

Questionnaire by Proscovia Svärd

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1. Please indicate which mechanisms have been established in the concerned country to hold accountable persons accused of committing or bearing responsibility for gross violations of human rights and serious violations of international humanitarian law in colonial contexts. If such mechanisms were not adopted, please explain why. Please indicate the challenges and opportunities encountered in investigating, prosecuting and sanctioning such crimes.

In Sierra Leone a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and a Special Court were established. My research focused only on the TRC and it confirmed poor management of the TRC documentation during the first years after its closure and poor dissemination of the results.

In Liberia a TRC was used as a transitional justice mechanism. Like the case of Sierra Leon, the management and dissemination of the TRC was poor. The poor information management regimes led to the exiling of the entire documentation to the US and no copy exists in Liberia!

In South Africa, the TRC was used to address the apartheid atrocities but the documentation that accrued is highly politicized.

In Gambia the on-going TRC is making the same mistakes and the Public Records office or the archivists and records managers are not involved in the process.

I am an information scientist and therefore interested in researching how the documentation that accrues from the TRC processes is used to democratize post-conflict societies and promote reconciliation. The countries I have focused my research on have been Sierra Leone and Liberia. I have looked at the Truth and Reconciliation Commissions' documentation processes. I investigate how the TRC documentation (archives) is/are captured, organized, preserved and diffused into society to inform policy that would address the social and economic injustices, promote reconciliation through an understanding of the conflicts and to promote a democratic society.

In the two case studies of Sierra Leon and Liberia an information management component was missing from the TRC budgets. These cases may seem like history since the TRCs took place

a long time ago but the challenges of democratizing the TRC documentation are omni-present due to lack of political will and poor information management infrastructures. Information is key to post conflict reconstruction but when African TRCs are established, the information institutions and the information management professions are often not involved in the process. This creates challenges regarding the management and dissemination of the entire documentation which should include; identifying classified information from information that should be put in the public domain and promotion of use through dissemination of the TRC findings. Furthermore, very few copies of the TRC findings are published and often out of reach of the societies they document. This hinders their dissemination to researchers or tertiary institutions and the society at large. In the case of Sierra Leone, the pictorial version that was created to compliment the TRC final report was never published but one of the commissioners that I interviewed during the time of my field work shared he had a copy! I consider this to be disrespectful to the war victims. In the Liberian case, a total of over 10000 pages of the report were written but only 1500 were printed. One wonders what happened to the rest of the pages. These are narratives of the victims that no one is following up or has managed in a meaningful way to meet with the objectives of the TRC!

The management of the collected data is usually done by database managers through international organizations that claim to use technology to enhance human rights. The problem is that due to poor information management infrastructures, the management of the data bases becomes a challenge and with no equipped information institutions, their use is non-existent. When I began looking at the Sierra Leonean case, the TRC documentation had been left packed in boxes and put in a dump room at Fourah Bay College! I personally visited and witnessed this. The database that was retained in the country was on a CD and the person who had been trained to manage it had left the country. The management of information that accrues from the TRC processes is only considered at the end of the TRC processes, by this time the TRCs have ran out of funds. The list of publications that I have sent in together with this document highlight the documentation management challenges that posited need to be addressed since 2006. This has not changed the status quo since TRCs have continued to be implemented and the management of the documentation that accrues continues not to be prioritized. At the commencement of each TRC mission, there must be an information management infrastructure in place to manage the creation, capture, organization and dissemination of the TRC findings.

The Liberian Human Rights Commission and the Governance Commission did not know where the documentation was! I held a seminar at the Governance Commission and let them know it was at St. Georgia Technical College in Atlanta, the US. I also interviewed one of the commissioners at the Human Rights Commission, a body entrusted with the implementation of the TRC recommendations but that is currently working without the documentation! Liberia hence made history in being the first sovereign state to hand over its entire TRC documentation to a foreign power. This move was meant to safe guard the documentation but this has meant that the continued work of the TRC that is the implementation of its recommendations was embarked on in the absence of this documentation which is so crucial to the process. The documentation is key to the delivery of justice, reparations, reconciliation and the democratization of the Liberian society. It is still in the US and the contract that was signed by the government of Liberia, the TRC and St. Georgia Technical College expired in 2010. The Liberian government has not made any claims to re-possess the documentation. My last visit to Liberia portrayed a frustrated citizenry who claimed the process awarded the perpetrators of the crimes and marginalized the victims.