying," *The Los Angeles Times*, July 9, 1997.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ "South Africa Panel Frees 4 in U.S. Student's Death," *The New York Times*, July 29, 1998.

⁸¹ Suzanne Daley, "Testimony in South Africa Ties Ex-Leader to Bombing," *The New York Times*, June 21, 1997.

⁸² "Botha Again Ignores Truth Panel's Subpoena," *The New York Times*, December 20, 1997.

1990s with the Mandela United Football Club.⁸³ The TRC focused especially on her involvement in the 1988 murder of Stompie Seipei, for which she had previously been convicted of assault and kidnapping but did not serve time, and in the “killing of a Soweto doctor who would not cooperate with a plan to embarrass a white priest by accusing him of homosexuality.”⁸⁴ Madikizela-Mandela’s hearings garnered much attention due to her popularity and her political leverage.

Table 1: Number of articles and op-eds covering topics of interest, South Africa⁸⁵

	New York Times	Los Angeles Times	Chicago Tribune
Biko	9	2	4
Biehl	4	4	2
Madikizela-Mandela	16	4	10
Botha	16	5	11
Other ⁸⁶	83	15	30
— <i>Amnesty for ANC officials</i>	3	0	2
— <i>Eugene de Kock</i>	3	0	0
— <i>Desmond Tutu</i>	3	1	6
— <i>F. W. de Klerk</i>	12	0	3
— <i>Report</i>	7	3	7
<i>Total⁸⁷</i>	128	30	57

⁸³ Suzanne Daley, “Winnie Mandela Faces Accusers With Display of Silent Witnesses,” *The New York Times*, October 3, 1997.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ The figures in this chart are based on my own findings: the number of articles I found and chose to select from, and my own categorization of the topic of each article.

⁸⁶ Besides the five topics listed above, “Other” also consisted of articles about various other amnesty hearings, especially concerning former policemen and government officials such as Dirk Coetzee and Magnus Malan. Most articles focused on specific personalities in order to highlight TRC events. Subjects categorized as “other” were covered less uniformly across all three papers than the four I have chosen to focus on.

⁸⁷ *New York Times* coverage of the TRC varied widely in the topics that it covered, though it still centered mostly on specific people—of those listed above, around half (63 of 128) of the pieces were personality-focused. The *Chicago Tribune* and *Los Angeles Times* did not have as much variation in their coverage. Just over half (16 out of 30) of the *Los Angeles Times* pieces listed above focused on people, and 36 out of 57 *Chicago Tribune* articles listed were as well. Across all three, Steve Biko was discussed about 7% of the time. Amy Biehl was covered more frequently in the *Los Angeles Times* (13%) than in the *New York Times* (3%) and the *Chicago Tribune* (4%). Madikizela-Mandela saw slightly more coverage in the *Chicago Tribune* (18%) than in the other two newspapers (13%). Botha was covered more in the *Los Angeles Times* (17%) and *Chicago Tribune* (19%) than in the *New York Times* (13%).

Steve Biko and Amy Biehl

The media was eager to discuss the controversial topic of amnesty, and the Steve Biko and Amy Biehl cases offered a chance to examine both the pro- and anti-amnesty camps. Because of the high-profile nature of the Biko case, and the international interest that came with it, it was constantly characterized as the defining case of the TRC. Not only could it bring to light the truth behind the death of Steve Biko at the hands of the police, but it also would show the world what it would take to receive amnesty. Notably, the Biko family had fought, and failed, to eliminate amnesty from the process at all, and they were expected to oppose amnesty for the policemen involved in Biko's death.⁸⁸ Daley writes that "the truth commission's first successes in solving the mysteries of the past are in cases where many of the victim's relatives have vehemently opposed the work of the commission."⁸⁹ Some victims, such as the Biko family, felt that offering amnesty to perpetrators did not allow for reconciliation on a personal level by victims and their families. Amnesty "denied the victims the right to have disputes settled in court," and in the case of Steve Biko, if the officers received amnesty then the family would be unable to seek justice on their own.⁹⁰ On the other hand, giving the officers a chance to receive amnesty for their crimes was seen as the only way to pursue, and receive, the truth behind what happened. After the hearings began, and details behind the murder came to light, the *New York Times* questioned whether or not Mrs. Biko had changed her mind toward amnesty: was it still justice that she desired, or had she wanted the truth above all? "Without the lure of amnesty," the article goes on, "it is likely that no one who knew of Mr. Biko's murder would have talked."⁹¹

⁸⁸ "5 Seek Amnesty."

⁸⁹ Daley, "In South Africa."

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ "The Truth About Steve Biko," *The New York Times*, February 4, 1997.

Coverage of the police officers' testimonies was also often placed within an international context, especially in discussing what the Biko case meant to American activists. Most articles referenced the 1987 film "Cry Freedom," likely to spark readers' interest and familiarity with the case, and highlighted how Biko's 1977 death "set off international outrage" and opened the world's eyes to "the Alice-in-Wonderland world of apartheid."⁹² It is as if covering the Biko case, and the officers' testimonies, was a way of showing how a single story could affect a country's future: how Biko's death had helped turn the world against the apartheid government, and then how his legacy would help the new post-apartheid South Africa move forward.

While coverage of the Biko case focused largely on its importance in revealing both the strengths and weaknesses of the TRC and the amnesty process, as well as its international interest, coverage of the Amy Biehl case shows the differences in dissecting the entanglement of race and politics in the waning years of apartheid, as well as during the post-apartheid period. Whereas articles constantly outlined the political context of the Biko murder, due to Biko's place as a political figure and anti-apartheid activist, the political nature of the Biehl murder was more unevenly examined, and gave way to a discussion based largely around race. The *Chicago Tribune* left out political context for the most part, but did include quotes from family and friends of Amy Biehl. Her parents expressed a willingness to forgive her killers, but a friend stated an inability to accept amnesty, arguing that "the crime was racially motivated, not politically motivated."⁹³ Only the *Los Angeles Times* placed the Biehl case within a specific political context, stating that the men had been "linked to the PAC's [Pan African Congress] youth wing," and explained how "in the early 1990s, the apartheid regime was encouraging

⁹² Daley, "In South Africa." John F. Burns, "Biko's Case Now Offers Justice From a Travesty," *The New York Times*, February 2, 1997.

⁹³ Hugh Dellios, "Seeking Amnesty, 4 S. Africans Admit Killing Amy Biehl in 1993," *Chicago Tribune*, July 9, 1997.

violence among blacks” and the PAC responded by “put[ting] into action the slogan ‘One settler, one bullet.’”⁹⁴ Articles explained the testifiers’ arguments that the racial nature of the murder made it a political act as well, as the apartheid government had fully politicized race in South Africa and the killing of a white person served as an act of violence against the violent apartheid regime. The desire for the *Los Angeles Times* to fully explain the political context behind the Biehl slaying may have been due to the regional interest in the case, as Biehl was a graduate of Stanford University and had grown up in Orange County.⁹⁵

The *New York Times*, on the other hand, did not discuss much of the political climate surrounding the murder. They noted the uneducated nature of each of the men, quoting Mr. Ntamo when he expressed an inability “to properly articulate any political ideology,” and Mr. Manqina’s statement that “South Africa is free today because of the bloodshed.”⁹⁶ However, one op-ed devoted to the amnesty case highlighted what the case meant in present-day South Africa in terms of confronting race and moving on from the past. Sindiwe Magona, a South African writer, contributed an editorial in which she discussed “South Africa’s curse”: black South Africans’ hatred of whites. “All South Africans killed Amy Biehl,” she writes, “for we allowed, even encouraged the climate that made the attack possible.”⁹⁷ This editorial is notable for multiple reasons: not only in addressing the racism pervasive in all aspects of South African society and on all sides, but also because a South African author chose the *New York Times* as the venue in which to express the need for South Africa to “acknowledg[e] our cancer.”⁹⁸ This piece, giving both a background to the political and racial climate surrounding the Biehl murder

⁹⁴ “S. African Group Urges Amnesty in Biehl Slaying,” *The Los Angeles Times*, August 21, 1996. James F. Smith, “Killers Seek Amnesty in Amy Biehl Slaying,” *The Los Angeles Times*, July 9, 1997.

⁹⁵ Smith, “Killers Seek Amnesty.”

⁹⁶ Suzanne Daley, “South Africans Apologize to Family of American Victim,” *The New York Times*, July 9, 1997.

⁹⁷ Sindiwe Magona, “South Africa’s Curse,” *The New York Times*, August 4, 1998.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

and a plea to truly confront the problem of racial hatred, was not only aimed at South Africans, but at the *Times*'s larger readership as well. In these earlier cases of the TRC, articles rarely discussed in-depth the continued racial tensions in South Africa, and perhaps because of the international interest in the Biko and Biehl cases, South Africans felt it was important to place these cases within the country's present-day sociopolitical context. It is also important to highlight the editorial nature of this piece: editorials and op-ed pieces were more likely to offer criticisms and analyses of South African society and the impact of the TRC, versus more succinct news articles. Neither Biko's nor Biehl's cases saw a large amount of coverage outside of news articles; this is why Magona's piece stands out.

One interesting aspect of the coverage of both the Biko and Biehl cases is the tendency to assume whether or not one group would receive amnesty: while it was uncertain whether or not the men involved in Amy Biehl's murder would be granted amnesty, it was constantly assumed that the policemen who applied in the Biko case would receive it. The reverse would end up occurring. Amy Biehl's killers received amnesty after it was determined that they had disclosed a full, honest account of the events and their motivations.⁹⁹ The police officers involved in Steve Biko's death, however, did not significantly alter their original statements from the original 1978 trial, and offered contradictory statements about what had happened, leading the panel to reject their application for amnesty.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ Dean E. Murphy, "S. Africa Frees 4 Killers of Southland Student," *The Los Angeles Times*, July 29, 1998.

¹⁰⁰ Suzanne Daley, "Panel Denies Amnesty for Four Officers in Steve Biko's Death," *The New York Times*, February 17, 1999, accessed April 10, 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/1999/02/17/world/panel-denies-amnesty-for-four-officers-in-steve-biko-s-death.html>.

Winnie Mandela and P.W. Botha

While the Biko and Biehl cases illuminated the complicated issue of amnesty and the politics of race, the P.W. Botha and Winnie Madikizela-Mandela cases offered the chance to show the polarizing affect that the commission had not only on the South African public, but also within the American media. The three different newspapers have distinct differences in how they discussed each case, as well as the frequency with which they covered them. The *Los Angeles Times*' coverage of the two cases was sparser than the other two. When covering the Madikizela-Mandela case, the *New York Times* attempted a more neutral tone in its discussion of the connection between the hearings and her political aspirations, and focused largely on testimony regarding the 1989 murder of Stompei Seipei, especially pinpointing the highly anticipated testimony of Katiza Cebekhulu, a former member of her Mandela United Football Club. On the other hand, when covering the case of P. W. Botha, they all held similar views and offered similar characterizations of the man, the trial, and its significance.

The *Chicago Tribune* did not mask its critical tone towards Winnie and her tenuous place in the African National Congress. Unlike in other coverage of the TRC, the *Tribune*'s authors were willing to offer their opinions of Madikizela-Mandela's place in the current South African society, and overall the articles offered more information about the political context of the 1980s. Though the *New York Times* focused on her present-day political dealings, the *Tribune* noted that following the Seipei murder and trial in the late 1980s/early 1990s, the ANC chose to separate itself from her: South Africa's Secretary of Safety and Security Azar Cachalia was quoted as saying, "We were on the eve of our liberation. We didn't want anything to interfere."¹⁰¹ They also highlighted the focus of Winnie's testimony: that she was the target of "dirty tricks" by

¹⁰¹ Hugh Dellios, "Curb Madikizela-Mandela, Official Urges Commission is Asked to Ban Her From Office," *Chicago Tribune*, November 28, 1997.

apartheid police forces, which testimonies actually somewhat confirmed when one of her former bodyguards admitting to working as a police informant. However, the “dirty tricks” angle was still often written off as paranoia or intimidation, rather than the reality of Madikizela-Mandela’s life under apartheid.

Most striking is a piece of commentary following the conclusion of her hearings, published on December 12, 1997, titled, “The Most Dangerous Woman in Africa.”¹⁰² The article, written by freelance journalist Gwynne Dyer, offers a sympathetic view of Desmond Tutu as the priest who could not reign in Winnie Madikizela-Mandela and solicit the desired answers and apology that the country expected of her. The result, Dyer writes, was that “the monster is still on the loose.”¹⁰³ He describes the danger that Winnie posed to South Africa, how her “rage and greed would destroy” the laws, economy, and society that the post-apartheid government had begun to slowly fix.¹⁰⁴ Also important was how the Madikizela-Mandela hearings had made something of a mockery of the process: while the testimonies showed how she had been involved in numerous murders and crimes, the case “was undermined by the evasiveness of some senior ANC witnesses,” as well as “by the non-appearance of other witnesses who were openly intimidated by Madikizela-Mandela’s entourage.”¹⁰⁵ For those who had hoped the trial would open the eyes of South Africans to the dangers of having a powerful woman like Madikizela-Mandela in office, the TRC had apparently failed in its job. The next day, the Tribune ran an editorial comparing the plights of both Madikizela-Mandela and Nelson Mandela, and how they had both come out of apartheid with different views of the world and society. While both had faced “brutal, unjust treatment,” Nelson Mandela emerged “ennobled,” while his ex-wife

¹⁰² Gwynne Dyer, “The Most Dangerous Woman in Africa,” *Chicago Tribune*, December 12, 1997.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

“became brutish.”¹⁰⁶ The *Tribune* chose to forgo balanced representation when it only published commentary that characterized Madikizela-Mandela as the “angry black woman” whose emotions and pride overruled her ability to act as an effective political leader. The *Tribune* wrote off her past actions were written off as completely inexcusable, even when placed within the context of a tumultuous period filled with violence on all sides, and her willingness to participate in the TRC at all was viewed as useless in the wake of her controversial apology, discussed below.

On the contrary, the *New York Times* often kept its criticisms of Madikizela-Mandela more hushed, and attempted to offer a more balanced look at the ambiguous nature of the testimonies, while focusing most intently on the testimonies surrounding the 1989 death of Seipei. Multiple articles discussed the lead-up to the testimony of exiled Katiza Cebekhulu, who claimed to have witnessed Madikizela-Mandela stab Seipei, and had since applied for amnesty himself in the case. Though many did not accept Cebekhulu’s testimony, claiming that it was inconsistent and inaccurate, the *Times* still chose to focus largely on his story.¹⁰⁷ The Cebekhulu testimony, as well as follow-up testimonies from police officials, allowed the *Times* to show the contradictory nature of testimony in high-profile cases such as Madikizela-Mandela’s, and how they made the Commission’s job more difficult in extracting the truth it so desperately needed in order to move towards reconciliation. When highlighting her eventual apology, the *Times* did so by publishing whole quotes from her testimony—notably, chairman Desmond Tutu’s pleas for her to apologize for wrong-doing, and her controversial statement:

I am saying it is true — things went horribly wrong. I fully agree with that and for that part of those painful years when things went horribly wrong and we were aware of the fact that there were factors that led to that, for that I am deeply sorry.

¹⁰⁶ “The Things That Brutality Begets,” *Chicago Tribune*, December 13, 1997.

¹⁰⁷ Suzanne Daley, “Winnie Mandela Killed Youth, Apartheid Inquiry Is Told,” *The New York Times*, November 26, 1997.

By offering extensive quotations, rather than merely discussing specific quotes, it could be argued that the *Times* wanted the readers to decide for themselves the sincerity of her words, rather than telling them whether or not to accept her statements as truthful and apologetic, or dodgy and hollow.

In one instance, the *Times* did offer a criticism similar in tone to the *Tribune*: the author highlighted the importance of the hearings, not only because of its potential to affect Madikizela-Mandela's political aspirations, but to show the "special sorrow in credible testimony that a hero of the anti-apartheid struggle used her power against her own people."¹⁰⁸ Like the *Tribune*, the *Times* fails to place her story within the context of her own struggle during the years of apartheid—constant arrests, imprisonment, and exile—and chooses ignore her other roles as an anti-apartheid leader and activist. The short piece ends on a critical note, stating that while the ANC should take her political message—"that the Government her former husband leads has not brought enough progress to poor blacks"—seriously, she "is not the person to deliver it."¹⁰⁹ With statements such as this, the consensus in the American mainstream media seemed to be that while Madikizela-Mandela had valid concerns about the government and the future, her background did not lend itself well to a great, or fair, leader. As she announced her intent to step down from pursuing the deputy presidency, the *Times* highlighted future president Thabo Mbeki's statements regarding race and politics in the country, notably regarding the importance of working together towards equality, and that his tenure as president would likely not lead to

¹⁰⁸ "Winnie Mandela's Shame," *The New York Times*, December 5, 1998.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

“any radical changes”—something in direct contrast to Madikizela-Mandela’s criticisms that the government had not done enough to change, and equalize, South African society.¹¹⁰

The characterizations of former prime minister and president P.W. Botha were not as varied in tone as the discussions of Madikizela-Mandela. Botha’s situation with the TRC was different: while both figures were subpoenaed to appear before the Commission, Botha ignored the multiple subpoenas he faced. Madikizela-Mandela not only accepted them but asked for public hearings. After ignoring the third subpoena, the Commission pressed charges against Botha and he went on trial for contempt of court. Like the Winnie hearings, the Botha trial was considered crucial in determining both the power and affects of the TRC on the country’s ability to reconcile: would it lead to more tense race relations, or would it help the country to heal by potentially bringing to the forefront even more truths about crimes committed by the apartheid government? To some, Botha on trial represented the willingness and ability of the ANC government to put past leaders on trial for wrong-doings. To others, specifically Afrikaners, it represented the vilification of an ailing old man.

Articles in all three newspapers emphasized the black-white divide on the issue, both among the general public and even in the courtroom. For example, the *New York Times* especially emphasized the judge in Botha’s case: how he “stood ... before a black judge his Government would never have allowed on the bench,” and his lawyers’ attempts to obtain an Afrikaans-speaking judge instead.¹¹¹ Botha had even forewarned that the trial and ANC policies were “‘awakening the tiger’ in the Afrikaner,” and harkened back to the fears of “the forces of chaos, communism and socialism” that had driven Cold War-era apartheid rhetoric.¹¹²

¹¹⁰ Suzanne Daley, “Winnie Mandela Stops Trying to Rekindle Political Career,” *The New York Times*, December 18, 1997.

¹¹¹ Suzanne Daley, “Defiant on Apartheid, Botha Gets His Day In Court,” *The New York Times*, January 24, 1998.

¹¹² Ibid. Dean E. Murphy, “Hearing for Apartheid-Era Leader Put Off,” *The Los Angeles Times*, January 24, 1998.

The *Los Angeles Times* offered an interesting and unique look at a museum that was affected by the end of apartheid and the Botha trial. The George Museum, located in the Western Cape, had displayed the P. W. Botha collection since the early nineties, paid for by Botha himself, and was faced with the problem of maintaining a problematic exhibit amidst a changing political and social landscape. A museum tour guide who had led groups through the Botha exhibit discussed her lack of knowledge about the realities for the majority of South Africans under apartheid, stating, “I didn’t even know the blacks in this country were oppressed.”¹¹³ The exhibit itself was guarded by a black photo technician, who “during the bleakest years of racial separation, ... was not even permitted to visit white museums.”¹¹⁴ The *Los Angeles Times* used the museum as a way to highlight Botha’s role during apartheid, and how the truths revealed during the TRC were especially changing whites’ perceptions of the past under apartheid. The museum, understanding the need to update its exhibit to reflect Botha’s “contentious historic role,” hoped to negotiate a contract with Botha in order to create a more balanced display of history.¹¹⁵

I highlight the museum piece because it offers a unique, and often unseen, type of coverage of not only one specific hearing but of the affect that the TRC could have on a community and on South Africa as a whole. Rather than merely focusing on Botha’s demeanor and the details of the trial, the *Los Angeles Times* chose to also look at what the TRC and trial meant to the average person. A controversial figure such as Botha had his detractors and his supporters, and highlighting something as simple as a museum exhibit could show how both groups reacted to his trial, as well as the complex nature of the country’s feelings towards him. The black security guard mentioned above, Ben Rasi, stated, “Most people of all colors walk in

¹¹³ Murphy, “Apartheid Leader’s Museum Exhibit.”

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

here and see that sign and turn right around. ... Then they usually ask where they can find the Nelson Mandela room.”¹¹⁶ A local pastor, on the other hand, pointed out, “The older folk really love [Botha], but political views have shifted away from his kind of politics. If he were the George representative now, he would not enjoy the support he once had.”¹¹⁷ Museum visitors may not have been interested in Botha as a subject, but the pastor implied that the town’s sociopolitical views had not changed too drastically in the few years since apartheid had officially ended.

This piece, as stated, was distinctive. Most articles focused specifically on the build-up to the trial, and the trial itself, with a heavy eye on where Botha stood in regards to the commission. They constantly referred to his reputation as “The Great Crocodile,” painting him as a fiery politician unafraid to voice his criticisms of the current government and unwilling to participate in its truth-gathering mission, but also as an ailing old man whose poor health allowed for him to garner some sympathy from a mainly Afrikaner public. Hugh Dellios wrote that he “sounded as if he still could be dictating the racial policies of his 1980s regime.”¹¹⁸ The case brought into light, however, the difficult question of how to best deal with this highly controversial figure whose apartheid policies were often seen as the harshest, but whose white supporters felt was receiving too severe a treatment by the government already. Black South Africans expected a firm punishment; Afrikaners, however, used him as “a symbol of what they see as the new government’s efforts to humiliate them.”¹¹⁹ While the Madikizela-Mandela case allowed for the media to critically assess the fact that violence under apartheid was not simply a clear-cut black-versus-white matter, the Botha case highlighted the reality that racial tensions still largely existed

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Hugh Dellios, “Botha Addresses New S. Africa With Old Views Intact,” *Chicago Tribune*, January 24, 1998.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

across South Africa, and that a single trial could potentially worsen those tensions by encouraging a feeling of victimization amongst white South Africans. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission hoped that the truth would help lead to reconciliation; however, in reality it could also exacerbate existing racial divides.

The differences in reporting on the Winnie Madikizela-Mandela and P. W. Botha cases are telling in that, while reporters were willing to offer their criticisms of—and in some cases, even vilify—Madikizela-Mandela herself and her role in the current political landscape, they were more balanced in their characterization of Botha and the varying public opinions towards him. They clearly stated the reasons the TRC sought them out—their roles in violent acts committed under apartheid—but only Madikizela-Mandela faced a more critical tone in her only partial cooperation with the TRC. Botha refused any cooperation and was charged with contempt of court, yet the media did not outright disparage him for this. In some ways, this indicates the differing treatment the media gave to white men versus black women, especially those in positions of power. When the media chose to write Madikizela-Mandela off as “brutish,” it actively sought to disempower her by using her contentious past against her. With P. W. Botha, his reputation as “The Great Crocodile” was not used against him, but rather to remind readers of the kind of leader he once was: a politician with the kind of fire expected in a strong male leader. We can also boil down the different characterizations to the fact that Botha’s political career had long ended, while Madikizela-Mandela was looking to rekindle hers. The American mainstream media could potentially affect Winnie’s political aspirations by showing American disinterest in dealing with her, but the media would probably not have any effect on improving or exacerbating race relations within South Africa. In the end, both race and gender are at play here: Madikizela-Mandela, a black woman, was constantly written off as a threat due to her controversial past and

her substantial following, without equal discussion of her political strengths or ideologies. Botha, a white man, is written in a more sympathetic light, regardless of his past policies as an apartheid leader. The media was more willing to punish Madikizela-Mandela for her past than they were to punish Botha for his; in doing so, they were also criticizing and questioning the ANC and any fault with both the organization's past and its leaders' participation in the TRC, without equally criticizing the lack of National Party participation in the Commission.

Covering Transitional Justice in Sierra Leone

I have examined how extensively the American mainstream media reported on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa. Coverage was broad enough to look specifically at individual cases, rather than simply the TRC as a whole. Articles not only gave the facts about what the TRC was and who was involved; they also analyzed the role of amnesty, the possibility of reconciliation, and how the truths revealed during hearings could have an impact—positive or negative—on South African society. The media expressed an interest in seeing the commission through to its end, and in assessing the South African and international responses to what had occurred during the Commission's years in session. Reporters also looked at what a reconciled South Africa meant for America: the importance of South Africa electing political figures with whom the American government would want to work, and the vested interest that a selection of Americans had in seeing the country rebuild its racially-fragmented society.

However, South Africa is not the only African country to have undertaken forms of transitional justice in order to move their nation forward.¹²⁰ Sierra Leone, as discussed earlier, utilized both a Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which took testimonies from victims and

¹²⁰ Sierra Leone, Liberia, Rwanda, and Côte d'Ivoire, to name a few, have all implemented post-conflict transitional justice processes—not only Truth and Reconciliation Commissions, but also war crimes tribunals or community courts.

perpetrators across the country, and a war crimes tribunal, the Special Court for Sierra Leone, which focused on prosecuting a number of leaders who had led and encouraged some of the most brutal acts of the war. During the years of Sierra Leone’s SCSL and TRC, the country was mentioned in a number of ways in the American media. In all three newspapers examined here, the *New York Times* only mentioned the Truth and Reconciliation Commission twice, and the *Los Angeles Times* once. They all presented minimal coverage of the SCSL, usually giving a brief overview of the court’s proceedings, or mentioning a few of the leaders the court was either trying, or searching for. More often, Sierra Leone was mentioned in passing either through discussion of the on-going conflict in neighboring Liberia, or Liberia’s president Charles Taylor, who the SCSL charged with crimes against humanity. The media, in the end, was more interested in discussing the role of the international community in ending conflict in West Africa, rather than on supporting post-conflict peace processes already occurring in the region.

Table 2: Number of articles and op-eds covering topics of interest, Sierra Leone¹²¹

	New York Times	Los Angeles Times	Chicago Tribune
TRC	2	0	0
SCSL/warlords	15	10 ¹²²	7
Charles Taylor	23	6	10
Liberia	53	3	9
Other ¹²³	63	17	15
— <i>Elections</i>	5	2	2
— <i>Blood diamonds</i>	5	2	1
— <i>Disarmament</i>	1	1	1
— <i>Sex crimes scandal</i>	0	2	4
<i>Total</i> ¹²⁴	155	36	41

¹²¹ The figures in this chart are based on my own findings: the number of articles I found and chose to select from, and my own categorization of the topic of each article.

¹²² Many of these articles relating to the SCSL or warlords are “In Brief” pieces, typically consisting of three to six sentences.

Charles Taylor and the International Community

The opportunity to discuss the role of the SCSL in West African peace efforts, and its importance in the region, is especially lost in the coverage of Charles Taylor. While articles mention his role in the Sierra Leonean conflict, and his indictment by the court, they usually focus on his own personal conflicts with the international community and the Liberian government. The contrast here between coverage on South Africa and coverage in Sierra Leone is striking: in discussing the TRC in South Africa, writers touched on how amnesty affected victims, or on the significance of specific high-profile cases in either helping or hindering the nation's reconciliation process. Meanwhile, in the case of Sierra Leone and Liberia, interest leaned more towards the highlighting the personality of Taylor and the international community's role in prosecuting him and fixing a broken Liberia—and, by extension, a broken West Africa.

Sierra Leone usually saw only a passing mention in these pieces: that Taylor was charged by the Special Court for Sierra Leone and saw himself as immune from the indictment due to his political position as a world leader. Most articles discussed whether or not he would step down from office, and once he had, they questioned whether or not Nigeria—where he went into exile—would turn him over to Sierra Leone. Starting from June of 2003, when the SCSL handed down its indictment of Charles Taylor, newspapers began covering him more frequently,

¹²³ Besides the four topics listed above, “Other” also various articles about child soldiers, removal of peacekeeping forces, conflict in Côte d’Ivoire, and democracy in West Africa. The *New York Times* published a significantly higher number of articles regarding these different subjects than did the other two newspapers.

¹²⁴ About half (76 out of 155) of the *New York Times*' publications that mentioned Sierra Leone specifically discussed Charles Taylor or the conflict in Liberia. Only 17 out of 155 of those articles discussed Sierra Leone's transitional justice processes. The *Los Angeles Times* discussed the SCSL about as much as Liberia and Charles Taylor, while the *Chicago Tribune* also discussed Liberia and Charles Taylor more than the SCSL.

documenting his tendency to flip-flop on whether or not to step down from the presidency and his criticisms of the international community for not doing enough to help Liberia. Headlines themselves showed the uncertain nature of what Taylor would do: “Liberian President Says He’d Bow Out,” “Liberian President Says He’ll Fulfill Term,” “Liberian President Defies Call By Bush to Give Up Post,” “Liberian President Again Says He Will Go.”¹²⁵ His indictment by the SCSL and role in the Sierra Leonean conflict in each of these articles is mentioned only in the final paragraph or sentence, almost as a passing thought.

The lens was placed on the United States and United Nations, and whether or not they were responsible for helping to clean up the mess in Liberia, and West Africa as a whole. Taylor “depicted himself as the guardian of innocent Liberians,” and “rebuked the international community for failing to sufficiently condemn his rebel enemies” who continued to wreak havoc on Liberia.¹²⁶ The *New York Times* in particular discussed the U.S. government’s uncertainty in sending peacekeeping troops to Liberia. In an article aptly titled “Rescuing Liberia,” the author writes that “Washington is the appropriate leader for any international effort to rescue Liberia, a troubled West African nation that was founded by freed American slaves.”¹²⁷ They argue that America had an historical interest in Liberia—which is even referred to as an “experiment”—and that it was America’s duty to save the country from complete ruin because of that.¹²⁸

Not everybody agreed with this line of thought that ran through *New York Times* articles. In the *Los Angeles Times*, Manthia Diawara contributed commentary stating that while the United States should take part in the U.N.’s peacekeeping initiatives, it was the African Union

¹²⁵ “Liberian President Says He’d Bow Out,” *The New York Times*, June 18, 2003. “Liberian President Says He’ll Fulfill Term,” *The New York Times*, June 21, 2003. Somini Sengupta, “Liberian President Defies Call by Bush to Give Up Post,” *The New York Times*, June 28, 2003. Somini Sengupta, “Liberian President Again Says He Will Go,” *The New York Times*, July 5, 2003.

¹²⁶ Sengupta, “Liberian President Defies Call.”

¹²⁷ “Rescuing Liberia,” *The New York Times*, July 1, 2003.

¹²⁸ The Associated Press, “Chronology: Painful History of an Experiment,” *The New York Times*, July 2, 2003.

that should play the main role. “[R]elying on the U.S. to rescue Liberia, as France and Britain have done in the past in their old colonies of Ivory Coast and Sierra Leone, only affirms neocolonial intervention in Africa.”¹²⁹ Whereas most articles published in the *Chicago Tribune* and *New York Times* discussed the importance of the U.S. intervening in the Liberian conflict, Diawara here shows that while international intervention is key, it should come mostly from other African nations first, and on a secondary level from Western countries. As will be discussed below, the *Los Angeles Times* was also the only newspaper discussed here to mention the role that Sierra Leone could play in showing that peace is possible for its neighboring West African nations.¹³⁰ However, it is only in a piece of commentary that this is brought up: any other articles that discuss the role that the U.S. government should play in West Africa are usually categorized as news.

It is also important to note that journalists relied most heavily on sources from people within the international communities—“diplomats, analysts and intelligence sources”—rather than the perspectives of citizens of the countries they reported on.¹³¹ Rarely did they interview Liberians or Sierra Leoneans to ask their opinions about Charles Taylor, the SCSL or the potential for peace in West Africa. Rather, the situation in Liberia was seen as an international issue that needed international solutions. The voices of victims and refugees appeared in only the occasional article meant to highlight the torment and despair of the wars. Again, the focus would lie on Liberia, and sometimes on Sierra Leonean survivors trying to rebuild their lives—but rarely did they ask what Sierra Leoneans or Liberians expected or wanted from post-conflict processes. For example, in an article discussing whether or not Taylor should face trial in Sierra

¹²⁹ Manthia Diawara, “Liberia Is No Place for U.S. to Go Solo,” *The Los Angeles Times*, July 23, 2003.

¹³⁰ Ann M. Simmons, “The World: Many Liberians Worry Aid May Be A Short-Term Affair,” *The Los Angeles Times*, August 18, 2003.

¹³¹ Douglas Farah, “Liberian leader finds means to cling to power,” *Chicago Tribune*, June 5, 2002.

Leone, Somini Sengupta quoted numerous U.N. and U.S. government officials about the importance of trying Taylor, and the divisions the question had created within the international community. John Prendergast, with the NGO International Crisis Group, stated that “the precedent of removing an indictment against Taylor would be disastrous for years to come in encouraging impunity.”¹³² Sengupta even included quotes with Taylor’s advisers, one of whom stated that David Crane, the SCSL prosecutor, was just “a little white boy from somewhere in America who still believes in colonialism and thinks he can come in and try a sitting African president.”¹³³ While the discussion raised important questions regarding the prosecution of a sitting president, and whether or not trying him would lead to peace in the region, it still left out important voices: those of victims and survivors who had witnessed and been affected by the wars in Sierra Leone and Liberia, and what trying Taylor would mean for them. The transitional justice processes in Sierra Leone aimed to rebuild not only the country and its government, but the lives of Sierra Leoneans as well. The media, in choosing to focus solely on the Taylor and the international community, ignored this important aspect of the story.

Transitional Justice: The SCSL and the TRC

We have seen how coverage focused largely on Charles Taylor and Liberia, with passing mentions to his connections to the Sierra Leonean conflict. Did the country’s transitional justice processes receive any discussion? The Special Court for Sierra Leone, usually referred to as the country’s war crimes tribunal, received sparse and sporadic coverage, and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was mentioned in even fewer articles. Only the *Los Angeles Times*—which otherwise had the smallest amount of coverage regarding Sierra Leone—touched on the

¹³² Somini Sengupta, “Besieged Liberia,” *The New York Times*, July 11, 2003.

¹³³ *Ibid.*

lessons that Liberia could learn from Sierra Leone's post-conflict processes, writing that it "may offer a template for Liberia's recovery."¹³⁴ The writer mentioned not only the economic and political success the country had seen following the U.N.'s intervention, but also the TRC which "allowed victims to share their stories and get a sense of closure."¹³⁵ The *Los Angeles Times*, as discussed above, was also the only newspaper here to openly discuss the wary subject of American intervention as a neocolonial move rather than a wholly humanitarian one: that it "points to the failure of Africans to resolve their own problems."¹³⁶ The *New York Times* mentioned the Sierra Leone TRC twice in its World Briefings section, which gives short news blurbs from around the world. Once in 2003, it mentioned that hearings had begun "to try to help the country over the emotional wounds of a decade-long civil war that shocked the world for its savage atrocities," and that over 7,000 statements had been taken from both victims and perpetrators.¹³⁷ A year later, it mentioned the TRC's report, expected within the coming months.¹³⁸

The SCSL received significantly more attention than the TRC. Most articles were brief, outlining the Court and its key players, without going into detail about its role in rebuilding Sierra Leone or what the average citizen thought of it. Just as with coverage of South Africa's TRC, we see the Court through its focus on specific people—in this case, the main suspects facing trial. In particular, articles pinpointed Foday Sankoh, the leader of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), Sam Bockarie, a former RUF military leader, and Johnny Paul Koroma, a former Head of State, all of whom died or disappeared before the trials began, as well as Sierra Leone's former interior minister Sam Hinga Norman. Articles also often highlighted the role of

¹³⁴ Simmons, "The World: Many Liberians Worry."

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Diawara, "Liberia Is No Place."

¹³⁷ "Sierra Leone: Hearings On Savage War," *The New York Times*, April 15, 2003.

¹³⁸ "Sierra Leone: Human Rights Panel Approved," *The New York Times*, May 6, 2004.

David Crane, the American chief prosecutor. Of the coverage that the SCLS received, two events received the most attention: Foday Sankoh's death and the start of the trials.

With Sankoh's death came obituary articles that outlined his background and his role in the decade-long conflict. The *New York Times*, which offered the longest account of his life and actions, described him as a man "with near-messianic power," and questioned the ability of the Court to help the country "come to terms with its painful past" if all of its suspects continued to pass away.¹³⁹ The *Chicago Tribune* noted that the court had declined to postpone the trials due to his health.¹⁴⁰ All three newspapers highlighted the gruesome nature of the war, how "his drugged, drunk rebels became notorious for killing, raping, maiming and kidnapping tens of thousands of civilians."¹⁴¹ The *Los Angeles Times* also followed up on the obituary with a short piece on Sankoh's autopsy, detailing the specifics of what had led to his death. While the other articles had only looked at what he had done as the leader of the RUF, and of the charges against him, the autopsy article pointed out the public reaction to his death:

Hundreds of angry onlookers stood in drizzling rain Saturday to watch the transfer of the body.

"Take his body to hell or give it to us ... to burn his body to ashes," shouted a woman in the crowd.¹⁴²

It is interesting how only one of these articles mentioned the public at all. Just as with the case of Charles Taylor, most of the pieces focus on the role of the international community in ending the conflict, rather than what Sierra Leoneans thought and felt about the trials and the deaths of the Court's prime suspects.

¹³⁹ Somini Sengupta, "African Held for War Crimes Dies in Custody of a Tribunal," *The New York Times*, July 31, 2003.

¹⁴⁰ "Sierra Leone Rebel dies in custody of UN court," *Chicago Tribune*, July 31, 2003.

¹⁴¹ "Foday Sankoh, 65; Led Sierra Leone Rebels Notorious for War Crimes," *The Los Angeles Times*, July 31, 2003.

¹⁴² "Autopsy of Ex-Rebel Released; Foday Sankoh, former leader of brutal Sierra Leone fighters, died of pneumonia, doctors say," *The Los Angeles Times*, August 3, 2003.

The opening of the trials also saw a lengthier discussion of the proceedings, and what they meant for Sierra Leone. The *New York Times* insinuated that the Court was not necessarily welcome in Sierra Leone, stating that “some here see it as an unwelcome intrusion from the outside,” though without offering any commentary from the Sierra Leonean public to support this statement.¹⁴³ One Sierra Leonean human rights activist, John Caulker, was quoted as saying, “We expect Charles Taylor to account for his involvement,” supporting the belief that Sierra Leoneans wanted to see Taylor tried for his actions. However, again most of the focus sat on the international community, the price tag of the courts, and the absence of Taylor.

Reporting on Peace: The Differences Between South Africa and Sierra Leone

We have seen how South Africa received more balanced coverage in the American news media, which showed both the pros and cons of the TRC, the criticisms it faced as well as its successes. Meanwhile, coverage of Sierra Leone and Liberia focused solely on conflict and corruption, the barbarism of the wars and their seemingly unending nature. Any focus on and related to Sierra Leone largely centered on what was needed from the international community in order to “save” West Africa. Whereas South Africa was capable of fixing itself, the conflicts in West Africa were viewed differently. How could a region so broken down by “anarchy, tribalism and corruption” be fixed and brought into the 21st century?¹⁴⁴

It is interesting, but not surprising, that though the three newspapers highlighted here were invested in South Africa’s TRC, they chose to completely ignore the TRC in Sierra Leone and discuss only briefly the SCSL, while showing a sudden intense interest in Liberia’s conflict and president. Why would the mainstream media ignore the peaceful efforts to rebuild a country

¹⁴³ Somini Sengupta, “Sierra Leone War Crimes Trial Opens Without Chief Suspect,” *The New York Times*, June 4, 2004.

¹⁴⁴ Diawara, “Liberia Is No Place.”

racked by a civil war that was tied directly to the conflict and political situation in Liberia? When the media reported on the TRC in South Africa, it did so with a critical eye on the process, but understood it as an important moment in South Africa's transition. Peace in a nation haunted by a racially oppressed past—a context that the American public could understand and relate to—is a newsworthy moment. In reporting on the conflict in West Africa, however, the media had no interest in looking at the ways in which peaceful situations are built and maintained in the countries racked by “pointless” wars, but rather in any ongoing “savagery” that can be saved by the West—if only the West would notice and step up. Liberia in particular received significant coverage because of America's historical ties to the country; but rather than look at neighboring Sierra Leone to analyze the potential for peace in Liberia, and to assess if institutions such as a TRC or a war crimes tribunal are capable of helping Liberians to rebuild economically and politically, the media chose to focus on the ongoing hopeless nature of the conflict and whether or not it would ever end. It seems that once peace is a distinct possibility in a country, the media would rather turn its spotlight to the next conflict. Is there really no readership for peace?

The varied coverage between the two countries also shows the continued misconceptions of Africa as a broken continent, rather than a collection of active players in the international community. South Africa's problems under apartheid could be boiled down to political and racial problems, reduced to white versus black. Though certain cases, such as with Winnie Madikizela-Mandela, shone a light on the more complex nature of violence and politics during the apartheid era, it was still a situation that could be more clearly explained in racial terms for American readers to understand. With Sierra Leone and the related West African conflicts, however, pinpointing a reason was not as easy. The focus turned to the gruesome, “savage” nature of the wars: “hacking off the limbs of women and children” and “enlisting thousands of child soldiers,”

as the *Times* printed in January 2002.¹⁴⁵ South Africa was about race and politics; Sierra Leone and Liberia on the other hand, were chaotic and hopeless. This characterization of the conflict and crisis in West Africa—largely ignoring any economic and political roots—leads to an “othering” of Africa based on the misconceptions of it as a backwards, traditional, tribal continent. The crimes of the white apartheid government are shown as cruel, yes, but the leaders are not depicted as backwards or megalomaniacal savages; meanwhile, the political and military leaders in Sierra Leone and Liberia are constantly referred to as figures who see themselves as gods or religious figures, and the words used to describe their actions—hacking and mutilating—are different and more gruesome in tone from the words used to describe the actions of the apartheid government—murder, torture. The characterization of warlord versus president says it all: P. W. Botha and his National Party predecessors are never described as power-hungry though they were elected without the votes of the majority of the population, whereas Charles Taylor, Foday Sankoh and other military leaders are most commonly referred to as warlords. While this is not an inaccurate use of the term—the dictionary defines a warlord as “a supreme military leader” or “a military commander exercising civil power by force usually in a limited area”¹⁴⁶—it could certainly be argued that the Nationalist Party leadership of South Africa demonstrated warlord-type behavior in the excessive force used to resist anti-apartheid movements, with the main difference in that the Party had the backing of the South African Parliament and, at times, the international community. The term warlord is rarely, if ever, used to describe a white military rule or dictatorship—just as the language of savagery is hardly ever used to describe violence committed by whites. At the same time, the focus on warlordism is a way to write-off the political situation in these countries: it implies anarchic factionalism and places the blame solely

¹⁴⁵ “U.N. War Crimes Court to Try 20 Suspects in Sierra Leone,” *The New York Times*, January 4, 2002.

¹⁴⁶ “Warlord – Definition and More,” *Merriam-Webster*, accessed April 9, 2014, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/warlord>.

on power-hungry warlords, which once again echoes the gruesome and chaotic characterizations of the Sierra Leonean and Liberian conflicts without needing to examine the conflicts' complex backgrounds.

Even coverage of the South African TRC, which was far more balanced, saw more of a focus on amnesty cases surrounding high-profile murders or violent crimes. The reconciliatory possibilities of the TRC received little attention when discussing the details of the Steve Biko murder, or the contradictory testimonies against Winnie Madikizela-Mandela. The mainstream media has been accused, and for good reason, of following the mantra “if it bleeds, it leads.” We can see here, then, that stories of high-profile figures that are connected to stories or cases that “bleed” are more likely to receive detailed coverage, rather than stories examining the potential for success in these peacebuilding efforts. Stories on transitional justice initiatives such as truth and reconciliation commissions—programs geared towards peace and understanding on local and national levels—or war crimes tribunals such as the SCSL would give readers a more positive perspective of the continent: that there is more than just conflict and crisis to be found, and that African nations are capable of healing themselves.

Conclusion

This thesis asks whether there is a readership for peace. While I have not assessed whether or not each newspaper's readership wants more stories of peace, what I have argued here is that an examination of coverage of peace processes in South Africa and Sierra Leone reveal that readers are not shown a balanced portrait of both conflict *and* peacemaking on the continent of Africa. If given the choice between covering peaceful processes and chaotic conflict—such as in Sierra Leone and Liberia respectively—the media will most likely choose conflict. And even when covering peacemaking processes, they often do not give the full scope: what citizens of the countries think about the TRC or the war crimes tribunal, and how these procedures might contribute to reconciliation. In South Africa, the media focused on the question of amnesty, but even more so on high-profile figures and the revelations—or lack of—that came out of their hearings. While the revelations themselves were important, as they contributed to the rewriting of the country's history and gave a voice to those disenfranchised and silenced by apartheid, the media often failed to examine what those revelations meant in the greater scope of the nation's reconciliation. How did people react? How could truth-telling foster reconciliation, if at all? In the case of Sierra Leone, peacebuilding was for the most part ignored completely. By focusing only on other conflicts in the region, and ignoring the importance of seeing the TRC and SCSL succeed in Sierra Leone, the media painted a picture of a fractured West Africa that could only be pieced together by international intervention. While Sierra Leone's TRC and SCSL were funded, and (in the case of the SCSL) staffed, by members of the international community, they were still only a stepping stone towards the nation's healing and reconciliation—much of which had to be done at the local levels, between Sierra Leoneans themselves.

To be fair, the nature of journalism, especially in the pre-internet era, does not typically allow for extensive reportage of every story. Deadlines and space limitations necessitate brevity. But oftentimes, conciseness wins out over clarity, a choice that leaves out important aspects of a story: a failure to fully examine the roots of a complicated conflict, or ignoring a political leader's complex past in order to paint a certain portrait of her as a one-sided figure. As Beverly Hawk notes, "Some might argue that the media can just report the 'facts,' but there are no such things as facts without interpretation."¹⁴⁷ When writing a story, journalists must choose which facts to focus on, and how to interpret them. Simply deciding what is "important" enough to print is evidence of a certain bias or interpretation. By filling pages with stories of conflict and forgoing examples of peacebuilding, the writers and editors are making conscious decisions to portray the world, and especially Africa, as a broken place in dire need of intervention. Depictions and discussions of Africa in Western media, literature and art, historically portray it as "dark continent," and ignoring peace only serves to further this stereotype. The American news media, in the end, chooses to focus on negative changes happening in Africa, not on positive changes.

Why cover peacemaking? I will give two reasons. First, to show that peace is not only possible, but that it is an ongoing process that must be nurtured and supported both locally and internationally. And second, to educate readers far removed from places of conflict, to show them that conflicts end and that there is more to Sierra Leone, Liberia, Rwanda, and other countries than the oppressive or violent eras that they endured. How do countries rebuild, and what can we learn from these countries? The United States in particular is frequently looked to as a major intervening force, and thus must constantly question whether or not intervening in a conflict is worth the money or the manpower. Usually, this is done by assessing previous

¹⁴⁷ Hawk, 3.

peacekeeping failures or successes. Rather than only looking at how interventions have failed in the past, it is also important to look at what types of peacekeeping and peacebuilding initiatives have worked in order to most effectively begin the first steps toward peace. Media coverage is an important way of doing this: it pushes American readers to think about these conflicts and our potential role in ending them, but also to consider in what people on the ground in these countries think about and want from transitional justice initiatives.

Recently, the media reflected on two important events: the death of Nelson Mandela and the twentieth anniversary of the Rwandan genocide. Articles about Nelson Mandela's life and legacy in the American media often painted a specific heroic portrait of him as an anti-apartheid leader and highlighted his importance to Americans, especially in influencing President Barack Obama. These articles often ignored certain historical facts surrounding his imprisonment, including how even the United States government had branded him a terrorist and called the ANC a terrorist organization, and also largely left out his role in the ANC's military wing, Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK). A glance at headlines looking back at the Rwandan genocide shows not only a continued interest in rehashing a gruesome tale, but also an effort at analyzing how the country has rebuilt itself and how it continues to reconcile with the past. Once again, we see how the media reports on figures that represent peace or places of conflict that have worked to rebuild in the decades since. If we look solely at coverage of Rwanda, we might think that the media is truly interested in evaluating peace and reconciliation and the work that remains to be done towards such things. However, the coverage of Nelson Mandela shows a continued tendency to paint one-sided portraits of conflicts and leaders by leaving out the facts that show the less-than-rosy contributions that the United States government made toward supporting the oppression of the apartheid system. Detailed analyses of peacebuilding and reconciliation are the exception

rather than the rule, and balanced coverage is harder to come by than one might think. A story's importance is usually placed within the context of what it means to America rather than what it means to the international community as a whole. The media appears to have placed the United States on pedestal above the rest of the world, with a focus on what America can do for other countries rather than what peacemaking in those countries can teach us about promoting and preserving peace.

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