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## **Assessing Local Evaluations of Truth Telling: Getting to 'Why' through a Qualitative Case Study Analysis**

### **Abstract**

This paper presents partial results from a qualitative case study assessment of the Sierra Leone's Truth and Reconciliation Commission's (TRC) effects. The data presented adds to the empirical evidence mounting against the claim that the public performance of truth telling is linked to psychological catharsis for those in postwar settings. In addition, this paper adds significantly to the specificity of such findings, showing, first, that there are clear differences between local educated elites and non-elites in experiences of truth telling as catharsis, and second, that these divergent experiences are related to divergent levels of access to, and incorporation of, the global discourses of healing by which the performance of truth-telling is thought to function.

### **Introduction**

Few readers will be unaware of the growth, over the past 30 years, of the transitional justice field. The proliferation of tribunals and truth commissions in postwar and post-authoritarian states has, in this relatively short period, experienced prolonged expansion. In the past 20 years dozens of truth commissions have created a "truth cascade" (Daly 2008) and numerous groundbreaking tribunals have attempted to hold individuals accountable for past violations.<sup>1</sup> These include the International Criminal Tribunal for the

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<sup>1</sup> Erin Daly, 'Truth Skepticism: An Inquiry into the Value of Truth in Times of Transition,' *The International Journal of Transitional Justice* 2 (2008): 23-41

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Former Yugoslavia (ICTY), the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR), and, of course, the International Criminal Court (ICC) in The Hague.

In the past few years, however, it has become ever more apparent that the field of transitional justice is in need of more systematic and extended assessment. There seems no end to the debate concerning the costs and benefits of transitional justice mechanisms, but, as scholars have recently pointed out, these debates are fueled largely by normative conceptions of how such mechanisms 'should' work, with very little analysis of whether they actually 'do' work. The debates have so far been based more on faith than on facts, driven more by principles than by proof.<sup>2</sup> Many of these authors lament the dearth of empirical research either in support of or in opposition to the often assumed benefits of these mechanisms.

Thoms et. al.'s recent review of the empirical research cites just 26 efforts at empirical evaluation.<sup>3</sup> This paper presents data from another such study, a case study of the local experiences of the TRC's public hearing process in the northern Sierra Leonean town of Makeni. This study investigated local understandings, interpretations and evaluations of the TRC by collecting micro level data through over 10 months of

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<sup>2</sup> See Eric Brahm, 'Uncovering the Truth: Examining Truth Commission Success and Impact,' *International Studies Perspective* 8 (2007): 16-35; Oskan N.T. Thoms, James Ron and Roland Paris, 'The Effects of Transitional Justice Mechanisms: A Summary of Empirical Research findings and Implications for Analysts and Practitioners' (Ottawa: Centre for International Policy Studies, 2008); David Mendeloff, 'Trauma and Vengeance: Assessing the Psychological and Emotional Effects of Post-Conflict Justice,' *Human Rights Quarterly* 31 (2009): 592-623; Hugo Van Der Merwe, Victoria Baxter and Audrey R. Chapman, *Assessing the Impact of Transitional Justice: Challenges for Empirical Research* (Washington D.C.: United States Institute of Peace, 2009)

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

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participant observation and 62 informal semi-structured interviews with residents of Makeni and the surrounding villages, 12 with educated elites and 50 with non-elites.

The article is broken into five parts. Part one presents a brief review of the literature on the often claimed psychological benefits of public performances of truth telling, and part two discusses the literature on the methodologies used in assessing truth commission effects. Part three describes my own methodology in this research, focusing on the development of dense local knowledge and the collection of micro level data, while part four presents my findings regarding the local experience of psychological healing in response to the truth telling performances during the public hearing in Makeni, showing that such experiences were very different for educated elites as opposed to the non-elite majority. Part five investigates these findings further, explaining that these different experiences result from divergent incorporation of globally normative conceptions of appropriate psychological practice, and finally, part six concludes the paper with reflections on the benefits of this methodology for the study of the complicated social process of postwar healing. In these pages I will, therefore, present both a critical piece of my findings, and show the strengths of qualitative case study assessment of effects at the local level.

### **Psychological Healing in Truth Commission Literature**

The concentration, within transitional justice literature, on the truth as an avenue towards healing, follows from what were at the time experimental, and are today highly influential, early truth commissions in Latin America and South Africa. In these cases the

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very nature of the crimes committed against the population by paramilitary and black operations forces, wherein even the perpetration of a crime was often simply ignored and denied by the authorities, combined with the need in the postwar period to placate those same authorities, resulted in the acceptance of truth seeking as an acceptable form of postwar justice.<sup>4</sup> As the outright denial of wrongs committed by these past regimes was itself considered an affront to the human rights of the victims, the acknowledgement of the truth was, and to a great extent still is, theorized to provide justice to the victims and their survivors.

Over time, however, this initial conception of truth as justice developed and the supposed benefits of uncovering the truth have expanded. The list of assumed benefits to the process of truth telling is today quite long and one of the additional benefits regularly discussed in the literature is psychological healing.<sup>5</sup> The acknowledgement of truth is thought to lead to an individual psychological catharsis among the aggrieved.<sup>6</sup> In addition, it is assumed, and often discussed in the literature concerning reconciliation and peacebuilding, first, that all conflict occurs between and further reifies identity groups, as

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<sup>4</sup> See Stephan Landsman, 'Alternative Responses to Serious Human Rights Abuses: Of Prosecution and Truth Commissions,' *Law and Contemporary Problems* 59, no. 4 (1997): 81-92; Margaret Popkin and Nehal Bhuta, 'Latin American Amnesties in Comparative Perspective: Can the Past be Buried?' *Ethics and International Affairs* 13 (1999): 99-122; Martha Minow, *Between Vengeance and Forgiveness: Facing History After Genocides and Mass Violence* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1998), 55; Susan Opatow, 'Reconciliation in Times of Impunity: Challenges for Social Justice,' *Social Justice Research* 14, no. 2 (2001): 154

<sup>5</sup> David Mendeloff, 'Truth-Seeking, Truth-Telling, and Postconflict Peacebuilding: Curb the Enthusiasm?' *International Studies Review* 6 (2004): 355-380

<sup>6</sup> See Mendeloff, *supra* n 2; Audrey R. Chapman and Patrick Ball, 'The Truth of Truth Commissions: Comparative Lessons from Haiti, South Africa, and Guatemala,' *Human Rights Quarterly* 23, no. 1 (2001): 15-16

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described by Coser, and second, that those groups then experience collective emotional responses to conflict which must be overcome, or somehow “worked through” in a collective psychologically healing process.<sup>7</sup> These psychological issues, whether individual or collective, are variably described as experiences of humiliation, victimization, disempowerment, trauma, or resentment.<sup>8</sup>

This expansion of the assumed benefits of the truth is connected to the transformation from the early *truth seeking* model of investigation and reporting, to the public performances of *truth telling*.<sup>9</sup> This transition was very closely related to the South African TRC. As Freeman has stated, “one can divide the history of truth commissions into two periods: before South Africa, and after,” in that the South African case changed the entire approach of truth commissions to issues of justice and healing.<sup>10</sup> Since South Africa, commissions have become intricately involved, not only in developing authoritative records of the past, but of supposedly catalyzing collective psychological, or as Nadler and Shnabel describe it, “socioemotional,” reconciliation, through the very

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<sup>7</sup> Lewis A. Coser, *The Functions of Social Conflict* (New York: The Free Press, 1956)

<sup>8</sup> Evelin Gerda Lindner, ‘Healing the Cycles of Humiliation: How to Attend to the Emotional Aspects of ‘Unsolvable’ Conflicts and the use of ‘Humiliation Entrepreneurship’,’ *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology* 8, no. 2 (2002): 125-138; Joseph V Montville, ‘Justice and the Burdens of History,’ in *Reconciliation, Justice, and Coexistence: Theory and Practice*, ed. Mohammed Abu-Nimer (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2001); Mohamed Abu-Nimer, ‘Education for Coexistence in Israel: Potential and Challenges,’ in *Reconciliation, Justice, and Coexistence: Theory and Practice*, ed. Mohamed Abu-Nimer (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2001): 248; Naomi Roht-Arriaza, ‘The New Landscape of Transitional Justice,’ in *Transitional Justice in The Twenty-First Century: Beyond Truth Versus Justice*, ed. Naomi Roht-Arriaza and Javier Mariezcurrena (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006): 4; Jeffrie G. Murphy, ‘Forgiveness and Resentment,’ in *Forgiveness and Mercy*, ed. Jeffrie G. Murphy and Jean Hampton (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988)

<sup>9</sup> Mendeloff, *supra* n 5

<sup>10</sup> Mark Freeman, *Truth Commissions and Procedural Fairness* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006): 26

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performance and presentation of witness, victim, and perpetrator's stories of their personal experiences.<sup>11</sup>

References to the psychological healing power of truth telling are found throughout the peacebuilding and transitional justice literatures. Rothstein, for example, has argued that "since there is obviously an important psychological or emotional component of protracted conflicts, there is surely likely to be an equally important psychological or emotional component to their resolution," and in response the "victimized individual and the victimized group need to have their losses recognized by the enemy so their 'grief is validated' and the self-esteem is raised."<sup>12</sup> Galtung defined reconciliation itself as "the process of healing the traumas of both victims and perpetrators after violence, providing a closure of the bad relation."<sup>13</sup>

This concentration on healing is also reflective of Archbishop Desmond Tutu's "tendency to understand the task of the TRC in terms of the metaphor of "healing the body" of the nation."<sup>14</sup> When whole populations are said to share an experience of victimhood they are understood to "require complex healing processes to get beyond

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<sup>11</sup> Arie Nadler and Nurit Shnabel, 'Instrumental and Socioemotional Paths to Intergroup Reconciliation and the Needs-Based Model of Socioemotional Reconciliation,' in *The Social Psychology of Intergroup Reconciliation*, ed. Arie Nadler, Thomas E. Malloy and Jeffrey D. Fisher (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008)

<sup>12</sup> Robert L. Rothstein, 'Fragile Peace and its Aftermath,' in *After the Peace: Resistance and Reconciliation*, ed. Robert L. Rothstein (Boulder: Lynne Reiner Publishers, Inc., 1999): 239-240

<sup>13</sup> Johan Galtung, 'After Violence, Reconstruction, Reconciliation, and Resolution: Coping with Visible and Invisible Effects of War and Violence,' in *Reconciliation, Justice, and Coexistence: Theory and Practice*, ed. Mohamed Abu-Nimer (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2001): 3

<sup>14</sup> Giuliana Lund, "'Healing the Nation": Medicolonial Discourse and the State of Emergency from Apartheid to Truth and Reconciliation,' *Cultural Critique* 54 (2003): 113

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psychosocial and physiological symptoms.”<sup>15</sup> It is taken for granted in such literature that “just as individuals need ‘closure’ to leave trauma behind, whole traumatized societies would benefit from a public airing leading to closure.”<sup>16</sup> Indeed there is the assumption, among most advocates of truth telling as healing that socioemotional reconciliation seeks to remove the emotional and identity related barriers to the end of conflict through the successful completion of an acknowledgement-apology-forgiveness cycle.<sup>17</sup>

It is largely as a result of these dominant paradigms of postwar trauma and necessary processes of recovery, within the fields of conflict resolution and transitional justice, that popular conceptual models of postwar recovery have placed such a heavy emphasis on the importance of truth telling in postwar psychological healing. These understandings of the psychological processes of reconciliation, based, as explained, initially on the experiences in Latin America and South Africa, have provided guidance in the development of truth commission processes as they have become increasingly popular in the past 30 years and have, as such, become somewhat entrenched in the conceptions of scholars and practitioners alike.

### **Assessing Psychological Catharsis**

As just articulated, it is broadly accepted that the cycle of acknowledgement, apology, and forgiveness assumed to lead from truth telling “represents a social interaction that

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<sup>15</sup> Montville, *supra* n 8 at 132

<sup>16</sup> Roht-Arriaza, *supra* n 8 at 4

<sup>17</sup> See Nicholas Tavuchis, *Mea Culpa: A Sociology of Apology and Reconciliation* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991); Ronald J. Fisher, ‘Social-Psychological Processes in Interactive Conflict Analysis and Reconciliation,’ in *Reconciliation, Justice, and Coexistence: Theory and Practice*, ed. Mohamed Abu-Nimer (Lanham, Lexington Books, 2001)

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satisfies the psychological needs of victims and perpetrators.”<sup>18</sup> This satisfaction is seen, according to Allan and Allan, as the correct response to traumatized people’s “instinctive need to tell their stories” which demands that victims, witnesses, and perpetrators be given the opportunity to express what happened to them during the violence.<sup>19</sup> But The few existing empirical studies of the effects of truth telling, such as that of Allan and Allan above, rely not on assessment of local population experiences of truth telling, but on the opinions of truth commission staff and NGO workers,.

De la Rey and Owens, in a review of the psychosocial aspects of the South African TRC, note the “frequent appending of the word ‘process’ to the word ‘healing’” among TRC staff and NGO workers, and conclude that “[m]any conditions necessary for the healing of victims of political repression ... are present in the TRC process.”<sup>20</sup> However, this belief in victim’s “instinctive need” to “tell their stories,” to experience a “healing process,” is reflective of the assumptions of the theorists and practitioners in the field, not of the actual postwar needs of local people.

Conclusions such as those above are highly reliant not on South African’s experiences of the truth telling process, but on the opinions of TRC commissioners and staff and related NGO workers regarding the effects of the truth telling process. De la Rey and Owen admit as much in the above quoted article, stating quite plainly that their pool of interviewees were almost all peacebuilding or NGO professionals. This is true

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<sup>18</sup> Nadler and Shnabel, *supra* n 11 at 49

<sup>19</sup> Alfred Allan and Marietjie Allan, ‘The South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission as a Therapeutic Tool,’ *Behavioral Sciences and Law* 18 (2000): 462-463

<sup>20</sup> Cheryl de la Rey and Ingrid Owens, ‘Perceptions of Psychosocial Healing and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa,’ *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology* 4 (1998): 269



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also for research conducted by Espinoza Cuevas and Luisa Ortiz Rojas, who relied heavily on personal connections within practitioner and NGO communities for their interviewees.<sup>21</sup> This reliance on elite opinion points more to the need for critique than it does to support for the process. I show below that this reliance on educated elite opinions in past assessments places the entire theoretical foundation of the Truth Commission model of healing through truth telling in doubt.

Only recently, in response to growing criticism, has there been a sustained effort to develop rigorous empirical evidence of the success or failure of transitional justice mechanisms.<sup>22</sup> The few assessments completed so far have focused on two general areas. They have either been focused on the political and institutional reforms and adjustments following transitional justice mechanisms, or they have been focused on the psychological effects of truth telling on individuals and communities.<sup>23</sup> However, in reviews of both groups of assessment studies the general finding is that there is insufficient empirical support to conclude that transitional justice mechanisms, whether tribunals or truth commissions, have had any effect, good or bad, on either political and

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<sup>21</sup> Victor Espinoza Cuevas and Maria Luisa Ortiz Rojas, 'Practical Considerations in Comparative Research: Approaching Problems from the Bottom and from within,' in *Assessing the Impact of Transitional Justice: Challenges for Empirical Research*, ed. Hugo van der Merwe, Victoria Baxter and Audrey R. Chapman (Washington D.C.: United States Institute of Peace, 2009)

<sup>22</sup> See Laurel E. Fletcher and Harvey M. Weinstein, 'Violence and Social Repair: Rethinking the Contribution of Justice to Reconciliation,' *Human Rights Quarterly* 24 (2002): 573-639; Jack Snyder and Leslie Vinjamuri, 'Trials and Errors: Principle and Pragmatism in Strategies of International Justice,' *International Security* 28, no. 3 (2003): 5-44; Mendeloff, *supra* n 5; Mendeloff, *supra* n 2; Thoms, *supra* n 2; Daly, *supra* n 1; van der Merwe et. al., *supra* n 2

<sup>23</sup> See Brahm, *supra* n 2; Vanessa Pupavac, 'International Therapeutic Peace and Justice in Bosnia,' *Social & Legal Studies* 13, no. 3 (2004): 377-401; James Gibson, 'Overcoming Apartheid: Can Truth Reconcile a Divided Nation?' *Politikon* 31 (2004): 129-155

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institutional reforms, or individual or collective psychological healing in postwar states.<sup>24</sup>

In opposition to the evaluations of de la Rey and Owens or Allan and Allan in South Africa, for example, Hamber has noted that “the process may have helped some with healing, but was hardly sufficient and the impact not necessarily psychologically beneficial.”<sup>25</sup> Gilligan notes that the general “assumption is that war creates trauma and peace provides the conditions in which trauma can be worked through and psychological health restored,” but that, first, professional psychological therapy can potentially hurt as many people as it benefits, second, that many survivors frame the demand for truth in relation to justice and not to psychological healing, and third, that “the impetus for the growth of humanitarian psychosocial programmes (sic) to deal with war trauma comes from the West rather than from the societies affected by violent conflict.”<sup>26</sup>

What these authors highlight is the potential disconnect between the imposed processes thought to produce collective or individual psychosocial healing, and the experience of the process on the ground, among the target audience. My own work sheds light on exactly this problematic dynamic; the clash between locally and globally normative conceptions of appropriate postwar psychological interventions.

## **Methodology**

The genesis of my research project can be found in the work of previous researchers who

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<sup>24</sup> See Thoms, *supra* n 2; Mendeloff, *supra* n 2

<sup>25</sup> Brandon Hamber, 'Rights and Reasons: Challenges for Truth Recovery in South Africa and Northern Ireland,' *Fordham International Law Journal* (2003): 1078

<sup>26</sup> Chris Gilligan, 'Traumatized by Peace? A Critique of Five Assumptions in the Theory and Practice of Conflict-Related Trauma Policy in Northern Ireland,' *Policy & Politics* 34, no. 2 (2006): 327, 335, 337

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reported on the cultural salience of the TRC, and the process of truth telling, for local people in Sierra Leone.<sup>27</sup> These authors argued that the TRC's public hearings, conducted in the headquarter towns of each of the country's 12 districts, as well as in Freetown, were unable to elicit the requisite emotional response from participants and audience members. These authors also provided reasons why this might be the case. Shaw and Kelsall both argued that the process of truth telling was, in itself, culturally inappropriate within the constructs of Sierra Leonean culture, and that the TRC should, in response, have incorporated much more symbol and ritual from the local culture.

When I began my research I aimed to test both of these findings. Therefore, my goal was to investigate to what extent the inclusion of local symbol, ritual and ceremony impacted the local non-elite understandings, perceptions, and evaluations of the TRC public hearings as a form of healing and justice provision. For this reason, in opposition to many other studies that have attempted to assess the effect of transitional justice mechanisms by using national case studies or cross national comparison studies, I decided to use a highly focused and ethnographic case study approach, focusing on one town, one public hearing, and the local perceptions of that one event.<sup>28</sup> As such, the findings from this study are far more specifically localized than those of many other studies but, instead of only saying how the TRC was perceived or what effects it produced, this study can also provide a detailed understanding of why it was perceived as

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<sup>27</sup> Rosalind Shaw, 'Rethinking Truth and Reconciliation Commissions: Lessons from Sierra Leone,' (Washington D.C.: United States Institute of Peace, 2005); Timothy Kelsall, 'Truth, Lies, Ritual: Preliminary Reflections on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission,' *Human Rights Quarterly* 27, no. 2 (2005): 361-391

<sup>28</sup> For reviews of past empirical studies see Thoms et. al., supra n 2; Mendeloff, supra n 2; Van Der Merwe et. al., supra n 2

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it was and affected people as it did.

The key to this approach was a period of long term residence in the community of Makeni, interaction with a wide range of groups and individuals by fostering numerous and variable opportunities for participant observation, and a series of 62 semi-structured and open ended interviews, 50 of which were with local non-elites and 12 of which were with educated elites resident in the community.

I spent 6 weeks in the summer of 2007, the time surrounding the presidential election of current Sierra Leonean President Ernest Bai Karoma, in Freetown, making contacts, learning some Krio, and becoming informally acquainted with the capital. Therefore, on my arrival in Sierra Leone, called Salone by locals, in August of 2008, I spent only two weeks in Freetown before heading out to Makeni to get settled in and to begin participant observation. I was, therefore, in Makeni from early September 2008 until July 2009. I had arranged, prior to leaving the US, to spend from the start of September to the start of December working with a small local NGO working on child health and education issues. This was my primary participant observation site.

However, in addition to working at the small NGO, I also started lecturing at the local Catholic College, volunteering on a number of community projects, and visiting a small village outside of town called Magbenteh, playing football with the boys of the village most evenings and getting acquainted with their lives. By early December, having been in Makeni since early September, I was ready to start interviewing. However, at no time during over 10 months in Makeni did I stop carrying out participant observation and engaging with the community. Indeed, from early December until early March, when I

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was conducting the interview process, I was even more active walking around town and identifying interviewees. Throughout this time the goal was always to learn what it was to live in Makeni. As Kempny and Burszta state, anthropological knowledge is gained by “dwelling in the world,” or as Stack has described it, “the observer himself must attempt to learn how to move appropriately inside the private world of those observed.”<sup>29</sup> Through conversations and relationships with locals, and the daily process of living, working, and talking, I attempted, over these 10 months, to “learn how to move” in this world.

My interviews among elites, starting in early December, were with individuals identified as having been involved with or having detailed knowledge of the TRC process. I used snowball sampling to identify and contact these first interviewees and they included religious leaders, such as the Bishop and the District Chief Imam, traditional leaders, such as the Paramount Chief, a few local businessmen, and a number of NGO staff who were involved with or worked with larger Sierra Leonean NGOs. These interviewees, although diverse, are also quite easy to identify as *educated elites*. Each of these elites had a significant amount of education and, with the exception of that with the District Chief Imam, each of these interviews was conducted in fluent English.

Non-elite interviewees, on the other hand, were much more difficult to identify. Those I did interview were sampled in two different ways. It was important, if I was to

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<sup>29</sup> Marian Kempny and Wojciech J. Burszta, ‘On the Relevance of Common Sense for Anthropological Knowledge,’ in *Social Experience and Anthropological Knowledge*, ed. Kirsten Hastrup and Peter Hervik (New York: Routledge, 1994): 122; Carol Stack, ‘Doing Research in the Flats,’ in *In the Field: Readings on the Field Research Experience*, ed. Carolyn D. Smith and William Kornblum (New York: Praeger, 1989): 24

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understand the effect of including local symbols, rituals, and ceremonies within the public hearings of the TRC, to interview those who had attended the hearings as audience members, as opposed to those most victimized by the violence, or those who testified to the TRC, as other studies have done. This was no easy task as, although elite interviewees often described the hall as being full during the hearings, it was very difficult to find those non-elites who had attended among 200,000 people living in and around Makeni. However, over time 30 non-elite interviewees were identified through snowball sampling, chosen specifically because they had attended the TRC's public hearings in Makeni as audience members.

The remaining 20 non-elite interviewees were randomly sampled. This random sampling became necessary after about a month of interviews. Following the grounded theory approach to qualitative research I allowed emergent issues to guide my ongoing interviewee sampling.<sup>30</sup> The most salient issue that emerged from my earliest interviews, at least for my initial research agenda, was that none of my interviewees remembered or described anything they would describe as local symbol or ritual in the public hearings other than the presence of certain local and sometimes traditional leaders, such as the paramount chief. In fact, three of the elite interviewees noted, in support of Kelsall's suggestion, that such symbolism and ritual would have assisted the process as no such ritual had been included.<sup>31</sup>

Instead the focus of the interviews always shifted towards the role of the TRC,

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<sup>30</sup> Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research* (Chicago: Aldine, 1967)

<sup>31</sup> Kelsall, *supra* n 28

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what the TRC was expected to do that it had not done. This lack of any memory of ritual in the public hearings, and the desire among interviewees to speak instead of their own expectations of what a transitional justice mechanism should do, led me to expand my research questions, to investigate local conceptions of healing and justice, and how such understandings effected perceptions or evaluations of the public truth telling process. Such issues were far more relevant to my interviewees and elicited far more passion and interest from all groups. In response, I altered both my sampling methodology and my questions to investigate further these emergent issues.

The random sample was conducted by using a random digit generator to choose 100 addresses from a recently constructed list of all the addresses in Makeni. Once the random list of addresses was generated my translator and I proceeded to walk around town and interview the first adult who would assent to participate at each house. When we arrived at an address that was unoccupied, which is rather common in Makeni where many houses undergo piece by piece construction and many others are burned out husks, we went to the first occupied house to the left of the one identified in our sample. In this way we were able to interview 20 randomly sampled residents of Makeni who were willing to participate in the study. Three of these random interviewees also happened to have attended the TRC as audience members on at least one occasion.

These non-elite interviewees, unlike the 12 elites, rarely spoke any English and usually had very little education. Among this group were housewives and farmers, unemployed young men and market women, wheelbarrow pushers and market traders. It must be noted that this group included elites of different kinds, such as a local Sheik,

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which is a religious figure, a local area Chief on the south side of Makeni, and a Mami Queen, a high official in the women's secret society, in a village just north of Makeni. These people hold status in their communities but they are clearly differentiated in my sample from the educated elites by their lack of education and, usually, their lack of English skills.

Alternatively, some of my non-elite interviewees did speak relatively good English, a young policeman, a number of young men and women who were trying to finish school, and a handful of teachers, some employed, some not. But the ability to speak some English does not place them in the same category as those who run NGOs, own businesses, and lead religious institutions. What distinguishes "educated elites" in Makeni from other kinds of elites, or from non-elites with a small amount of education, are connections and *access* to structures of power, knowledge, and influence. I will return to this in Part five of this paper.

### **Local Perceptions of Truth Telling as Psychological Catharsis: Elites vs. Non-Elites**

When describing the basic evaluation of the psychologically cathartic effect of the TRC's public hearings in Makeni it is simple enough to say that there was a huge divergence between the experiences and evaluations of the educated elites, and the non-elites. Elite's were very likely to feel, for example, that the TRC had helped them personally. Anthony, a 35 year old medical professional working at the Catholic Church's hospital in Makeni, described, for example, how;

“some of the boys that joined the RUF, my neighbors, they went in my house,



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burned my house, vandalized and stole all of my property ... if it were not for the TRC and the, the sensitization that had been going on the radio and said lets accept our brothers, lets forget about everything, lets come together and build our society, I should have had a heavy problem with them, you know?"

Many of my elite interviewees argued that the TRC had served a very valuable purpose. Alimami, the director of the Center for Democracy and Human Rights (CDHR), the local NGO that was responsible for facilitating the TRC's public hearing in Makeni, told me that;

To many people even saying what happened to you is a healing process. It was very helpful. I can still remember some victims, when they were testifying publicly they were crying, and that crying is also part of the healing process. It was very much useful.

And Ali, a former student at the Fatima Institute, the Catholic College where I was lecturing and where a year's tuition costs almost three times the GDP per capita in Sierra Leone, stated;

After saying the truth out of your mind, because of what had happened, you understand, then because you've said what has happened then you can be able to resettle and then reconcile, from the reconciliation then you will be able to resettle down with the person that has done bad things to you.

Others, such as Mustapha, a youth leader and a former Fatima Institute student, believed that it was a good thing for the perpetrators to tell their stories to an audience. As he argued;

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The testimonies I did appreciate. Both from the side of the perpetrator and the victims themselves, but what I admire the most was that, the mere fact that some, the perpetrator, had the zeal to come out before the audience and speak of what he had been doing to people.

Similarly, Matthew, a teacher who had also worked for an NGO that was involved in collecting victim and witness statements before the TRC was even set up, and then volunteered for CDHR during the process, praised truth telling for its psychological effects on the perpetrators, in opposition to Kelsall's evaluation of its effect.<sup>32</sup>

Most of those people, those guys, our friends, who get themselves involved during the war, those RUF, SLA guys, most of them, when they listen to this, these types of stories, they really accepted that they have done bad, you know? I believe it is very important because most of these things, because most of these things come out.

My elite interviewees were, in this way, very supportive of the work of the TRC. They often seemed to regurgitate NGO speak as it regards peacebuilding. They talked about "healing processes," and "collective forgiveness." They expressed, not only how the TRC's work had affected them, but also how they thought it had affected their communities, and Salone, as a whole. Abdullah, a drugstore owner with a shop near the heart of the town, was of the opinion that "the TRC meant a lot, especially in enforcing or trying to enhance the peace." He was confident that the TRC had been the best option for Sierra Leone in the postwar period, even saying that;

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<sup>32</sup> Kelsall, *supra* n 28

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When you have a platform wherein you can pull out your anger or your frustration, your discouragement, maybe when something is within you and you have a forum to voice those particulars, then they will go off naturally. It is natural for human beings to say, or share their experiences when they have suffered, then that will release the tension within oneself.

Similarly, Sally, a staff member now at CDHR who was with another NGO at the time of the TRC stated;

I believe everything that happened that day has an important thing in it, you see ... I believe everything that took place there has its own importance ... I believe they would not have lived peacefully without the TRC. It was, it did a lot.

These elites, representatives as they are of a privileged class in Makeni, clearly had positive experiences of the TRC and its public hearings. Some had themselves experienced a psychologically cathartic effect, while others projected their experience onto the community or the nation as a whole, claiming, as Abdullah did, that talking about one's hardships will "naturally" allow you to overcome them. This, however, does not mean that these elites did not also voice very serious critiques of the process, as, in fact, almost all of them did. Abdullah, for example, lamented the lack of reparations for victims, stating that;

My regret over the TRC is they made promises, to encourage the people later and they keep on pushing them over and over, and I think that word reparation should not be downplayed upon. There are people who are still, they have fresh memories of this war, up till now.

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This was a very common complaint. It was also only from elites that I heard a critique of the TRC's failure to incorporate local ritual and symbolism. It was Anthony who argued that you must utilize the local societies if you want victims and perpetrators to talk together. As he explained it;

You [must] go down to their society, their culture, you meet them there, they talk things in common. That is the simplest place to make peace and reconciliation with them. Like the Limbas, when the *Bamban* is playing, every member of that society is equal, in the sight of the culture ... so if you preach reconciliation there it would go down perfectly.

In addition to these critiques many educated elites echoed comments made by non-elites, that the TRC failed to communicate its message to local people outside the headquarter towns, that it failed to provide any form of monetary assistance to local people, and that there were no follow up projects and programs to assist people in the long term. However, even given these critiques, when asked the simple questions, when we inquired as to their evaluation of the success of the process, the responses were always positive, with every one of the twelve elites. This was not the case with non-elites.

Non-elites, by way of contrast, almost never felt positively about the work of the TRC, with the exception of one young police officer and the old town crier. The rest of the non-elite interviewees held overwhelmingly negative attitudes. When talking about the potential psychologically cathartic effects of the TRC the local non-elite tendency to see the TRC hearings as a *provocation* is the most damaging effect. Michael, the leader of one of the two local polio victim's groups in Makeni, was always extremely negative

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about the TRC process and was the first I heard to use the word “provocation” to describe it. It was provocative, he said, because there was “no packet for people that suffered” and nothing for those who told their stories. Another man, one of the first I met at the office of the small NGO I worked with, likened the TRC hearings to “pouring hot water over your head,” and this statement, echoed frequently by other interviewees, articulates the obverse of local conceptions of psychological healing or calming, understood locally to be the creation of a cool heart.<sup>33</sup>

One of the first interviews I conducted in towns around Makeni, in Gbendembu, was with the headmaster of the local primary school, Saidu. Saidu was an older man at 61, and had been in the area for the entire time of the war. He echoed Shaw’s findings when he argued that “they [the TRC] were trying to create some problems” because “when I forgive somebody, even if I remember it in my mind, you don’t say it out loud.”<sup>34</sup> Similarly Alpha, a 32 year old Mende farmer, who was very negative about the work of the TRC but who had not attended it, felt that the TRC was problematic;

Because I just heard about it, but I feel it was just provocation as they talk it on the radio ... Because they just keep talking about it all the time, TRC, TRC, and I don’t see what they have done for us, so it seems as if it is only provocation to those that they seized advantage on during the war.

This is reflected in a comment by Boubakar, a 48 year old teacher in the village of Kamabai, a few minutes up the road from Makeni to the north, who had traveled to

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<sup>33</sup> Shaw, *supra* n 28

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*

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Makeni to view the hearing because in the war the rebels had burned his house and taken his daughter. When asked if the TRC had helped Salone, he replied;

Well, the TRC, it was just talk that they came and talked. What they talk, they didn't even do it. So I do not feel that they even came to help Salone.

Aminata, a 33 year old housewife who lost her house during the war and whose two brothers are amputees, made this clear when she informed us that;

What they said they are coming to do we did not see them doing it, they [the international community] gave them money, they brought money saying they are coming to sponsor people that have been offended during the war and I have not seen anything, I have not seen them doing any serious thing.

And Yamboi, , a 30 year old Mende salesman who had a relatively good understanding of the goals of the TRC, stated quite clearly that "most of the promises they made they did not do them. What they said they would do for people, they were not able to do those things. So I feel that they are not able to make it successful."

Similarly Hanna, a 29 year old housewife in Makeni who had attended the hearings, when asked what she had heard others say about the TRC immediately upon leaving the old town hall on the day of the hearing, stated that;

We usually discussed how the TRC only came to add wounds to people. They just came to awaken people's wounds because, if a certain thing is past and maybe you just remain as you are it will be better for you, but recalling the past, it can be more dangerous.

Hanna continued, and put this very nicely when she argued that the TRC came;

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when the problem had happened for a very long time and you came in just a single day for me to start back and unveil all what has happened, just like I said before, you are *coming to add pepper in my wound*.

And lastly, Tamba, a 35 year old farmer in Kamabai, the town about 10 minutes to the north of Makeni, who had traveled to Makeni to witness the hearings, argued, when asked if the TRC helped people to forget the war;

No, it will not help them to forget. Because if you have already said that I'm telling you to forget about this and later you come with the person again, that this is the one who hurt you ... I am on the way to forget about it and you bring the person in front of me, it is like you don't want to settle between us.

All of these quotes, direct evaluations from non-elites of the public hearing process in Makeni, tell a similar story, they articulate a disquiet with, or a disconnect from, the process. There were many other concerns voiced by non-elites about the process. It didn't provide healthcare, housing, education, rebuilding assistance, and grants or loans for new businesses. People also complained that the TRC was redundant, the religious leaders, Pastors, Priests and Imams had been preaching peace and forgiveness for years, even during the war, and the TRC only continued this. And as a result, in direct opposition to the evaluations of the educated elites, all but two non-elites held negative evaluations of the psychological effects of the TRC's public hearings processes, primarily seeing it either as a provocation or a complete waste of time. The next section investigates reasons behind these divergent experiences.

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## **Understanding Divergent Perspectives**

I want now to investigate why the evaluations highlighted above were voiced as they were. In the case of the public hearings in Makeni this leads us back to issues of understanding and expectation. Most non-elites had very little understanding of the *process* that the TRC followed, although they had some understanding of its *goals*. When asked, for example, why the TRC had come to Makeni, many non-elites responded simply that it was “to bring peace” or “to bring unity.” This was a simple but relatively accurate understanding of the goals of the TRC in Sierra Leone as truth commissions, like all transitional justice mechanisms, are thought to further the goal of peace and sustainable transition from war and/or authoritarian government. However, there was a very limited understanding of what the TRC was going to do in order to meet those goals, as well as a great amount of confusion between the TRC and the various other postwar projects undertaken by the government, international NGOs, and particularly the Special Court.

Because the processes of the TRC were not communicated to the local non-elites in an understandable way, these non-elites had very high expectations of what it would do. Non-elites understood the TRC was there to bring peace, to bring help to the people and to help people forgive and forget. This was what was clearly communicated and understood. However, when assessing the role or power of the TRC and its presentation of truth telling to provide psychological healing, we see that it is the expectations that this generated that worked most directly against the TRC’s success. The most damaging false understanding about the TRC was that it was coming to provide *immediate support* to



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victims, the idea that the TRC was going to give people money or supplies. Even when they did not confuse the work of the TRC with that of the Special Court, the government, or international NGOs, this misunderstanding among local people was still a hugely debilitating factor.

In Makeni you quickly learn that many words are used for what, in the west, we would term compensation. I was once asked by the guard the Fatima Institute hired to patrol our compound why I didn't *consider* him? This meant, why didn't I give him money? When I was leaving Makeni on a road trip one day, I was told to be sure to *remember* the driver of the vehicle. This meant that I should tip the driver. Similarly many interviewees lamented that the TRC had not *encouraged* them and did not understand because the TRC was supposed to come and *help*; how could the TRC expect them to recover from the war if it did not help them? All of these word – consider, remember, encourage, help – imply, in Makeni, the transfer of money or resources. When local non-elites heard that the TRC was coming to help them, they expected no less than the provision of money and resources, not at some time in the future, right now.

It was believed by most local non-elites that the TRC would provide money in direct exchange for the telling of victim or witness stories. Fanta, a 60 year old Limba woman we met at the Panlap amputee camp, who had a large scar the entire way down her back and a debilitated left arm, stated plainly that “they said if we go and talk, they will help us.” Fanta was one of two people I interviewed who had told their stories at the TRC hearing in Makeni. Fanta had done so only because, as she said “I thought they will help me for daily bread and medical.” Ejatu, the local *Mami Queen*, or the head of the

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women's secret society, in Kalangba, a village north of Makeni, told us that she had wanted to attend the TRC because "they have said it, anybody that goes to testify, they will help you and your children." Ejatu had lost her husband in the war and desperately needed help raising her children and, I got the impression, her grandchildren. Help had not come for her, but she felt that people who had been able to attend the TRC hearing and tell their story had received such help.

Through such voices we witness a disconnect between what the TRC did and what local people expected of it. These expectations however, are as much related to local social norms and values as they are to the sensitization campaign of the TRC. The norm in Makeni is that words such as help, support, remember, appreciate, or consider, all mean to provide resources or money. In the mistaken use of these terms in its sensitization campaign, and within the sociocultural context specific to Sierra Leone, the TRC was misrepresenting what it planned to do. Similarly, the conventional role of white, European, American or UN administered projects is to provide resources, to run projects, drill wells, etc. To act, as they have always acted, as patrons within the locally dominant sociocultural conception of appropriate patron-client relations, built, as they are, on reciprocal obligation.

Such Patron-Client systems are endemic to the region and, in the case of Sierra Leone, represent one of the prime motivators of social action. It is through this system that individual autonomy, responsibility, and social action, is understood. Consumption by the big-man, for example, is "balanced by generosity and

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other benevolent forms of extension to their dependents and supporters.”<sup>35</sup> In this way systems of patron-client relationships can be seen as reciprocal relationships; there is “the implicit understanding that a chief will give his protection to those who submit to his authority and place themselves in his hands.”<sup>36</sup>

The TRC was perceived, therefore, by local non-elites, as a patron within this sociocultural context. The idea that such a project will come and talk, what is conventionally the role of the chiefs, priests, pastors and Imams, was anathema to local people. A UN project, run by white people from America and Europe, provides resources, not talk. As a result, among local non-elites, truth telling failed to create the kind of psychological healing western scholars and practitioners expected of it. It did, however, have a much more positive effect among the local educated elites.

As described above, although they too voiced many critiques of the TRC process, among the educated elites I interviewed were individuals who reported a positive experience of, and psychologically cathartic effects from, the TRC. I argue that there are two reasons for such contradictory results. First of all, these elites live lives very different from my non-elite interviewees. Their reality is simple unrepresentative. Many of our interviews with elites, for example, were conducted at their place of employment. We met the higher level NGO staff members in their offices, with their 4 wheel

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<sup>35</sup> Rosalind Shaw, *Memories of the Slave Trade: Ritual and Historical Imagination in Sierra Leone* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002): 256

<sup>36</sup> Michael Jackson, *In Sierra Leone* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004): 47

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drives parked outside, their computers humming away on their desks, and, when we were lucky, the AC unit pumping cold clean air into the room. A good number of the senior employees of the Catholic Mission and the Fatima Institute had been to Italy on the Church's money, either for educational opportunities or for church projects. Similarly many NGO workers, including one of my research assistants who had previously worked for a large NGO, had been overseas for work.

Makeni's elites are a rather interconnected group of professionals, NGO workers, and self-professed "civil society" leaders. This community is rather small compared with the population of Makeni and its surrounding environs and, as such, most of these elites know each other very well and many have known each other their entire lives. These elites, usually men, are literate and quite educated relative to the average resident of Makeni. As such, although they were influential and relatively wealthy prior to the end of the war, they were also those most able to take advantage of the large influx of funds after the war and take advantage of the peacebuilding process.

These elites often have multiple sources of income, from their jobs as well as their farms, where they employ manual laborers in exchange for food, housing, or very small daily wages, around Makeni just 5000 Leones, or \$1.66, per day. They often drive large SUVs and live in secure walled compounds. Their lives are very different from the majority in Makeni. The very real result, therefore, is that, where non-elites lament the TRC's inability to affect their lives, the peacebuilding process truly did affect the lives of

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many elites. They have a positive memory of the TRC because many of them were either employed by it or by one of the other development organizations that were active in Makeni at that time. They have benefited from the peace, it has provided them with livelihoods, houses, cars, "Bigness." Unlike the non-elites, these elites have received the necessary resources to rebuild their lives.

The second reason for this difference between educated elites and non-elites is that the experience of being incorporated into the peacebuilding and transitional justice mechanisms itself fosters the incorporation of those western paradigms and constructs foundational to the idea of truth telling as psychologically healing. As a direct result of their incorporation into and incorporation of of western constructs, local elites have a very different understanding of their world, both its local and global aspects. As a group they do not adhere to the dominant local understandings or interpretations of Sierra Leone's ongoing postwar dynamics because they are situated differently in relation to them and their evaluations depend on that very positionality. They experience truth telling as psychologically cathartic because, for them, it was, just as it may be for many of the scholars and practitioners working in the field. But this does not mean that such experiences are "natural" or should be everywhere expected.

In short, locals, both elite and non-elite, place all imposed projects, including the truth commission, within the constructs of the sociocultural world they are able to understand. In the case of the truth commission their conceptions of healing, justice, peace and development will determine their interpretation and evaluation of the process. The positive evaluations of the educated elites are symptomatic of the location of these

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elites within an interconnected global discourse, far closer to the position of the west than are the non-elites in Makeni. My educated elite interviewees had access to, and had cultivated an acceptance of, contemporary western or Anglo-American concepts and ideas of psychological healing.<sup>37</sup> This is reflected in their quotes above, and in their general orientation towards peacebuilding and transitional justice mechanisms. Non-elites had little access to, and therefore little understanding and incorporation of, such concepts.

In the world in which we live today the truth commission model of transitional justice is itself a symptom of ongoing global dynamics which are creating ever more interconnected and interpenetrated conceptual worlds. There is an expanding literature describing the hybridization, cosmopolitanization, or creolization of experience, in which everyone is, to a greater or lesser extent, implicated and affected by the cultural exports of others.<sup>38</sup> However, the extent of this affect on individual members of communities in far flung localities is itself variable and, as a result, some localities, and individuals in those localities, are more exposed to and incorporative of, dominant global concepts, while other localities, and

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<sup>37</sup> For Investigations of the impact of the Anglo-Americanization of psychological therapeutic practice see Pupavac supra n 23; Frank Furedi, *Therapy Culture: Cultivating Vulnerability in an Uncertain Age* (London: Routledge, 2004); Tana Dineen, *Manufacturing Victims: What the Psychology Industry is Doing to People* (Westmount QC: Robert Davies Multimedia Publishing, 2000).

<sup>38</sup> See Ulf Hannerz, 'The World in Creolisation,' *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 57, no. 4 (1987): 546-559; James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988); Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson, 'Beyond "Culture": Space, Identity, and the Politics of Difference,' *Cultural Anthropology* 7 (1992): 6-23; Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996); Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, *Millennial Capitalism and the Culture of Neoliberalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001); Ulrich Beck, 'Cosmopolitan Realism: On the Distinction between Cosmopolitanism in Philosophy and the Social Sciences,' *Global Networks* 4. No. 2 (2004): 131-156.

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those individuals in them, experience such exposure and incorporation much less powerfully. It is exactly this difference we witness in the quotes from residents of Makeni.

## **Conclusion**

In this paper I have tried to add to the literature assessing the psychological effects of transitional justice mechanisms, and specifically, the truth telling processes now central to the truth commission model of transitional justice. In part one I described the dominant conception of truth telling in the literature, as a psychologically healing process that assists both individuals and groups in the postwar transitional period. In part two, I looked at the limited literature that has thus far attempted to assess that often presumed effect, finding, unfortunately, that the literature simply does not provide enough proof to support the arguments of truth telling advocates.

In part three I described my own approach to assessment in Makeni, Sierra Leone, focusing as I did on a single case study and a deep understanding of the local context and local understandings, perceptions and evaluations of the process, gained through extensive participant observation and a series of semi structured interviews. In part four, I presented a portion of my findings which describe the divergence between the positive evaluations of local educated elites and the negative evaluations of non-elites. Finally, in the last section, I provided two of the core reasons for this divergence and showed that this differences is rooted in the variable realities of life in Makeni for

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educated elites and non-elites, the benefits educated elites experienced as a result of their ability to take advantage of the peacebuilding and development projects in the immediate postwar period, and their incorporation of global concepts of psychological healing.

I want now to conclude with a word regarding assessment. It must be highlighted that, if I had spent less time in Makeni, interviewed only educated elites regarding the process, or attempted to do a comparative study of numerous towns or even a number of countries, I would never have come to understand the situation in Makeni to the depth that I did. While in Makeni I witnessed many audits, assessments and evaluations of NGO projects. A European NGO worker usually flew into Freetown, drove to two or three other cities during their two weeks in country, talked almost exclusively to educated elites about projects those elite had economic and political reasons to lie about, and then proceeded to fly home and write their report.

Such assessments provide inaccurate and one sided evaluations of peacebuilding, transitional justice, and development in postwar states. They fail to acknowledge the very real incentives for misinformation, corruption, or outright theft, among members of "civil society" in such shifting and transitional environments. In addition, even if they receive accurate evaluative information from those they interact with on the ground, such evaluation processes are only suited to, at best, determine what is experienced on the ground, but never to determine why. If we are to improve our practices it is necessary to concern ourselves consistently with why our processes are experienced as they are on the ground. The very real incentives for local elites to misinform and lie to evaluators and auditors clearly demands a more non-elite focused method of evaluation.



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However, as I tried to make clear in part five of this paper. The positive evaluations I heard from educated elites cannot simply be understood as misinformation; they were not all lying in every case. Many of the educated elites did experience the process positively because of their position within the society and their incorporation of western norms and concepts. However, this does not make their opinions representative of the majority. The process of spending an extended amount of time working with, living with, and socializing with the most vulnerable, the uneducated, the underprivileged, in a place like Makeni, is the only way to overcome, not only the potential for misinformation, but also the far more complicating issues of divergent experiences of events, indeed, of reality, resulting from the ongoing globalization and hybridization of concepts and constructs. The approach taken in this project, to understand not only how the TRC worked, how many public hearings it held, or how many people provided statements, but to evaluate, and most importantly *understand* local non-elite perceptions, must be replicated in future assessments.

As Theissen argues, survey results often say more about the respondents than they do about the actual efficacy of an institution.<sup>39</sup> This is true also for the opinions of the educated elites and non-elites interviewed for this study. However, given that the public hearings of a TRC are intended to have experiential affects, to affect the individual's experience of psychological trauma, or healing, the very nature of the individual experience of those events is itself a measure of the efficacy of the institution.

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<sup>39</sup> Gunnar Theissen, 'Object of Trust and Hatred: Public Attitudes Toward the TRC,' in *Truth and Reconciliation in South Africa*, ed. Audrey R. Chapman and Hugo Van Der Merwe (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008): 192

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A more ethnographic approach to evaluation evaluates the success of transitional justice mechanisms by assessing the experience of those mechanisms among the target audience themselves. These mechanisms are thought to produce effects among such audiences, clearly evaluating local experience is itself an evaluation of the success of the process and must be replicated.

It is also true that understandings, perceptions, and evaluations of the TRC at this later date, five years after the TRC's public hearings in Makeni, reflect the influence of various other social factors and institutions. However, this too supports my contention that a greater focus on analysis of specific local social, political, economic, and demographic influences, the general sociocultural context in which a truth commission operates and is understood, is itself a requirement for future assessment. What is needed is what Geertz called "thick description" of local realities.<sup>40</sup> In addition, the social and economic situation in postwar settings similar to rural Sierra Leone require a more qualitative approach that takes account of the disempowered status of a largely illiterate majority. Methodologies reliant on fast and informal procedures would, potentially, be unable to capture an accurate picture of local experiences and perceptions.

In short, the results of this study, only elements of which have been presented in this paper, show the importance of qualitative case study analyses of local experiences of truth commissions in order to determine their success and failure. Certainly the various other methodologies of assessment are also necessary. These various forms of assessment are complementary, not contradictory or in competition. Deep qualitative understandings

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<sup>40</sup> Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973)

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of local experience, such as I have conducted in Makeni, are only more useful when placed alongside larger comparative case studies, whether qualitative or quantitative in nature. I therefore hope that this paper be seen at one and the same time as an example of assessment, and a call for more, whether similar or dissimilar to my own efforts.