Dear Readers,
The piece you are reading today is Chapter 6 of my dissertation. It is a *very* rough first draft so thank you for your patience with it and I am very much looking forward to your comments as I am stuck now but know it needs some serious restructuring, more theoretical grounding, and a more clear framing. I have my own thoughts on where I need to add and where I need to fix, but I will wait to hear what you have to say instead of pre-emptively imprinting my own negativity on you! I am also waiting to write my conclusion until the chapter is more complete.

Because this is a chapter, you are missing a lot of the background information that is in the dissertation. So I have compiled some pieces below to give you some of the necessary background.

Thanks so much! kiri
Overview of dissertation:
My dissertation is a qualitative study of the global diffusion of truth commissions, focusing on the role of professionals within this process. Truth commissions are temporary institutions created to research and report on human rights abuses, find and tell the ‘truth’ of a specific conflict, and help heal individuals and a nation by making known the story of a particular period of atrocities. Truth commissions have become extremely common over the past 20 years. Since the first truth commission in 1974, there have been 42; 35 of these since 1990; and 20 since 2000. In this sense, truth commissions are a good example of a model that has diffused globally to vastly different local, cultural contexts – a process of institutional isomorphism that has become increasingly more evident. Existing scholarship has shown that despite extremely diverse political, social and economic contexts, nations across the world often adopt similar policies, organizational models, and international standards. We also know from this literature that professionals are vital to this diffusion process as they are tasked with transferring ideas and norms across locales. Yet, we know surprisingly little about the mechanisms and processes by which professionals do such work, much less how professionals make sense of and understand their work. My research addresses this gap.

To study the role of professionals in the global diffusion of truth commissions, I spent a year doing ethnographic fieldwork at the International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ), a non-profit organization that assists countries in transitioning from conflict to peace. Specifically, the ICTJ is the organization that works with countries on establishing and running truth commissions. During my time at the ICTJ, I conducted 28 in-depth interviews and 20 surveys of ‘truth commission professionals,’ including ICTJ directors, interns, and researchers as well as current and former truth commissioners. In addition to interviews, I observed the daily activities of the organization and organization meetings. I also observed director meetings with each other as well as with truth commissioners, the UN, US National Security, and local and international NGOs.

My research findings show that, contrary to the expectations of organizational and professional studies, truth commission professionals are not simple norm carriers with similar backgrounds, hoping to advance their careers through promoting truth commissions. Rather I find that truth commission professionals are ‘true believers’ who personally and professionally identify with the principles of truth commissions. Their diverse backgrounds of nationality, education, political participation, and career trajectory mean that they do not share a common, institutionalized professional path. But they do share a fervent commitment to redressing human rights violations by uncovering the ‘truth’ of a conflict. In addition, truth commission professionals work creatively and relationally to negotiate the way the principles of truth commissions can be practiced within a number of local contexts with differing structural constraints. In large part, they conceive of their work as an attempt to get adopting nations to implement truth commissions as planned so that those principles and local practices remain ‘coupled.’ Thus, truth commission norms are not just transferred and diffused but shaped and adjusted to fit local contexts. In this way, my research contributes to diffusion studies by fleshing out the dynamics of normative isomorphism and making clear how diffusion is not a straightforward process. As a corollary, this finding contributes to the sociology of development by exploring some of the underlying processes by which development initiatives diffuse.
Addition Background (if you think you need it)

N.B. TCC is the pseudonym for the ICTJ in the dissertation

**Transitional justice, truth commissions, and the TCC**

The end of the Cold War marked the beginning of a ‘new era of humanitarianism’ (Duffield, 1994), characterized by a proliferation of ‘humanitarian’ professionals, academics, disciplines and institutions concerned with alleviating poverty and violence, particularly in Third World countries. This proliferation can be understood as part of a broader, global trend, namely the ‘world wide explosion of organizations and organizing’ that has resulted from globalization (Drori et al., 2006: 2). For humanitarian initiatives, this organizing explosion has ultimately created a dramatic increase in international attention to and involvement in programs promoting development, complex emergency relief, and peace building; and it has facilitated a dynamic cross-cultural dialogue concerning appropriate approaches to eradicate injustice. Within this ‘era of humanitarianism,’ the field of transitional justice has emerged and gained credence, endorsement, and increasing popularity.

The field of transitional justice emerged in the 1980s and 1990s mainly in response to political changes in Latin America and Eastern Europe and to demands in these regions for justice after long periods of oppressive rule. At the time, human rights activists and others wanted to address the systematic abuses by former regimes but without endangering the political transformations that were underway. Since these changes were popularly called "transitions to democracy," people began calling this new multidisciplinary field "transitional justice" (Arthur, 2009). Governments of these countries adopted many of what became the basic practices of transitional justice, namely public apologies, criminal prosecutions, reparation programs, memorialization efforts, security system reform and truth commissions (Arthur, 2009). Truth commissions, then, are one organizational form that emerged within the field of transitional justice.

Truth commissions, in particular, have become extremely prevalent and have proliferated and diffused rapidly over the past 20 years. Although the first truth commission occurred before the ‘field’ of transitional justice emerged, the use of truth commissions has exponentially increased since the field solidified. As the field emerged and truth commissions became more popular, a truth commission ‘model’ has consolidated. The first truth commissions had to develop what principles should govern the establishment of a truth commission and what the parameters should be. More recent commissions can begin with a model to guide them, including an internationally recognized set of principles. Thus, although there is variation amongst specific truth commission cases, the truth commission as a model can now be understood to share particular characteristics or ‘family of resemblances.’ As the neo-institutional world polity theorists would predict, local contexts are negotiated with global models.

The global model begins with the basic assumption that truth commissions are used to research and report on human rights abuses that took place over a certain period of time in a particular conflict within a particular country (Hayner, 2001). Truth commissions typically occur after civil conflict or systematic mass murder. As opposed to criminal prosecutions, truth commissions collect ‘stories’ of harm from victims, their relatives and perpetrators. People give evidence of human rights abuses, with the commission providing an official forum for their accounts (Ball and Chapman, 2001). The model is premised upon
the idea that finding and telling the ‘truth’ of the past will heal the nation, build trust in the
new state, redress human rights abuses and therein help establish long-term peace.

The international community endorses truth commissions as a legitimate and
effective means of promoting peace (Hayner, 2001). Correspondingly, a number of
international standards have been established to guide transitional justice processes, namely
the U.N has produced a set of best practices and principles relating to establishment of truth
commissions. Specifically, and importantly, the “Right to Truth” was declared an unalienable
Human Right and added to the UN covenant of human rights. The best principles and
practices were derived from this ‘right.’ Of paramount importance in the justice process,
victims were declared to have a right to know the truth about the political history of the
conflict as well as the particular situations of their loved ones. In addition to prioritizing the
right of the victim, these principles recommend that civil society be consulted during
transitional justice processes and that commissioners reflect the composition of society. In
accordance with the over arching principles of contemporary human rights work, the local
culture, context and people are made central in the transitional justice process even as these
universal principles are put into action.

A number of organizations have arisen that work with truth commissions and
oversee these mechanisms, standards, and guidelines. The first and most renown of these
organizations is the TCC. To some degree, TCC’s relationship to the field is genetic:
transitional justice and TCC gained significant popularity and endorsement at the same time,
and the TCC took deliberate steps to define and develop the field (Arthur, 2009). In many
ways, the success of transitional justice and the truth commission model came from the
missionary zeal of the initial founders of the TCC who strongly believed in the need for and
principle of truth commissions. Additionally, these early, ‘true believers’ were well-known
human rights activists, many of who had strong ties to American academic and legal
institutions (Gunningham et al., 2003: 101). Together these characteristics helped provide
credibility for the burgeoning field.

Broadly, the TCC’s mission is to redress and prevent human rights violations by
promoting accountability and justice through transitional justice research and practices. The
TCC firmly believes that the rights of the victims must be made central in transitional justice
processes and that local sensitivity and cultural context is of utmost importance. While the
TCC pursues its mission through various transitional justice mechanisms, truth commissions
are a main focus. The TCC has supported governments, civil society, and the international
community in carrying out the work of truth commissions in 12 countries as well as several
unofficial truth projects. Importantly, the TCC provides feedback on the framework
necessary for the establishment of a commission, in the form of memoranda and expert
testimony to policymakers. TCC professionals; obtain their legitimacy and ‘expert’ status
from their credentials as activities, human rights lawyers, transitional justice researchers, and
political historians as well as their unmatched experience with truth commission processes.
Their engagement most often is composed of running workshops and advising via meetings,
phone conferences and/or memos and they serve as consultants to truth commissions for
governments interested in establish a truth commission. A critical component of their work
is to help different countries follow international best practices however this does not always
work.
Chapter 6
The Calling: True Believers and Their Vocation

I. Introduction:

It is 1pm my time, in New York, 5pm in Monrovia, Liberia, where Eric\(^1\) is working as Program Associate for the TCC Liberia Program. Eric is my first interview, so I am relieved when, even through the crackly connection, he sounds happy and eager to talk. Right away, Eric begins to ask me questions about my work. After I explain the premise of my dissertation, he tells me he is writing his masters thesis in political science, so we share some jokes and complaints regarding the writing process. Then we begin the formal interview. I ask Eric how he got involved in the Liberian Truth Commission and came to work for the TCC.

“Well, I’m Liberian. After the conflict, I felt I had to get involved in civil society in some way - to help rebuild the country. I joined a coalition that was working on democratic empowerment. I felt that the return to violence was very possible if we didn’t set up the right structure. I began reading about the TRC process and I began to be very self-conscience about the mandate of the TRC and that I believed it could help liberate Liberia from all the hate and injustice, if everything was done right. It represented my beliefs of what was needed to take Liberia beyond the conflict. So it was that level of enlightenment. I became very self-conscience about the role of the TRC and the possible effect and outcome and so I got involved. And then three years later I started working for the TCC, helping with the ongoing transitional adjustments determined by the TRC – like reparations and that type of stuff.”

\(^1\) All names of persons are pseudonyms to protect respondents’ confidentiality
Because Eric was my first interview, the notions of “fighting injustice” and of “having to get involved,” did not register as anything particularly important at the time. But as I continued to interview, I realized that these were common themes, which I now understand to be the common bond that these professionals share. At the time, I was more surprised that he did not have a law degree or any specific ‘human rights’ training – either academically or in the ‘field.’ And I was surprised that, later in the interview, he was critical of truth commissions. Even though he believed that they could help fight injustice; he did not believe that they were always the right transitional justice mechanism. “It depends on the local context,’ he told me. The literature on global professionals had prepared me for something different.

Literature on global professionals within sociology is scarce. The sociology of professions literature is only recently starting to analyze how globalization has impacted its founding functionalist theories and is no putting forth some work on global professions but not on professionals (Faulconbridge and Muzio 2011). Picking up on the more critical theories of professions, new governance studies has emerged. These scholars expand on Abbott’s and Bourdieu’s notion of the ‘professional project’ and examine the geneses and construction of transnational fields to understand the processes and agents that produce knowledge in ways that, they argue, is hegemonic. They show how global professionals often share similar backgrounds – education, class, and nationality, and how this common habitus works to consolidate their power and legitimacy for their own self-interest (Dezalay and Garth 2010). From the sociology of culture and organizations, neo-institutional world polity theorists have asserted that
global professionals play a critical role in global diffusion as norm transmitters or norm entrepreneurs (Meyer et al. 1997; 2006). But they say little about the mechanisms and processes by which professionals do such work, much less how professionals make sense of and understand their work.

But the stories I heard, like Eric’s story, did not seem to fit with this literature. My research findings show that, contrary to the literature, truth commission professionals are not simple norm carriers with similar backgrounds, hoping to advance their careers through promoting truth commissions. Rather I find that truth commission professionals are ‘true believers’ (Kagan and Gunningham 2003) who personally and professionally identify with the principles of truth commissions, namely the attempt at fighting injustice by redressing human rights violation through the uncovering of the historical ‘truth’ of a conflict. But they are critical and skeptical of truth commissions as a panacea, a quick fix, or a way for the government to gain international legitimacy. Often they decide a truth commission is not the right mechanism for a particular situation. Their diverse backgrounds of nationality, education, political participation, and career trajectory mean that they do not share a common, institutionalized professional path. But they do share a fervent belief in fighting injustice and they have always felt that they had to do something that honored that belief. Following Weber, I argue that these ‘true believers’ had a ‘calling’ so that this work is a vocation not a profession for them and this complicates the straightforward normative diffusion mechanism and leads to different outcomes.
The chapters up until now have traced the diffusion and popularity of truth commissions, the field of transitional justice, and the organizational structure of the TCC, detailing the type of work these professionals do, the environment in which they do it, and the structural constraints they face. I have attempted to outline the field, in the Bourdieusian sense, of this global profession. In this chapter, I begin to bring to life the professionals involved in the work of truth commissions. I describe who they are and how they understand their work with truth commissions. Ultimately, I draw on Weber to show how their work is better understood as a vocation rather than a profession, in so much that these professionals seem to be ‘called’ to the work of fighting injustice: they believe in fighting injustice not because they have been trained to, or educated to, or socialized to and not even because they grew up in a conflict or had some experience that drew them to this work, but because it is their “calling.”

This chapter lays the background information for the next chapter, which expands on the normative mechanism of diffusion and shows how truth commission professionals work creatively and relationally to negotiate the way the principles that they believe in can be practiced within a number of local contexts with differing structural constraints. In large part, they conceive of their work as an attempt to get adopting nations to implement truth commissions in ways that principles and local practices remain ‘coupled.’ However, I argue that the unintended, and unwanted, outcome of this belief-based work is an intensification of truth commission standardization and diffusion.
The chapter begins by outlining the literatures on professions, from a number of different subfields of sociology. The literature review helps to show why I expected to see something different than what I did and why my findings contribute a new understanding of global professionals. The following section details the differences and diversity amongst these professionals. Making clear how they do not share a common habitus. The last section explains what they do in fact share: a belief and a ‘calling.’ And argues that this belief is not in truth commissions persee but in something more deeply ethical, which, as will I will show in the next chapter, has specific implications for how they do their work and how truth commissions diffuse.

II. Theories of Professions and Professionals

The sociology of professions can by and large be divided into two main theoretical strands: one that understands professions as a normative value system and one that understands professions as a controlling ideology (Evetts 399: 2003). The largest difference between these two stands of theory is that while professions as value system is optimistic about the positive contribution of the concept to a normative social order, professions as ideology is more negative and focuses on professions as a hegemonic belief system and mechanism of social control. Professions as value system is part of a long history of theorists, from Durkheim (see 1992) to Parsons (1951), attempting to clarify the meaning and functions of professionalism for the stability and civility of the social systems. But in the 1970s and 1980s, the concept of professions as values system was rejected and replaced by the professions as controlling ideology. This second
strand, constituted by neo-Weberian theorists (Larson 1977; Abbott 1988; Bourdieu 1995), attacked professions as powerful, privileged, self-interested, monopolies that carved out and maintained jurisdiction through competition and the requisite work that was necessary to establish the legitimacy to monopolize the specific professional field (Abbott 1988). This created a general skepticism about professions, which came to be seen instead as elite conspiracies of powerful occupational workers.

Although since the 1980s, theorists (Friedson 1994; 2001; Evetts 1998; Halliday 1987) have attempted to moderate the polarity of both these approaches by highlighting both the social advantages and disadvantages of the professions, at the level of global analysis the second strand has formed a specific theoretical perspective most called ‘new governance’ studies. The work of Yves Dezalay and Bryant G. Garth (1996; 2002; 2010) dominate this perspective. Dezalay and Garth studied global professionals, specifically international lawyers, and through a primarily Bourdieuan and Foucauldian framework, they argued that international lawyers share a common habitus. Because of this, they argue, certain types of knowledges become hegemonic within a variety of professional fields (e.g. law, economics, education). In other words, as these similar professionals, sharing similar values and intellectual frameworks, work around the world, their norms, ideas, and practices become diffused, institutionalized and eventually taken for granted (Silbey 1998). The hegemonic consolidation of their knowledge raises their social status to that of ‘expert’ and swiftly moves them up the job ladder. As a result, the literature argues, other knowledges are eclipsed, most often

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2 See also: Fourcade 2006, 2009; Conti 2010; Halliday, Block-Lieb and Carruthers 2010
those of the people from the local area in which these professionals are working at the time.

From a different, cultural and organization perspective, neo-institutionalist world polity theorists also discuss global professionals and norms. Neo-institutionalists adopt a more relativist perspective. As represented by Meyer et al. (1997) the issue of globally converging norms is part of a process of modernization involving the gradual diffusion of western notions of rationality and even the nation state. This approach argues that global professionals play a critical role this diffusion process as norm transmitters or norm entrepreneur. Professionals spread the cultural norms of world polity through their work of consulting, theorizing, advising, speaking, and writing. As professionals spread the norm of their particular professions, organizations in a variety of different sectors become increasingly more rationalized and isomorphic (Meyer and Rowan 1997; Strang and Meyer 1993). In this way, professionals play a key role in the normative mechanism of diffusion accounting for isomorphism. Neo-institutional literature has shown these effects particularly within science, law, education, and non-profits (Boli and Thomas 1999; Boyle and Meyer 1998; Meyer, Diori, Ramirez, and Schoffer 2003; Meyer, Boli, and Ramirez 1985; Meyer, Hwang, Drori 2006). Unlike new governance studies, however, neo-institutionalists say little about the ‘on the ground’ processes that constitute normative diffusion much less how these professionals understand this process or their work.

Together, new governance studies and neo-institutional world polity theory constitute the majority of literature on global professionals and global professions.
Faulconbridge and Muzio argue that there is ‘a paucity of studies of the impacts of globalization on professionalization strategies and tactics and the implication for neo-Weberian theorization of professional projects’ (137: 2011). They call for transnational sociology of the professions and the professionals that constitute them. This paper hopes to contribute to filling this gap and creating a transnational sociology of the professions.

III. Difference and Diversity

The professionals in my study did not look like alike. And they did not look like what was sketched by the literature. Based on the literature, I expected the professionals at TCC to have all gone have gone to the same elite schools that boast prestigious international ‘peace,’ ‘development,’ and/or ‘humanitarian’ program. I expected most of them to be lawyers. And although I expected regional office to be headed by those from that region, I expected the U.S office to be run primarily be Americans. None of these expectations were met.

As mentioned earlier, my study focused on the 28 “leadership staff” of the organization that dealt directly with transitional justice programs. Leadership staff thus included Heads of Office and Program Directors of different countries’ programs or specific programs, such as ‘Truth and Memory,’ “Raparative Justice,” “Children and Youth,’ or “Gender Justice,” which worked in many different countries and in cooperation with country specific leaders. Administrative, financial, technology, legal, communications, development and ‘office of the president’ staff, including the President, were not included in the sample set because they are not directly involved in
creating, establishing or running a truth commission in any way. There were a total of 28 professionals. 17 of these professionals were based in the US Headquarters. Of these 17, 12 (70%) were foreign born and raised (lived in their country of birth until adulthood). Of the entire 28 professionals, 22 (29%) were foreign born and raised, representing 15 different countries. All 28 professionals had college education. 25 (89%) had obtained a Masters degree, 9 (32%) had obtained law degrees, and 3 (11%) had PhDs. Of the 22 foreign born professionals, 13 (60%) studied abroad and 8 (36%) of these went to notable elite “western” (US and UK) schools. Of the 6 American professionals, only 2 (33%) went to notable elite “western” schools. 17 (61%) of these professionals grew up in a country where conflict had taken place during their life. In terms of their professional background beyond education and before joining the TCC, 9 (32%) professional worked for the state in some legal capacity relating to human rights (ministry of justice; Human Rights office, etc) – 6 (21%) of these were professionals from conflict areas. 15 (54%) professionals had worked for grassroots human rights organizations, 9 (32%) of whom were from conflict areas. And, lastly, 4 professionals followed an academic research route – researching for different universities and, later, human rights organizations; 3 of whom were from conflict areas. The average age of these professionals was 44.

The numbers presented here, demonstrate the diversity of this group of professionals as well as what they have in common. TCC professionals come from all over the world. And since just over half the professionals come from conflict areas, we can understand that it is not only the experience of conflict that draws people to this
profession. TCC professionals all have an education but only just over half of those born outside of the US studied abroad and less than that studied at elite schools. There was no dominant subject area which they studied – majors ranged from philosophy, to comparative literature, to political science. Therefore, we can understand that it is not just people’s shared education background that draws this profession. Moreover, TCC professionals were activists in civil society, both locally and internationally, they worked for governments, for the UN, and for different universities. Again then, we can stress the understanding that it is not a shared background that has led these professionals to the TCC. So then what is it that bonds and binds these professionals? What is it that brings them to work in this field? And motivates them to stay in it?

Drawing on Weber, I argue here that what binds these professionals is a shared belief in fighting injustice and a ‘calling’ to the work that does this.

IV. The Ties that Bind: a Belief, a Calling, a Vocation

I ask Jesse to tell me about himself – to tell me his story.

He chuckles and says jokingly: “I thought we were talking about what makes truth commissions successful?”

“We are!” I respond. And laugh too.

“Well...I’m an activist. I have a tradition of personal activism. I’m a lawyer too but a regretful lawyer.” He laughs.

“What does that mean?” I ask.

I tried to get out of the legalist cause and move more towards the real world. Use law to serve human rights. So I ended up working for a human rights organizations but then when I could see my country was undergoing change, after the conflict, and I heard talks of the truth commission, I really thought it [truth commission] could be a way forward. So I got involved in the ministry of justice and then I became a member of the commission.”
For Jesse, growing up in Peru during a time of conflict, he feels that the need to fight injustice was just part of his psyche. Like many lawyers, he became one in order to serve and help people in his country. But, unlike many lawyers - who often end up working for large corporate firms, he left the profession and began working for local human rights NGOs after finishing his degree abroad. When the truth commission began to be discussed amongst NGOs, he thought not it really was his opportunity to serve his country in a way that could make a difference.

Although, he tells me later, he will never work on a truth commission again:

“Nunca Mas! Never again the truth commission!” I ask him why.

We gave our hearts and souls to write that report and we believed in it so dearly. And so we cannot avoid to be very...sentimental..about it. It was a very intense experience, a very very intense experience to see those things in your country. I mean, my most valuable moment in my life, but never again (laughs)!”

But when I ask him if this means that he doesn’t believe in truth commissions now, he says:

“No, its not so simple. It’s not really about truth commissions. It’s about what will help the country. Because it’s a long, big process. I believe truth commissions can be good at finding historical facts - the truth about an atrocity and victims have a right to that. Victims want to know what happened. And the country and the children need to know what happened so that it doesn’t repeat. I believe in the right to truth, but I think its just part of a much larger process. It can start a national dialogue. But rebuilding the country, reconciling..that’s a whole other process. It’s not really about believing in truth commissions. It’s about finding the best way to deal with the injustice of the past.”

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Jen was born and raised in the US. She came from a middle class background and went to a decent college but not an elite one. When I ask Jen to tell me how she got involved with truth commissions, she says:
Well, I’ll put it this way: when I told my mom that I was going into conflict resolution, she said ‘Jill, you cry when people fight! Why would you do that?!’ But I think that’s sort’ve exactly why. I actually think that because I’m sensitive to people’s feeling that, in a way, going into conflict resolution was a way to channel that sensitivity from being a liability to being a strength in the work that I do. I think I’ve just always felt really strongly about injustice and conflict, felt really sensitive to it. And then when I went to school I had the language to express that. That people had rights and they needed to be upheld and that for conflicts to be resolved voices needed to be heard.

“You believe truth commissions do that?” I ask.

“I believe they can. But they don’t always. I think knowing the history of what happened is important for victims. And its important to deal with the past. And truth commissions can be very good at fact finding and then disseminating that report.”

Jesse and Jen come from very different places. They have different nationalities and different education backgrounds. There is a ten-year age gap between them. Even now, they live on separate continents. But their stories share a theme of, which drawing from Weber, I understand to be a “calling” – a calling based on a belief and commitment to fighting injustice. Although they say it differently, they both feel that they always were always drawn to fight injustice. And they both believe in human rights, the rights of victims, and in particular the right of victims to tell their story and learn the truth of a conflict. Time and time again, this belief emerged in my interviews in different way; however, it was not a belief in truth commissions. In fact, most of the professionals were critical of truth commissions and wary of how popular or ‘sexy,’ as they would say, they had become. They didn’t necessarily believe in truth commissions what they believed in was that fighting the injustice that underpinned a conflict was necessary in order for the conflict not to repeat. This ‘fighting’ could be done in a variety of different
ways and while there was no ‘right’ way, the specific local context needed to be taken into account in order to choose the most appropriate. Truth commissions were one way that sometimes made the most sense given the context. And they did believe that foundational principle of truth commissions to centralize the need of victims to know the historical facts of the path and to create a national dialogue could be a critical component of fighting injustice.

It is this finding that contradicts the literature. According to neo-institutionalists, as noted earlier, professionals play the crucial role of diffusing global norms. Based on this, I expected the professionals to laud the virtues of truth commissions, to mimic the words of the glossy pamphlets in the lobby explaining the work they do, and to draw on the discourse of human rights in their understandings and meanings of what they do. In addition, new governance studies literature prepared me to find that shared backgrounds of the professionals to create a hegemonic knowledge base, which would eclipse local solutions and creative interpretations of truth commissions. And that it would be through the proliferation of truth commissions, the diffusion of the norms that underpin them, and the resulting consolidation of power, that these professionals would rise up the humanitarian ranks, securing increasingly high salaries and social status.

But what I heard and saw was, to my surprise, something different. The professionals were extremely critical of truth commissions, dubious as to their ability to fulfill any mandate let alone the more broad and ambitious ones of the renowned truth commissions (South Africa; Peru; Argentina), which promised reconciliation. They were
quick to say that other solutions could be more effective depending on the context and
to point the problems with the truth commissions they had worked on, as Mark said:

If I could turn the clock back perhaps I would have recommended the mandate to be more modest and more focused but the demands and the expectations were so huge, we couldn’t resist the temptation to try to do something for those who were mistreated, for the orphans, for the damages that the villages and cities had. So yes we were too ambitious. And I think that we to transmit to the victims that the truth commission was only a temporary mechanism. And that the solutions to the problems was not in the hands of the truth commission.

Mark expresses here what he understands as not only the failure of the truth commission but his own failures as commissioner. For Mark and the others the work is very personal.

As an organization, TCC often pulled out of truth commission planning if they did not think that victims’ rights were being centralized, or if it didn’t properly represent civil society and so the national dialogue was one sided, or if they felt that the government was only establishing one it to ‘white wash’ the conflict and gain global legitimacy. In the quote below, Fran describes what she understands her work to be:

I think that what we do in the TCC is to try to help align truth commissions with the principles of the right to truth and the rights of the victims. So, when I come in contact with good will initiative that complies with the rights of victims, I try to support them in centralizing the rights of victims and creating a mandate that works for their situation. When I find situations where people are saying something is a truth commission when it is clearly designed to either be a white wash or to be an arrangement between politicians or just a second rate poor person consolation prize, I don’t support it. The TCC doesn’t support. We do not support it just cause it has the name ‘truth commission.’

Fran makes clear here that she and the TCC are not promoting truth commissions wherever they go or wherever the opportunity arises. Conversely, what they try to promote
or support is for countries to determine the best way to help victims and to change the culture of injustice in the country.

I heard over and over again, not only in my interviews, but in meetings and in memos, professionals encourage commissioners to be creative in their interpretations and construction of the mandate so that it reflected the needs of the context and local culture. The spoke of how they don’t like ‘where the commissioners are slavish-ly following a cookie-cutter approach,’ rather they like when they are actually adapting the principles to their own reality.’

Moreover, the discourse in which these professionals drew on was not a global one but a very personal one. Although human rights does underpin the principles of truth commissions necessary their interpretations of what these look like when instituted are diverse and personal. They speak more about what is required to change a culture of injustice than they do of their wholehearted support for the human rights framework. It is not that they do not believe in human rights, it is that their support of human rights is filtered through their more primary belief in fighting injustice.

The combination of these elements: that they felt they always had to something to fight injustice, their believe in fighting injustice, and their critical position on truth commissions, seems to speak to something different than simple norm transmitters. The work they do is much more personal than the literature suggests. And it is much more based on a sense of ethical duty to humanity. For these reasons, Weber would understand this work as a vocation derived from a ‘calling.’
In *The Protestant Ethic and The Spirit of Capitalism*, Weber argued the calling was a product of the Reformation, and a Protestant notion that involved the determining your worldly duty to god or “the valuation of the fulfillment of duty in worldly affairs at the highest form which the moral activity of the individual could assume” (Weber 40). Doing work that fulfills this moral duty is what distinguishes a profession from a vocation and its work that one is called to do, or destined to do, in order to serve God. I argue here that these professionals had a calling in so much that they just always knew or were always drawn to this work of fighting injustice and that although this was not understood as a duty to God, it was and is understood as a duty or ethical responsibility to humanity, one that they cannot remember a time in which the did not have it.

For these professionals, there work is a vocation. They were and are true believers (Gunningham and Kagan 2003). Gunningham and Kagan argue that ‘true believers’ are those people or organizations that make decisions based on what they believe is the ‘right thing to do’ given their moral framework. ‘True believers’ think that the right decision will always be the decision that honors their principles (2003: 101). This understanding of global professionals that they are true believers who had a calling towards a particular vocation creates a very different picture of global professionals than the literature thus far. It also creates a very different understanding of how the normative mechanism of diffusion works as I will show in the following chapter.

V. Conclusion: Prophets not Priests