

**SPECIAL COURT FOR SIERRA LEONE
OUTREACH AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICE**



Historic postcard showing the laying of the foundation stone of the Albert Academy School in Freetown

PRESS CLIPPINGS

Enclosed are clippings of local and international press on the Special Court and related issues obtained by the Outreach and Public Affairs Office

as at:

Friday, 26 June 2009

Press clips are produced Monday through Friday.
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Star Radio (Liberia)

Thursday, 25 June 2009

Pro-war crimes group releases names of alleged perpetrators

Written by Vivian Gartyn

A pro war crimes court group has released a list of people it claims bears the greatest responsibility for the war in Liberia.

The Forum for the Establishment of a war crimes court in Liberia listed thirty-nine names including former warlords and current government officials.

According to the group, the names are among one hundred names of alleged war criminals expected to be published later.

The group believes the individuals committed war crimes and crimes against humanity and should be prosecuted.

The war crimes advocate has at the same time, declared its support for recommendations put forth by delegates at the TRC's National Reconciliation Conference.

The group believes the recommendations including call for the setting up of a war crimes court send a message that it's now time to give justice to millions of war victims.

The group says it will also work to ensure the immediate setting-up of a Panel of Experts on Liberia and imposition of travel restrictions on all suspected war criminals.

UNMIL Public Information Office Media Summary 25 June 2009

[The media summaries and press clips do not necessarily represent the views of UNMIL.]

International Clips on Liberia

Liberian vice president to visit China

BEIJING, Jun 25, 2009 (Xinhua via COMTEX) -- Liberian Vice President Joseph Nyuma Boakai will pay an official visit to China from July 5 to 11 at the invitation of his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping. Foreign Ministry spokesman Qin Gang made the announcement here Thursday at a regular press conference.

International Clips on West Africa

Local Media – Newspaper

Opposition CDC, LINU Sign Communiqué to Collaborate Ahead of 2011 Elections

(The Monitor, The Inquirer, Daily Observer, The News, The Analyst, National Chronicle, Heritage)

- The Standard Bearer of the Congress for Democratic Change (CDC), George Weah and the political leader of the Liberia National Union (LINU), Winston Tubman have agreed to put up a joint challenge during Liberia's 2011 presidential and General elections.
- According to a communiqué signed in Accra, Ghana the two politicians further agreed to collaborate, join resources and called on other opposition parties to join them in their collaboration efforts.
- Meanwhile, they have expressed concern at the lack of progress towards national reconciliation, the unabated expansion and practice of corruption with impunity, the increase in violent crimes and the deteriorating living standard of Liberians.

Six Convicted Armed Robbers Get 15 Years Prison Term

(The Inquirer, New Vision, The News)

- Criminal Court "D" has sentenced six young men to fifteen years in jail.
- Jurors found Saah Williams, Moses Nassah, Samuel Bettie, Arthur Degular, Alfred Powell, and Elijah Brown guilty for armed robbery last Friday.
- They were arrested in January following an armed robbery at the home of one Jenneh Kamara.
- After they were sentenced, two of the convicted men, Elijah Brown and Alfred Powell admitted committing the act.
- In an interview, they said Samuel Bettie, who earlier denied the act was part of the group but that two of their colleagues escaped and have not been arrested
- Their lawyer excepted to the sentence and announced an appeal to the Supreme Court during its October term.

U.N. Panel Report Says Former President Taylor and Associates Still discussing "Political Matters".

(Heritage)

- The mid-term report by the United Nations Panel of Experts suggests that former associates of former President Charles Taylor currently on trial at The Hague continue to make telephone contacts with him and discussing "political matters".
- The report said based on correspondence with the Registrar of the Special Court for Sierra Leone, the Panel can confirm that Charles Taylor continues to have telephone contact with other designated individuals.

- The designated individuals are Cyril Allen, John T. Richardson (only on the travel ban list), Edwin M. Snowe, Jr., Agnes Reeves Taylor, Jewel Howard Taylor, Tupee Enid Taylor and Benjamin Yeaten.

Major Conference on Climate Change Opens in Monrovia

(The News, Daily Observer)

- Speaking at the start of a three-day seminar on the impacts of climate change on Liberia, the Acting Executive Director of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Mr. Jerome Nyenkan says three major climate hazards have been identified in the country.
- Mr. Nyenkan named rise in sea level, coastal erosion and changes in rain fall pattern.
- At the same time, UNDP Country Representative Dominic Sam says Liberia as a developing post-war country is vulnerable to climate change.

Liberian Refugees Arrested, Detained in Guinea

(Daily Observer)

- Over an endless leadership crisis in the Konka Refugee camp in N'Zerekore Prefecture of Guinea, eight Liberia refugees have been arrested and detained at the border town of Macenta in Guinea.
- The crisis is reported to been sparked off by the refusal of the Guinean local authorities to accept changes in the refugee leadership as demanded by some of the refugees.

Local Media – Star Radio (*culled from website today at 09:00 am*)

Six Convicted Armed Robbers Get 15 Years Prison Term

(Also reported on Sky F.M., and ELBC)

EPA Identifies Climate Hazards in Liberia

(Also reported on Sky F.M., and ELBC)

DEA to Destroy Dangerous Drugs Friday

- Over LD\$24 million worth of dangerous drugs are expected to be destroyed across the Country on tomorrow.
- According to the Drug Enforcement Agency, the destruction of drugs in its custody will take place simultaneously in the fifteen Counties.
- DEA Director, James Jaddah named the drugs as over eight thousand grams of marijuana, two hundred thirty grams of Cocaine, among others.
- The destruction is in observance of international day against drug abuse and trafficking.

Vessel loaded with Scarp Materials Impounded in Greenville

- The County Attorney of Sinoe has arrested and detained the captain and crew of a vessel loaded with scraps at the port of Greenville.
- Attorney John Gabriel also impounded the vessel and ordered the crew to off load the nine hundred metric tons of scraps.
- According to the County Attorney the scraps were taken from the old Vamplah Camp site near Greenville.
- The captain and crew have been reportedly jailed at the Correctional Palace in Greenville.

Maritime Institute to Open Soon

- The Bureau of Maritime Affairs says it is exerting every effort to ensure the speedy reopening of the Liberia Marine Institute in Marshall, Margibi County.
- BMA'S Commissioner, Binyah Kesselly disclosed that reconstruction work on the institute which began February this year would be completed in August.
- Commissioner Kesselly the BMA is pursuing partnership to invest in seafaring training and a manning agency to place trained Liberian seafarers on ships around the world.
- Mr. Kesselly indicated when re-opened, the LMTI would have the potential to create employment opportunities for Liberians.

World Politics Review

Thursday, 25 June 2009

Reconciling the Truth: Liberia TRC Set to Wrap Up

MONROVIA, Liberia -- Liberia's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), modeled after South Africa's approach to moving beyond the violence and repression of apartheid, moved into its final stages last week. At a final conference on the outskirts of Monrovia, 400 representatives from around the country and the Liberian diaspora met to discuss findings from the thousands of hearings conducted so far, and to determine the path ahead.



That, many agree, will not be an easy task.

The commission was established in 2005 to address the legacy of the civil war that ravaged the country from 1989 to 2003. The roots of that conflict trace back to age-old animosities between Americo-Liberians, the descendants of freed slaves from the U.S., and indigenous Liberians from the numerous tribal groups that historically lived in the region. Tensions reached their peak in the late-1970s and 1980s, until Charles Taylor's 1989 rebellion sparked a civil war.

The 14 years of conflict that followed manipulated tribal, political, religious, family and ethnic ties, and turned the country upside down. Numerous rebel forces formed, splintered, and disbanded. Even cautious estimates put the number killed by the war at 200,000. Hundreds of thousands more were raped, injured and displaced, while almost everyone in the nation of 3.5 million people was affected in some way.

The TRC has now heard testimony from 20,000 witnesses regarding the period covering the late-1970s through August 2003. Government officials, ex-warlords, members of civil society, financiers, rebels, and regular citizens have all come forward to weave their individual narratives into a history of the convoluted war: some apologetic, some angry, some still traumatized, some honest, others not.

Hearing their testimony and fleshing out what really happened was an essential step in reconciling Liberian society, explains TRC Chairman Jerome Verdier from his office.

"The Commission believes," Verdier told the press last week, "consistent with the mandate, that reconciliation entails the people of Liberia firstly understanding what has happened in the past. That impunity is a thing of the past, and that justice is necessary for upholding the rule of law in Liberia."

But not everyone believes the TRC has brought Liberia closer to the truth. Many insist that few significant actors divulged truthful statements, using the forum of the TRC to instead justify their actions, or blame others.

Joshua Milton Blahyi, once known as "General Butt Naked," is regarded by observers as an exception to this rule: a former faction leader who gave truthful, remorseful and accurate accounts of his actions, which included the ritual killing of children and resulted in the deaths of 20,000 people. Having experienced a religious conversion more than a decade ago, Blahyi now regrets his actions and says he will readily accept any punishment the TRC metes out. But he feels the process has lacked the conviction necessary to facilitate healing.

"I don't see people putting in the real time or effort in solving the real problems of our society," he

explains from outside the conference. "They put times and dates on reconciling the [civil war]. . . . We just need more time."

Time, like resources, has been a limiting factor from day one. The legislature allotted only two years for actual hearings, and that time is now up. So commissioners must work with what testimony they have to make their final recommendations, including decisions over who, if anyone, should be prosecuted.

"We have a mandate to make recommendations," explains Verdier. "And in doing so we have to be realistic, we have to be fair, and we have to be seen to understand the realities of the day."

Sen. Prince Johnson, one of the TRC's few vocal critics, argued that those accused of having perpetrated crimes were not able to defend their actions or to confront their accusers.

Johnson led a breakoff faction of Taylor's movement during the civil war, and appeared in a videotape showing the torture and execution of former President Samuel Doe. He believes he is on a list of 200 people that the TRC is recommending for prosecution, something he claims cannot happen.

"There is already an existing law in this country, passed by the national legislature and the Senate in [August] 2003," Johnson says, presenting and quoting from the law: "This is an act to grant immunity from both civil and criminal proceedings from acts or crimes committed during the civil war from December 1989 [to] August 2003."

Johnson's citation was the first time the law had been discussed in a public forum. If he is correct and the law is, in fact, legally valid, it would present a significant hurdle in following through on any recommended prosecutions.

Regardless of criticisms by Johnson or others, Verdier explains that the TRC is on course to compile the input from the conference and deliver its recommendations by the June 30 deadline.

The next step for Liberia -- and the hardest one -- will be determining exactly how best to act on those recommendations, without disrupting the country's initial steps toward reconciliation and the development that has been fostered.

Myles Estey is a media trainer and journalist living in Monrovia, Liberia. His blog, [The Esteyonage](#), tries to capture some of the beautiful insanity of the country. Myles wishes he was surfing.

Photo: A woman participating in the U.N. Mission in Liberia's "16 Days of Activism" campaign to strengthen the rights of women and stop gender-based violence (U.N. photo by Christopher Herwig).

NRC Handelsblad

Friday 26 June 2009

<http://www.nrc.nl/international/article2280195.ece/>

France and the Tutsi have to face justice in Rwanda too



A file photo shows prisoners suspected of taking part in the 1994 Rwandan genocide. Photo AFP

The Netherlands is ashamed for its absence during the genocide by the Hutus in Rwanda in 1994. That is why it is afraid to demand that the Tutsis - and France - be tried too.

By Marcia Luyten

Fifteen years after the mass slaughter during which an estimated 800,000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus were killed in Rwanda, only one party involved in the conflict has stood trial: the Hutu. The International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda in Arusha, Tanzania, has so far sentenced 44 Hutu leaders. People's tribunals in Rwanda - the so-called gacacas - have judged 1.5 million genocide suspects.

But according to the UN's High Commissioner for Refugees the Tutsi rebel army has also killed between 25,000 and 45,000 civilians in 1994. Despite the fact that these deaths were investigated and documented by the UN, the Rwanda tribunal and Human Rights Watch, there have been almost no prosecutions.

Time is of the essence in Rwanda. On 31 December 2010, the Rwanda tribunal will be dissolved. Before that happens the parties who have not had to explain themselves before a court of justice should be made to do so. They are France, which actively assisted the Hutus in carrying out the genocide against the Tutsis, and top Tutsi military men in the party of Rwandan president Paul Kagame. His Rwandese Patriotic Front (RPF), which stopped the genocide in 1994, also committed war crimes as it took control of the country.

The Rwanda tribunal is very different from the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia in The Hague, where all the parties involved are being tried: Serbs, Croats and Bosnians. It is a fundamental principle for all the tribunals, and for the International Criminal Court in The Hague that it should at all costs avoid carrying out victor's justice.

The Croat and Serb governments resisted the Yugoslavia tribunal for years, until the European Union made compliance with the tribunal a condition for future EU membership. Slobodan Milosevic' arrest in 2001 proved that Serbia had made the switch. A year earlier, wanted war criminals were still dining freely in the best restaurants of Belgrade; after Milosevic' arrests they all went into hiding. One, Radovan Karadzic, grew a beard and started a new life as a druid.

But in the case of Rwanda there has been no equal treatment of all parties. The former French prime minister Edouard Balladur has never had to grow a beard, despite there being sufficient evidence for French complicity in the genocide. The top commanders of Kagame's rebel army have never had to go into hiding because of the atrocities they committed in 1994.

Political and economical power

At least the crimes committed by the latter were investigated by the Rwanda tribunal. But the so-called special investigations ordered by the main prosecutor in both the Rwanda and Yugoslavia tribunal, Carla del Ponte, so angered the Rwandan government that it stopped collaborating with the tribunal. In 2002, it banned genocide survivors from travelling to Arusha to testify - even if this jeopardised cases against Hutu genocide suspects.

The so-called "witness crisis" lasted for months. Only after the US put pressure on Rwanda behind closed doors did the government allow the survivors to testify again. But full cooperation in cases against Tutsi officers was never demanded. According to Victor Peskin, an expert in international courts and author of *International Justice in Rwanda and the Balkans* (2008), the international community "never really exercised pressure on Rwanda to demand full cooperation with the tribunal."

Sabotaging the work of the tribunal didn't even get the Rwandan government in trouble, Peskin noted. Quite to the contrary: the Rwanda tribunal, which already had an image problem due to a series of administrative scandals, its excruciatingly slow progress and its unfair treatment of witnesses, was harassed by the Rwandan government to the point that Carla del Ponte was forced to offer her resignation in 2003.

International courts do not themselves have the power to make governments comply. It is only when the big players in the international community use their political and economical power that a country can be forced to collaborate with an international tribunal. The Netherlands, which plays the proud host to many international tribunals and courts, has understood this. Together with Belgium it is the only EU member state to demand that Serbia extradite former Bosnian-Serb leader Ratko Mladic before the Stabilisation and Association Agreement, the first step towards EU membership, can be signed.

The international community's approach to the former Yugoslavia tribunal is in stark contrast with the passivity it displays towards the Rwanda tribunal, says Peskin. Why is the Netherlands not bringing pressure on Rwanda to make sure that all the parties involved in the 1994 genocide are equally tried?

Conditional on cooperation

It is not as if there is a lack of ways to pressure Kigali. The Rwandan government depends on foreign aid for half its annual budget or 300 million dollars per year. The Netherlands are well placed to take the lead, because of its historic neutral position in Africa, and because of the considerable support that Dutch development aid minister Jan Pronk lent the Rwanda government immediately following the genocide, and because of the 36.5 million euros the Netherlands gives to Rwanda through its embassy in Kigali this year.

So why has the Dutch government not pulled its weight either within the United Nations, through bilateral contacts or other ways in order to force the Rwanda tribunal to try more cases against Tutsi officers?

In an email the Dutch foreign ministry responded: "The Netherlands respects the independence of the international courts and does not exercise pressure on their prosecution policy. The Rwanda tribunal is free to establish its own prosecution policy and to set its priorities..."

But why then has the Netherlands acted so differently in the case of the former Yugoslavia tribunal? Aid to Rwanda could have been made conditional on Kigali's full cooperation with the tribunal. The foreign ministry: "The Netherlands has never wanted to link aid to collaboration with the Rwanda tribunal or any other tribunal."

Perhaps not, but it has certainly made EU membership - and the financial and economic benefits that go with it - conditional on full cooperation with the former Yugoslavia tribunal.

It is true that international tribunals are free to set their own prosecution goals. But Carla del Ponte did want to prosecute crimes committed by the Rwandese Patriotic Front. She knew that it would undermine her legitimacy and that of the Rwanda tribunal if it was seen to deliver only victor's justice. But if the Rwanda tribunal was going to be free to set its own goals, it needed the international community to bring pressure on Rwanda to cooperate.

Ironically, one of the involved parties that have so far escaped justice is now actively trying to prosecute Tutsi officers: France. Based on a controversial report by the French investigative judge Jean-Louis Bruguière, prominent officers in Paul Kagame's army have been indicted for complicity in shooting down the plane of then Rwandan president Juvénal Habyarimana, a Hutu, on April 6, 1994. The attack signalled the beginning of the genocide against the Tutsi minority in Rwanda.

France is the least suitable country to seek justice in Rwanda because France played an important part in the Rwanda genocide.

Behind closed doors

French president Francois Mitterrand supported the extremist Hutu government of Rwanda from the first incursion by Kagame's rebel army on October 1, 1990 until it took power in Kigali in July 1994. Desperate to safeguard the "Françafrique" - the French influence in Africa - from the Uganda-based and therefore Anglophone RPF, Paris had sent money, military instructors, radio equipment, food and weapons to the Hutu government, despite a UN embargo.

Between 1990 and 1994, French military armed and trained the Interahamwe, the later Hutu death squads, despite France having been warned as early as 1990 of the possibility of a genocide. All the evidence suggests that if France hadn't shored up the beleaguered Hutu government in the early nineties, the Tutsi rebels would have taken power in no time.

The American journalist Andrew Wallis, in his book *Silent Accomplice*, gives an astonishing account of French involvement in Rwanda. Wallis lists testimonies about weapons deliveries, French soldiers "protecting" survivors in return for sexual favours, French soldiers advising Interahamwe militiamen to throw the dead bodies in the Kivu lake to avoid them being spotted by Western satellites. The French soldiers showed them how to first cut open the bellies of the corpses so they wouldn't float.

There have been several investigations into France's role in the Rwanda genocide. The French parliament in 1998 investigated French military cooperation with Rwanda between 1990 and 1994. The investigation was led by Mitterrand's former defence minister Paul Quilès. The commission heard 88 witnesses; not one of them under oath. The testimony was given behind closed doors if the witness so requested. Conclusion: "France was not an accomplice in the Rwandese genocide."

Perpetrators feel like victims

The Organisation for African Unity also commissioned a report from an international panel of experts. In 2000, it concluded: "The French government had unrivalled influence at the very highest levels of the Rwandan government and the Rwandan military. They were in a position to insist that attacks on the Tutsis must cease, and they chose never to exert that influence."

Instead, Paris evacuated prominent Hutu politicians to Paris as soon as the genocide began. In the international arena it lobbied actively in support of what it called "the legitimate government of Rwanda". That interim government had been installed on April 10, 1994 at the French embassy in Kigali, while street dogs were eating the corpses on the streets outside. An estimated 200,000 people had been murdered when France gave an official reception to members of the interim government in Paris, among them Jean-Bosco Barayagwiza, who was given a life sentence by the Rwanda tribunal in 2003.

The reason why the Netherlands is letting Kagame off the hook is simple: it is because we are ashamed about our passive role during the genocide in 1994. But by going easy on the RPF we are in danger of leaving a new and festering wound behind in Rwanda.

Impunity breeds more violence. It has been this way in Rwanda for a hundred years. Yesterday's victims are tomorrow's perpetrators. The Hutus in Rwanda are now cowed, just like they were before the Hutu revolt of 1959, when the Tutsis ruled Rwanda. Once again Hutus are often being passed over for good jobs and positions of power. There is no justice for the Hutu dead. And so the perpetrators of 1994 now feel like the victims.

The tribunal that could lift the impunity of both France and the current government in Rwanda will be around for just a little bit longer. It looks like its mandate will be extended until December 31, 2010 for trials, and until 2013 for appeals. On June 4, Carla del Ponte's successor, Hassan Jallow, made it clear before the UN security council that he has no intention to prosecute Tutsi cases. Some people say many of these cases are ready to go but they have been deliberately buried.

Rwanda deserves justice. In order for that to happen France has to be made to answer to an international court, and Tutsi officers have to explain themselves for retaliatory murders committed against Hutu civilians. It is exactly because of our gross negligence in 1994 that we should now do everything in our power to see to it that justice is done in Rwanda.

Marcia Luyten is a cultural historian, economist and journalist. She is based in Uganda

Voice of America

Thursday, 25 June 2009

Football Aims to Help Heal Rwanda's Post-Genocide Divide

By Linda Blake
Kigali

Several of the world's top footballers came to Rwanda this week to play a charity match in support of the country's genocide survivors. The VOA correspondent reports from Kigali on the unifying power of sports in a country still healing from the divisive events 15 years ago.

By sunset Monday, Rwanda's Amahoro stadium was packed with more than 20,000 football enthusiasts.

Tutsis, Hutus, the young, and the old cheered on Rwanda's Amavubi Stars as they came out victorious in a charity match against an All-Star team led by Cameroon and Barcelona striker Samuel Eto'o.

Proceeds went to the 'One Dollar Campaign,' an organization that builds homes for displaced orphans of the 1994 Rwandan Genocide against the Tutsis.



Man at the "genocide cemetery" of Kigali, Rwanda (file photo)

After the game, a crowd of young Rwandans gathered around all-star player and professional American footballer Dominic Scicluna as he urged the children to harness football to help heal the country's post-genocide divide.

"The players with the best technique in the world are ones that know that football is the vehicle for peace," Scicluna said. "That is why this stadium is called peace. What is the name of the stadium in Rwanda? "Amahoro!" That is right, and Amahoro means peace.

Using football to help unify is a concept that has trickled down from the stadium to the streets. Last October, when Rwanda's National Unity and Reconciliation Commission was tasked with reintegrating genocide perpetrators back into the same community they committed atrocities against, it turned to the beloved sport.

A series of football matches took place during a three-month stretch in various parts of urban Rwanda, including Kigali and Butare, and were each followed by events where the two parties could comfortably converse. And they actually worked, says NURC Project Coordinator Oswald Rutimburana.

"The sports makes the first entry - football - and it helps them come closer," Rutimburana said. "We have seen it working. We have seen people now accepting them, impressing them, talking to them and at least that trust, the first trust is built."

Rutimburana says the Rwanda National Unity and Reconciliation Commission hopes to coordinate several more reconciliatory matches next year.

The New Yorker
Thursday, 25 June 2009

Very Nice Monsters

In the second part of our roundtable, Amy Davidson interrogates Jon Lee Anderson and George Packer about their encounters with charming tyrants and whether there is such a thing as “national character.” (Read part one.)

Amy Davidson: Jon Lee, I was interested in your observation that “ordinary Iraqis knew which of Saddam’s sons they hated and feared more, and that was Uday.” Part of that, you write, has to do with what each brother actually did; but part, you suggest, was their attitude. One killed sadistically, the other obediently.

This gets at a theme in Steavenson’s book: the relationship between what you might call likeability and culpability. How do we judge someone we find charming—or, how do we avoid having our judgment muddled by someone’s charm?

Steavenson walks an interesting line; she gets very close to her subjects, and says that her knowledge of their complicity in Saddam’s crimes occasionally made her want to shake or yell at them. She writes that everyone’s story deserves to be heard, and that’s fair; the trick, as she knows, is in recognizing when their story becomes that of their victims.

You’ve interviewed very guilty people—Pinochet, Charles Taylor—as well as ones whose guilt was murkier; George, so have you. How is it when they smile and offer you a cup of tea and seem genuinely nice? Do niceness and goodness have anything to do with each other? Or, to take the other side, what about victims who are not, on a personal level, all that appealing?

Jon Lee Anderson: It seems to me that niceness is a social tool, while goodness is a matter of conscience. Neither are innate, but are taught—ideally, early in life. The two are not necessarily related, however; i.e., you can be good without being nice, and vice-versa.

I have met some very nice monsters in my time. You mention Charles Taylor, the former Liberian president, who is now a prisoner in the Hague, awaiting trial for crimes against humanity. When we met, he was president of the country, and he was very solicitous toward me, perfectly charming. He even employed some of Liberia’s wonderful old-fashioned niceties, calling me “My dear,” for instance. At that moment in time, Taylor was probably responsible for the murders of several tens of thousands of his own countrymen, almost all of them civilians, many of them women and children. And he was, by all accounts, aiding and abetting—in exchange for diamonds—Sierra Leone’s R.U.F. guerrillas, who were just beginning their limb-chopping frenzies through their own country. Taylor is a prime example of someone who, to my eye, is nice but not “good.”

Victimhood, or perceived victimhood, is not a virtue in itself, as we should all know and which we forget at our peril. The terrible thing about it is that victimhood almost always creates new perpetrators. This can be as true on a national level as well as on the personal. As a case in point, we have all seen what thirty-five years of brutalization by Saddam did to Iraqi society.

George Packer: I’ve interviewed very few people with whom I never felt a twinge of sympathy and understanding. Simply to make the interview work—which means creating an atmosphere in which the subject is willing to open up, perhaps more than he or she intended to—requires it.

Most people are their own best advocates. Few people think that they have acted out of base or selfish or vicious motives. It's sometimes the case—it happened in Iraq—that I'll come out of an interview thinking, "He really didn't seem that horrible," only to be reminded by some piece of evidence, a victim's testimony, or even my interpreter's seething fury, that I just sat through an hour or two of lies intended to cover up inhuman crimes.

It's essential to pass out of the journalistic version of Stockholm Syndrome in order to write anything worthwhile, but it might also be necessary to pass through it for just a little while as well.

Davidson: I'd also like to hear what you both think of this line from the book: "Duplicity was as much a part of being Iraqi as excessive pride, excessive hospitality and love of the kebab." Steavenson portrays Iraqis, generally, as having their souls crushed (or at least crumpled) as a result of having had to lie so much, to themselves and others, under Saddam. Is that fair? Was it possible, morally speaking, to hold your breath in an atmosphere that poisonous?

And moving beyond Iraq: you've both reported in several countries. Is there such a thing as national character—and, if so, is recognizing it useful to you as a journalist?

Anderson: Regarding Wendell's line about duplicity and excessive pride: This is a conclusion drawn from her own experience, and may be more valid, in the sum of its various parts, to her than it is to me. I agree with her about the pride and the hospitality of Iraqis. I am unsure about whether or not I agree that duplicity is an ongoing Iraqi national trait, or any more unique or enduring a phenomenon there than in any coercive society. But, yes, I agree with it having been a characteristic trait of Iraqis living under Saddam—probably necessarily so.

National character: I think, yes, that such a thing exists, with all of the usual caveats about individuals and exceptions. Do most of us not instantly believe we recognize something quintessentially "Italian" in the preening vanity of Silvio Berlusconi, for instance? Whether we liked it or not, George W. Bush reaffirmed certain fundamental "American" characteristics to the rest of the world, mostly negative. Does it help my journalism to be able to recognize them? I am not sure that it does. It may help me to know how people tend to respond to things when forced to respond on the basis of their nationality, I suppose, but it doesn't help with the individual.

Example: Not long ago, I met in Boston with friends of various Latin American nations: Peruvian, Argentine, Venezuelan, and a Mexican. We were discussing this very issue, and at one point, one of my friends challenged me to identify their national stereotypes. Calling them out as they popped into my head, I said: "Argentines: neurotic; Venezuelans, frivolous; Peruvians, insular; Mexicans, insecure." Everyone laughed except for the Mexican, who appeared stung by what I had said. If I was true in my assessment, it mattered little, because I had wounded him. Americans: bigmouthed.

Packer: People all over the world are quick to tell journalists what their national traits are. "We Burmese are too fatalistic to rebel." "Nigerians only think of today, never tomorrow." "You can't trust anything an Iraqi tells you." (This from an Iraqi.) They can be interesting and sometimes even useful, but I generally never think about these self-generalizations again after jotting them down. They don't help me to tell the story of the person I'm talking to and the situation in which he finds himself.

If anything, they reveal more about his circumstances—usually rather desperate—than his genetic character type. But it's just as common to hear generalizations about Americans, and they are seldom friendly. Most are on the order of: innocent, arrogant, simple-minded, self-deceiving. We're not often called duplicitous, though, which might be why it seems, good or bad, like an advantage others have over us.