In February of this year, Africa acquired its own 'Pinochet' when a Senegalese court indicted the former dictator of Chad, Hissein Habré for acts of torture committed during his regime. It was the first time ever that the courts of another country indicted a former African head of state. In the same month, the Supreme Court of Zimbabwe ruled that President Mugabe could be sued in his official capacity for failing to publish the reports of two commissions of inquiry into the deaths of government opponents in the Matabeleland region in the 1980s following clashes with the state security forces. Hitherto, the government had repressed the results of these inquiries, claiming their publication could spark violence between different political constituencies. Also in 1999, a number of developments happened on the African continent that indicated a concern with past human rights violations.

In June, President Obasanjo of Nigeria established a commission to investigate human rights abuses that had occurred in his country between January 1966 and his assumption of power in May 1999. In July, the civil war in Sierra Leone ended with the conclusion of the Lomé Peace Agreement that provided for, amongst other things, the investigation of atrocities committed during the war.

These developments, though small, form some counterweight to the human rights violations that continue to be committed in the various armed conflicts that pervade the continent, be it in Burundi, Angola, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Western Sahara, or Sudan. As such, these developments correspond to the international trend towards addressing issues of accountability and acknowledgement.

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Despite the number of commissions established on the continent, the African experience remains relatively understudied as compared to the wealth of material available on the Latin American cases.\footnote{Truth commissions have been established in Uganda (twice), Zimbabwe, Chad, and South Africa.} Only with the establishment of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) did attention turn to Africa, mostly because of the unique features of the TRC and the appeal of the South African ‘miracle’ transition. The lack of analysis of African commissions may be attributed in part to a general dearth of information and to the low international profile of the countries concerned. Nevertheless, a closer look at truth commissions in Africa is warranted. Not only will it contribute to our understanding of truth commissions in general; it may also provide us with insight as to whether any specific conditions prevail in Africa pertaining to truth commissions. The latter is especially relevant in light of recent developments, since a number of new commissions are being established or contemplated: aside from Nigeria and Sierra Leone, Guinea Bissau has decided to establish a truth commission and commissions are being considered for Burundi, Rwanda, and Malawi.

This article consists of two parts, which examine two contrasting cases in Africa: Namibia and Sierra Leone. While vastly different, both cases are thought provoking. Namibia is seldom considered in the field of transitional justice, probably because it has never had a mechanism to deal with the abuses committed prior to its transition to democracy in 1990. This, however, is what makes Namibia fascinating. A clear case can be made that the lack of accountability has had lasting repercussions for the Namibian democracy, the relationship between state and citizens, and the