TRUTH  

RECONCILIATION

"THE BEST COPY IN TOWN!"

THE MEDIA & THE TRC  
Is the truth in the telling or in the tale?

- Covering the killers  
  JACQUES PAUW & SOPHIE MOKOENA

- Restoring professional honour  ZUBEIDA JAFFER

- Media as Memory  
  ANTHONY SAMPSON

- The day the cowboys cried  
  MAX DU PREEZ
This issue ... and three important conferences

Guest editorial ... what if The Truth causes conflict, not conciliation? asks JANE TAYLOR

When the media serve as mediators: MELISSA BAUMANN and HANNES SIEBERT provide eight pointers for the press.

Journalists should question the tradition of truth telling in the TRC - and the maths of human rights violations, say PAMELA REYNOLDS and FIONA ROSS

Covering the killer cop Eugene de Kock embroils JACQUES PAUW in enormous ethical controversies.

Cowboys don’t cry, MAX DU PREEZ once declared in an article for the SA Union of Journalists’ newsletter. Today, the TRC has brought him to tears.

The best copy in town; handle with care: TRC officials HUGH LEWIN and DENZIL POTGIETER give the insiders’ view of media coverage.

Radio host SOPHIE MOKOENA found that when callers insulted assassin Joe Mamasela, he said it healed him.

The right thing: journalists are learning about human rights ... and doing a good job, writes JOHN VAN ZYL

The media as victims or the media as villains? MANDLA LANGA indicts the press.

STEPHEN LAUFER resents the mad scramble to investigate leaks by the TRC.

Talking terminology: journalists wrestle with the words to express trauma and tribulation.

Black journalists battle against continuous racial prejudice in the newsroom, say JOE LATAKOGOMO and DENIS PATHER in Independent Newspapers’ submission to the TRC.

"Why didn’t you tell us what happened to you?" ZUBEIDA JAFFER’s colleagues asked her. "You never asked," she replied. Extracts from her 1997 World Press Freedom Day lecture.

The Freedom Forum’s 1996 Cape Town and Johannesburg conferences: "Journalists Under Fire; Media Under Siege".

Why I apologise to black journalists. JOHN BATTERSBY says each person bears responsibility

What it means to cover the Truth Commission: snippets from six journalists.

In the early 1960s, Cape Times editor Victor Norton told many people how impressive Mandela was. But not his readers. ANTHONY SAMPSON scrutinises journalism as history.
THE TRC needs the media. And the media needs the TRC. Why? Because the nation cannot begin to know what the TRC is uncovering without the cooperation of journalists. And for its part the media cannot ignore the biggest, and longest running, story of our times. But dependency does not breed harmony. The TRC and the media have a complicated relationship with dangerous assumptions being made on both sides about the national process both are engaged in.

The TRC is assuming that the media — and the nation — accepts its definitions of “truth” and “reconciliation”, and in particular the very religious sentiment that “the truth will set you free”. The TRC assumes that if the mass media simply relays the outcome of the hearings to the nation, healing will take place on a vast scale.

Journalists have assumed that they can cover the hearings in the same way and with the same tools they have always used.

The transition to democracy has already chipped away at standard ideas about how journalists should operate. Journalists who found themselves easily combining roles in the 80s (journalist and activist) balk at combining roles in the 90s — journalist and nation builder.

The definition of what journalism is fits more easily with an oppositional stance than a championing stance. Journalists are for democracy, but they would rather much more than march in.

These difficulties are thrown into stark relief when reporting on the TRC.

Not only is the testimony deeply emotional and dramatic. In those standing on the sidelines observing, but very often it highlights how journalists, through shoddy reporting and their own blinkered experience, allowed themselves to get sucked into prepping up the white status quo and, more seriously, into the apartheid disinformation campaign.

These issues were debated by commissioners and journalists at a workshop in Cape Town in January hosted by the Media Peace Centre and sponsored by Media International and Rundstrif. The discussions were sharp, full of clashing opinions and deeply questioning of the ground rules of both the Commission and of journalism. In this special edition of the *Rhodes Journalism Review* we take the debate further by drawing in a wider group of journalists, all of whom have strong feelings and relevant points to make.

At the conference Stephen Laufer from *Business Day* said journalists make a contribution to society by reflecting the complexity of things. Well, journalists and truth is a very complex matter as you will find out in the following pages.

*Anthea Garman & Gay Berger*

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**Catch these conferences**

**NEW MEDIA 2000 CONFERENCE**

is where African and international journalists and IT experts gather to consider the impact of online technology on the media in Africa.

Hosted by the New Media Laboratory, Rhodes University Department of Journalism & Media Studies in Grahamstown, New Media 2000 takes place on September 16-19, 1997.

Present will be representatives from South Africa’s large media houses — Naspers, TML, Independent Newspapers, the SABC, community media, journalist trade unions, the Freedom of Expression Institute, the Institute for the Advancement of Journalism, Southern African member states of the Media Institute of Southern Africa, and other media organisations.

From abroad there will be speakers from the University of the South Pacific, Fiji; Deakin University and the University of Queensland, Australia; the Poynter Institute of Media Studies, Florida, US; California State University, Fullerton, US; Dublin City University, Ireland; Stockholm University, Sweden; the Centre for Culture & Media, Norrkoping, Sweden; and the School voor Journalistiek, Utrecht, Holland.

Conference themes include electronic data retrieval, robot-assisted research, the virtual newsroom, the global library, the wired journalist, multi-platform publishing, the state of Internet connectivity and usage in Southern Africa, broadcast media and the Net, online advertising, computer-assisted reporting, ethical questions related to new media, and other relevant topics.

**COSTS:**

- Students R150
- Professional individuals R300
- NGO/Academic institutions R500
- Corporate R900

**TRAIN THE ONLINE TRainers**

... is the learning event for anyone teaching online journalism skills. The aim is to share international experience and expertise in the new field of teaching online publishing, plus computer-aided research and reporting, with a focus on the needs and possibilities in Southern Africa. The format consists of short inputs and panel discussions, some formal papers and hands-on training sessions.

International experts taking part include Nora Paul, Poynter Institute, Mark Comerford, the Swedish Association of Investigative Journalists; Stephen Quin, Deakin University, Australia; Paul Lester, professor of Communications, University of California.

**CONFERENCE CONTACTS:**

email: media2000@unr.ac.za or contact:
Prof Gay Berger, head of department, berger@othu.ru.ac.za
Roland Stanbridge, Director of the New Media Lab, roland@othu.ru.ac.za
Monty Cooper, lecturer, photojournalism, cooper@othu.ru.ac.za

**PJ 97**

... is the 2nd annual conference of South African photojournalists and photojournalism instructors, 5-9 September.

Seven major seminars will deal with:
- Education and Photojournalism;
- Documentary developments in South Africa;
- Community Photojournalism;
- Photojournalism Ethics;
- Copyright on the Internet;
- Photojournalism on the WWW;
- Digital technology — where is it going? Has it threatened the fate of Photojournalism?

http://www.photojournal.ru.ac.za/conferences.hmtl

**Also... “Teletraffic”**

Rhodes University Computer Science conference 8-10 September
http://teletraffic97.ru.ac.za
Truth or Reconciliation?

JORNALISTIC autonomy and interrogative aggression have become defining articles of faith in South African journalism. However, the uneasy and ill-defined relationship between the media and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission has prompted a set of propositions which confront these liberal premises. It has become quite evident that the success of the TRC as a nation-building enterprise depends on no small measure on its capacity to mobilise the media for its purposes: the way in which the vast majority of South Africans will have access to our violent histories is through media representations via print, radio, and television.

Who we become will inevitably be inflected by what we know ourselves to have been. This latter category is to be distinguished from what we were. It is the Commission’s premise that such knowledge will begin the work of reconciliation. Thus the acts of telling are integral to the Commission’s purpose. But the act of telling in South Africa has historically been the burden of the independent media.

There is thus, I suspect, an anxiety about who is whose hand-servant in the ongoing project of historical retrieval. In other words, there is something of a conflict of interests at work. The media are required to convey the message of the TRC at the same time that they are to remain independent of any expressed government agendas. It is not, after all, the role of the media to undertake the state’s task of nation-building. To do so would be to jeopardise their substantial legacies of oppositional memory. But such ostensible disinterest carries its own risks. How, after all, does a responsible journalist separate the obligation to tell what she knows, from her obligation to withhold what she senses can fracture the national project and lead to civil conflict?

 Oppositional discourse and journalistic independence were pivotal instruments in destabilising the apartheid state. This created a particularly seductive mythology which capitalised on the figure of the independent journalist who is outside of all constraint, is beyond ethics, and is driven by the notion of an attainable objective truth. Such a romantic conception of the role of the journalist is perhaps not sustainable.

What, after all, is the objective truth which the TRC itself is seeking to identify? The Commission is engaged in a highly selective process, identifying as appropriate for public dissemination only a fragment of the stories which come before it. Those are the stories which the Commission has determined are appropriate to the task of nation-building. Only a very finite sample of the applications made can become stories told; the Commissioners exercise their judgement in negotiating what it is we, as a nation, need to know about ourselves, lest we be swamped by the detailed.

The question to be asked is: To what extent our press representatives should collaborate in this task. The project is one of telling but is also one of editing.

A different issue for journalists concerns how victims and perpetrators have been represented in the media. Max du Preez’s Sunday night TV audience for the TRC Special Report is predominantly a black one, while Jacques Pauw’s audience for Prime Time was almost exclusively white. These realities, for what they are worth, suggest disturbing patterns of identification.

For many journalists, there is the difficulty of distinguishing one story of abuse from another: that one mother’s loss is another father’s grief is another sister’s memory. All victims tell a story with one structure: it seems.

What makes the stories of the perpetrators so compelling is, in part, that they are agents: they act upon others. All of the psychological structures of desire, power, greed, fear, identification are invoked in these accounts. Milton’s classic dilemma in Paradise Lost was that Satan became the hero of the narrative, because of the inherent interest in his character. A similar effect was evident in the coverage of the stories of De Rock, Coetzee and Mmane.

Several coincidental factors contributed to this. In the first instance, the Commission was selecting stories of exemplary loss: thus over and over we heard the accounts of hapless victims. Further, the Commission was hearing such stories: it was indeed these people with these histories who were making up the bulk of the applicants to the Commission. In many instances, they became the hero of the narrative, because of the inherent interest in his character. A similar effect was evident in the coverage of the stories of De Rock, Coetzee and Mmane.

June Taylor is an academic in the Department of English, University of the Western Cape, and is author of Utopia and the Truth Commission which will premiere at the National Arts Festival in July.
paradigm shift

8 points for a new kind of journalism,
by MELISSA BAUMANN and HANNEs SIEBERT.

"JOURNALISTS mediate conflict, whether they intend to or not." This is the premise we started with seven years ago, when we began the work which became the bedrock for the Media Peace Centre, founded in 1992 as part of the Peace Accord structures. When we launched the Mediation Project for Journalists (MPJ) in 1990, journalists in South Africa largely came from mouthpiece or adversarial traditions. The state-run and much of the liberal press operated under the guise of "objectivity" and the illusion of hearing the absolute "truth". Journalists from the alternative media had an open agenda of "giving voice to the voiceless" and offsetting the official versions. The MPJ challenged all that.

Journalists as mediators? Not exactly. But journalists have a unique opportunity to impact upon conflict — pre-emptively, in its midst, and restoratively — to "intervene" as mediators do. Since 1990 the MPJ has offered nearly 100 journalists — here and overseas — training in mediation and other conflict handling/oversight skills, and posited new journalistic paradigms. At the heart of the project lies this conviction: that journalists can and should help manage conflict, rather than exacerbate it.

How to do this, however imperfectly? The MPJ imparts to journalists a set of skills borrowed from mediation, which basically underwrite sound journalism skills and practice. These include:

1. BRINGING PARTIES TO THE TABLE: Journalists have nearly unparalleled access to parties in a conflict, and often the power to bring them "to the table" to begin dialogue around conflictual issues, in the media and presumably "off the record". Key considerations are drawing parties in inclusively and representatively (the "right" sources). The TRC hearings are tabling a collective history — and journalists play a key role (along with the Commission) in deciding whose stories get told.

2. ACTIVE LISTENING: Journalists can help engage parties in better listening — through practising it themselves, and paraphrasing parties' points of view. Conflicts often persist because people aren't really heard. In covering the TRC, journalists enable people to be heard, but the question arises: has the public turned a deaf ear to the litanies of atrocity? How do we represent them differently?

THE MEDIA PEACE CENTRE has experimented with its own truth commission, in a sense. For nearly three years it has worked on the East Rand, primarily in Thokoza, with a local partner, Simunye, on a project called Video Dialogues. In this case, two former self-defence unit commanders involved in the East Rand conflict, one ANC, the other IFP, shot the video themselves, and went through a journey of confrontation and healing. Along the way the IFP ex-commander learned that his ANC counterpart had had a hand in his brother's killing. This could have derailed the project, but didn't — presumably there's a broader commitment to the community and the cathartic process of making the video. At the core of the video, in fact, are testimonies from both sides, collected and filmed by the ex-commanders, destined for the TRC. On a small but deeply rooted scale, Video Dialogues has helped Thokoza grapple with its own "truths".

3. MOVING PARTIES OFF POSITIONS, TOWARDS INTERESTS: This basic tenet of mediation has application for journalists. Journalists needn't reiterate parties' hardened positions with the time-worn "X said, Y said" formula. Instead they can explore interests underlying those positions, possibly identifying common ground between the parties. One of the major gaps in current reporting on the TRC is "driving for context". The typical reports repeat the gruesome narratives of violence and inhumanity. What drove people to such desperate acts of destruction? We have to uncover the fear, hatred, hunger for power and illusions that apartheid trapped us in. Without unfolding and sharing these underlying interests our memories will suffocate in the stories of pain and horror — we will never enter the common human space where healing can start.

4. AGENDA SETTING: Agenda setting harks back to the call for more pro-active journalism. What are, for instance, the critical issues emerging from the TRC which warrant the attention/action of government, those involved, the nation at large? Can we not see the forest for the trees — the hundreds of testimonies, while valid in themselves, all adding up to patterns, blocs of socio-political insight which need to be analysed and addressed?

5. DISPELLING MISPERCEPTION AND STEREOTYPE: Antagonists generally hold rigid misperceptions of each other — of the "other" — reinforced by and generating fear. Journalists can explore these misperceptions with the parties on both sides, and in uncovering them, help dispel them. Is the media coverage of the TRC distorting or reinforcing stereotypes?

6. QUESTIONING ASSUMPTIONS: A good journalist questions his/her own assumptions in reporting, as well as others. Many assumptions have presented themselves in the course of the TRC hearings — for one, does "the truth set you free"?

7. LAUNDERING LANGUAGE: Language has enormous power; we use it intentionally and unwittingly. Words can do a lot of damage, creating and perpetuating stereotypes and division. Watch out for binary comparisons — such as the TRC's "victim" and "perpetrator" — for labelling, for euphemism. They tend to lock us and our readers into narrow mindsets.

8. JOINT PROBLEM SOLVING: This is the best case scenario — when through the process of reporting and creating facilitating dialogue around a conflictual issue journalists can help move parties into action, into managing or resolving the conflict at hand. A critical prerequisite to this phase, of course, is helping to structure the conflict — through reportage — and identify key problem areas to be addressed. The media can also support joint problem solving by spotlighting instances where it works, and the process the parties took to get there. In the course of the TRC and in its spirit, a number of "victims" and "perpetrators" have met in an attempt at reconciliation. While not exactly joint problem solving, it is a joint working through of the past — in spiritual terms, of guilt and forgiveness. The danger in reporting these "reconciliations" (and in the reconciliations themselves) is that it is done facilely; the evil of these deeds cannot be obliterated in a handshake.

Melissa Baumann and Hannes Siebert are the founders of the Media Peace Centre.
UCT anthropologists PAMELA REYNOLDS and FIONA ROSS dig deep into the TRC and urge journalists to question its assumptions, its choice of voices and the data it releases.

Traditions and truths

French philosopher Michel Serres says that after terrible events, "a written work, even an abstract one, cannot help remaining a distressed witness for a long time". Each of us involved in the TRC, observing it, reporting on the processes, is "a distressed witness". This calls for reflection on one's distress, on one's motives, on one's role as commentator.

Said one journalist of the massacres in Rwanda, "We learned something about the soul of man that would leave us shameless long into the future." Journalists occupy a strange territory of privilege and burdens. What truth will we tell for the future? There is a focus on abuses that cancels out all possibility of heroism — we are unable to see that which was achieved. Images of pain offered through the TRC hearings and taken up by the media are of, archetypically, mothers in tears. There is little balance with stories of healing, surviving, battling, networking, growing over time, recording every day. All that has gone on and will continue to go on.

We need to explore assumptions like "the truth heals". Critic Michael Ignatieff writes: "It is an open question whether justice or truth actually heals. But the truth will not necessarily be believed, and it is putting too much faith in truth, to believe that it can heal." He quotes Desmond Tutu on national unity, reconciliation and healing, and adds: "Laudable aims, but are they coherent? Look at the assumptions he makes. That a nation has one psyche, not many; that the truth is one, not many; that the truth is certain, not contestable; and that when it is known by all, it has the capacity to heal and reconcile." Ignatieff says these are less assumptions than they are articles of faith about human nature.

There are at least two other positions on the need to reveal the truth about the past. One comes from anthropologist Mary Douglas, who stresses the value of forgetting. Knowledge may be well lost. It is not necessarily good, despite what Freud says, to recall. Douglas says it is wrong to forget, nor necessarily sad to forget. We should not strive to remember everything we ever knew. Time past, Douglas says, is remembered privately, or publically, when it can be used in time present to control the future.

The other position on truth and memory comes from Michel Serres, who talks about shadows. He says there are two strands in western thought. One is the Greek one, about bringing things into the light. The other one is Roman or Egyptian, about burying, concealing, hiding, or placing something in the shadows to conserve it. To wrench something from the shadows is often to destroy it. Serres says: "We never calculate the cost of our methods. We believe they are free. Everything has its price — even clarity. It is paid for in shadows, or destruction, sometimes."

Michel Serres

Is the TRC true?

There's a sense of dissatisfaction with the kinds of stories that reporters are able to tell thus far about the Commission. Vera Das, an Indian sociologist, calls these "crystallized narratives". She says that stories crystallize around events, they make sense of events, they have descriptive value. Then after a while, that descriptive value is lost somehow. There are ways we can move from those stories.

Stephen Leamer from Business Day has said that journalism is translation — that journalists take a mass of information and make it useful. "What do we do with all this information?" journalists ask. It seems to me that the public asks much the same question. They ask, what do we do with these nightly tales of tears, with what Hugh Lewin, a TRC official, has called "the relentless repetition of horror"?

One of the things we can do is maths. I added up the number of cases of human rights violations that I heard last year — there were 377 of them. One hundred and fifty were made by men, and of those 150, 98 were made by men about themselves. The women's stories are different. Out of 227 stories told by women, only 78 were about themselves; the remainder were about their husbands and sons. So in other words, men speak of their own experience, and women speak of others.

The Truth Commission process itself has shifted, because their narrative is not crystallised. At one point, there was an increasing emphasis on innocence. People were coming before the Commission and representing themselves as innocent. So out of those 78 women who spoke about themselves, 35 spoke about the way in which the state had opened fire on them when they were coming home from protest marches or from funerals, or when they had been standing in the streets waiting for buses.

Who tells stories, and how innocence and involvement are represented, raise a lot of questions about the data which the TRC presents us with. Who is left out? What stories don't we hear?

There is a lot that is displaced or hidden by the way in which we think and write about the Commission and by the way that the Commission represents itself. There are absences — silent voices. There are people who don't speak. There are ways in which it's incredibly difficult to actually evaluate the Truth Commission data that we have.

Take for example the Truth Commission Interim Report. It is based on five hearings. It found that 82 out of 124 deaths were caused by the security forces. The other 42 deaths were caused by "other/unknown". What is this "other/unknown"? I went off and worked it out. Those entities were the homeland security forces, the police reservists, the vigilantes and the liberation movements.

We have a responsibility to ask very critical, pushing questions about what it means to lump the liberation movements together with the homeland security forces in a category called "other/unknown". What kind of truth are we being presented with? Simply because it is the Truth Commission that gives us this data, doesn't make it true, doesn't mean it can't be interrogated, can't be questioned, can't be contested.

Pamela Reynolds

Who tells stories, and how innocence and involvement are represented, raise a lot of questions about the data which the TRC presents us with. Who is left out? What stories don't we hear?

"We never calculate the cost of our methods. We believe they are free. Everything has its price — even clarity. It is paid for in shadows, or destruction, sometimes."

Michel Serres

Archbishops and archetypes

Articles excerpted from presentations to the Media, Truth and Reconciliation workshop in Cape Town, February 1997.
Trading places

Eugene de Kock presided over the police hit squad base, Vlakplas. Television journalist JACQUES PAUW made deals to produce the De Kock documentary, *Prime Evil*. The film sparked a lot of debate as evident in these excerpts from the Media, Truth and Reconciliation workshop.

THESE PEOPLE from Vlakplas are available and can be traced quite easily. You get addresses from court records, even the telephone directory. I was amazed that there was not more journalism done on them. You literally just make an appointment to speak to these men. Getting them on camera, however, was a different story.

We decided early to use close-ups with black backdrops, to be dramatic and let these people speak. I tried to interview Jan Viktor, founder of Vlakplas, but like FW de Klerk he would not speak to me. I also had to make deals with other sources about the case, and agree that they wouldn’t speak about the murders they were involved in.

Craig Williamson (former police spy) refused to be interviewed against the backdrop, and wanted to be interviewed in his lawyer’s office wearing a jacket and tie. It was either get him on these terms or not: this was the only way we could get him. I never thought it important that people watching the programme should know this. It would have broken the story to tell the viewer that we are interviewing him in an office instead of against a black backdrop. We only had 110 minutes, and could have made a four-hour documentary.

I tried to interview De Kock’s family. But I had to make a deal with De Kock. I asked him in jail if he would give me three people who could talk on his behalf. He gave them to me and the deal was that I would not pursue his family. The three people were Peter Caselton, Lucas Kalina and De Kock’s brother, Vossia. I would very much have liked to include his wife and family in the documentary, but we couldn’t.

To get the truth, the Truth Commission guarantees amnesty. Journalists have to operate like that. To pretend that a journalist can go and get Craig Williamson to just talk is not realistic.

I am a journalist. Even if Eugene de Kock takes my hand and says “my brother”, but also tells me what I want to know, that is OK with me. I have spent hours with these guys in bars hearing their stories. It was a process of dealing with these scumbags, risking one’s life. The fact is that we know very little of what happened inside the military, because we have not been able to get into it.

There has been criticism that my documentary is too sympathetic to Vlakplas people and to De Kock. On the other hand, some whites have complained that they were shown as drunken killers. Was it a case of presenting some of the perpetrators as victims of De Kock? At some stage, yes. But not all people at Vlakplas killed. There were 150 men there in total. It is too easy for the killers to say they were victims of De Kock, political pawns. Yet Joe Mamasela (police killer) says he was a victim, “torched into killing my own people”.

I don’t think I’ll make another documentary like this. I don’t think I can go through all this again. I have had enough of these people — I don’t want to deal with them any more. The only remorse these guys feel is that they lost the war. It makes you realise how difficult reconciliation is.

Confessions of a personal kind

In his television documentary on Eugene de Kock, JACQUES PAUW spoke about his own regrets — provoking challenges from other journalists:

ANTJIE SAMUELS:

I T IS fascinating that Jacques put himself in the documentary, not only as a narrator, but as part of the story. In it, he says that he did not warn Bhekiz Mlangeni. (Ex-police officer Dirk Coetzee had told Pauw about a possible parcel bomb that could — and did — kill Mlangeni. Pauw expresses his regret in the documentary for not having taken Coetzee’s warning seriously enough to pass it on).

I wonder how Mrs Mlangeni felt, looking at the documentary. She told me that she could see that Jacques wanted to take something out of himself. Those are the words shes used: “he wanted to take something out of him”. And she added: “but I wonder why he did not tell me when he interviewed me for the programme”.

JP: What is it that people want before they can come to the step of saying, yes, I forgive you?

AS: She was saying that she can’t forgive you because you did not tell her privately. So what she is actually saying is that she does not want you to dictate the narrative. She wants to dictate the narrative.

JP: I was a witness in the Eugene de Kock trial and testified that Dirk Coetzee had warned me about the parcel bomb. Mrs Mlangeni was in court then; I only interviewed her afterwards. It is part of the story, that is why I put it in the movie. I don’t quite understand what it is all about. There is a sort of implication that I am also a perpetrator now.
AFTER the second week of Truth Commission hearings in April 1996, a caring SABC boss with a mournful face came to me with the news that he had arranged a psychotherapist for me and my colleagues on the TRC Special Report team. I'm from the old school of journalism. I still romanticise our craft as one practised by hard-living, cynical and tough bastards. We eat meals and we smoke and it's something we type stories on.

Therapy? This was our favourite joke for at least the next week. A journalist getting therapy is like a Springbok rugby prop using moisturiser.

But after the fourth week of hearings — that's when Archbishop Tutu had his now famous emotional breakdown on camera — two team members started cracking and had to leave the team.

The jokes became cruder and crueller. Mostly about torture, murder and suffering. Really tasteless stuff.

It was our way of coping with week after week of emotionally draining hearings. Not only listening to disturbing testimony every day, but then going through it again when we transcribed the video tapes, and then watched it again when editing the programme.

The rugby prop really did need moisturiser.

But we were getting therapy from each other in the team. Nobody understands a journalist like a fellow journalist. Now, a year later, we have learnt to cry with a victim and then move on. We'll deal with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder after the end of the Truth Commission.

The Special Report is a very successful programme. On average over the last year it has had the biggest audience of any television current affairs programme ever broadcast in South Africa — with AR figures of between 9 and 13 it is bigger than America's Funniest Home Videos.

Competing against all print and electronic media, the Special Report won the Foreign Correspondent Association of South Africa's 1996 Award for Outstanding Journalism.

Conventional wisdom says viewer figures should have dropped steeply after a few weeks or months, because tears, suffering and evil are not popular viewing week after week.

I think the Special Report remains popular viewing because there have always been so many restrictions on telling the real story of our nation. It is a basic need of any nation to know its past.

There is, I think, another reason. The TV and radio news and even the newspapers give a quick overview of what happened at the TRC with snippets of the tears and the saddest or most brutal pieces of evidence. The Special Report always tries to contextualise the evidence and tell the whole human drama. More often than not we go outside the hearings and do interviews with victims and relatives and members of the community.

We find it really helpful to play in the old SABC's TV news bulletins on the event in question at the beginning of the report. It gives some of the visual elements to the story as it happened, but more importantly, we give viewers a good idea of how racist, propagandist and untruthful the old SABC — and thus the regime and the public they served — were. That is part of the story of our past.

But many important events were, for ideological reason, never covered, or covered in such a way that the archive footage is unusable. We often came upon "sensitive" archive footage with little notes scribbled on it like: "Don't use without permission" and signed by the old bosses — one or two of them still in top positions at the SABC.

We often do stories outside the Truth Commission hearings: like the stories of District Six and Sophiatown; the Pass Laws which turned more than 17 million South African into criminals; the black people in the Kaloo who took "coloured" names to escape the worst parts of apartheid; and now we're making news back. And of course we have done several hard investigations, some of which have even led to the solving of cases of murder and disappearance.

We make very sure we are fair and balanced, but we are up-front that we are not "objective". Still, we clearly differentiate between opinion and factual reporting. We think our honesty and frankness are appreciated by viewers who are not used to those qualities in the media.

And we sail very close to the wind. So close that we have had two criminal charges laid against us (Gaye Derby Lewis and Magnus Mabon), two defamation charges by Vlakplaas operatives, and a complaint to the Broadcasting Complaints Commission from the Flame Lily Association of old Rhodesians. If one is serious about telling the real story of South Africa's murky past, this is almost inevitable. I am confident we will survive all these charges with a clean record.

One thing we struggle with, is the "has-anyone-here-been-raped-and-speak-English" syndrome. It is always tempting to give preference to the story of a victim who is eloquent and speaks English rather than the testimony of a stammering witness who was not well translated. It is morally and ethically questionable, but we also have a duty to make technically good, popular television. Difficult decisions.

My job as executive producer and presenter of the Special Report is deeply satisfying, especially since I had spent a lot of my energy the last 10 years — especially at Vrye Weekblad — on trying to help tell my country's story. And I get a warm feeling of vindication as the stories we wrote about death squads and the Third Force seven, eight years ago, are proved to be completely correct.

But the real stars of the Special Report are the team of young producers, recently reduced to only four full-time staff. When we started off in April last year, none had any television experience to speak of. Today they make some of the best documentaries the SABC has ever broadcast. Week after week, working six days a week, often well past midnight.

Perhaps it helps to know that we have the privilege to document the remarkable story of our own nation.
HUGH LEWIN tells how the TRC “manages the package”.

YOU’VE got a submission of about 150, say 300, statements which have been selected, which have been brought in from the statement takers in the area. They come in and they sit there, and you go through them. How do you then choose the 10 or 12 people who are going to appear on that particular day from that particular place? This is our brief. Cover everywhere. Go throughout the country. So how do you choose? You have two kids who were protesting. One is dead and the mother comes forward and tells the story of how the child died. One is crippled, is still alive, exactly the same situation — shot, but survived and has been crippled for the last 10, 15 years. Which do you choose? Which is the story that we say that you should hear? How do you choose between another hostel attack or another death in detention — another detention through torture?

Do you choose a well-known local politician who died as an activist, because that is going to please the community and that is going to make the community feel more involved in the process? Or do you choose someone who died who was a domestic worker who happened to be walking down the streets when the Hippos arrived? That for me has been the most difficult and the most painful process, because in fact what we are doing is managing the package in a way. And I think that is what we have all been doing in terms of reporting — is taking a package and managing it and then sending it forth.

The Commission itself is, in fact, not the end of a process which is only the beginning of a process in which we are all involved, and which has to be picked up. I maintain that the major challenge for us as journalists is that we are the first people who are going to have to pick this up and take the work forward once the Commission has finished its work — once the Commission has made this monumental report, which is going to be written hastily between December and March next year, and then presented in its 3 000 volumes to the president. It is a great story. I don’t think journalists have ever been presented with a story like this. Every single day you get the best copy in town. You have copy which is local, you have copy which is heartrending, which is tearing, which is a challenge to approach. It is the best story that has ever hit South Africa in media terms, in copy terms. But how are you going to maintain the momentum of covering where you have a relentless repetition of horror? How does one actually cope with that?

Hugh Lewis is a member of the TRC Human Rights Violations Committee.

“Remember the TRC’s obligations,” Advocate DENZIL POTGIETER appeals to journalists.

WE NEED a more critical and analytical coverage of the work we are doing. We are all very busy, we are all falling around all over, and we need that sort of in-depth look — philosophical look if you wish — into the work we are doing. Of course we have two competing interests. There is the duty of the media to keep the public informed and the public’s right to know, on the one hand. On the other hand there is the TRC’s statutory duties to keep certain information confidential.

We have, as a Commission, gone on record to make it quite clear that we are not interested in heavy-handed action, or in witchhunts, but of course we need to look at this quite critically, because we have the right of the public to know on the one side, but then we have our duty towards the victims, which we regard very, very seriously.

An untimely disclosure of the identity of an applicant for amnesty or of circumstances surrounding an amnesty application, can pose a threat to the applicant. The Commission has a duty to be sensitive to that. An important consideration is where this sort of conduct impinges our work. Where it interferes with our work, we are bound to preserve the integrity of the TRC process. We must then look at ways and means of overcoming this sort of problem. We need some discussion on this and we need to have some understanding. I think that our record has shown that we are committed to making information available. We are committed as far as is practically possible to transparency.

We have realised that the question of reconciliation, which is the second leg of our mandate, should be emphasised more than it has been up to now, and that we should focus more of our work towards that goal. We accept that the TRC won’t deliver reconciliation. At best we can put this on the national agenda. We also need to focus more on preparation in order to balance the situation which has arisen through the granting of amnesty to perpetrators of gross human rights violations. A difficulty has developed in black communities in particular, who see that amnesty is granted to perpetrators for murder, for all sorts of gross abuses. They walk free. They are released from prison. But the victims of those crimes don’t see anything happening. They don’t see any change in their circumsances. They form the view that this process is more geared towards perpetrators. It pays off as far as perpetrators are concerned, but there is nothing concrete, nothing tangible insofar as victims are concerned. We have taken note of that. And for that reason we need to have a greater focus on reparations and rehabilitation.

Denzil Potgieter is the commissioner in charge of media matters at the TRC.

Articles excerpted from presentations to the Media, Truth and Reconciliation workshop in Cape Town, February 1997.
Small stories are a big issue

NE HAS TO STRIVE to be unbiased, objective, and furthermore psychologically and emotionally strong, to cover the news of the past and the present events, which are very traumatic in content and emotion. The task of verifying facts is extremely difficult in a loaded, emotional climate such as that of the TRC hearings. Truth is the essential essence of reconciliation. But truth is not easy to come by, nor is it painless to reveal.

Ninety-nine percent of the victims who are interviewed are black, and ninety-five percent of the perpetrators are white. So to balance the two, it’s very difficult. These facts make the talk of reconciliation extremely difficult for the majority in South Africa. In many instances, people find it difficult enough to forgive their own brothers and sisters for turning against each other. But at the end of the day, for the sake of progress in the country, they have to. For example, you have Joe Mamasela, who turned against his own people, and today he wants the very same community to forgive him. How is he going to get forgiveness? Only by telling the truth.

However, do we as journalists communicate what Mamasela is saying to the people? Are we creating a climate for people to forgive Mamasela? Is Mamasela actually telling the truth? We have to verify facts.

The limelight and the public focus is on events that are already well known — like Boipatong. But we tend to forget little incidents, which are very important — the other hidden stories of thousands of people, whose lives were also affected.

The limelight and the public focus for covering the Truth and Reconciliation Commission is on events that are already well known — like Boipatong, the Pelco Three, the Cradock Four, Steve Biko. But we tend to forget little incidents, which are very important — the other hidden stories of thousands of people, whose lives were also affected. We as journalists have a responsibility to cover these stories too.

If I may make an example — Dirk Coetzee went to the amnesty committee and spoke about a Lesotho incident, where they killed a diamond dealer. I did an interview with Mamasela to verify the story, and I got totally different facts from him. It was broadcast. After five days, an organisation called Lesotho Political Victims called me to say thank you. For years and years they had been looking for the guy Coetzee had spoken about. I referred them to the Truth Commission. The same organisation disclosed that person’s name. And for the family, it was a relief. They called me six days later to say thanks. “At least now there is a light; we can actually know where to look for our own member of the family.”

These are stories we sometimes ignore and tend to look for the big stories. Bringing the uncovered story of the faceless, unknown people on the street, is essential to the process of truth and reconciliation. And not only looking at the black society — also looking at the white communities. They too were affected, and there are these little stories that we overlook.

SOPHIE MOKOENA of Lesedi Radio recounts the issues raised by interviewing Joe Mamasela and Dirk Coetzee, killers of human rights lawyer Griffiths Mxenge.

Radio & reconciliation

Therapy on air

invited Joe Mamasela onto my current affairs programme for an interview and for listeners to ask him questions.

After about 20 minutes of speaking to him and listeners asking him questions, there was a dramatic change. People became willing to forgive him when he actually answered their questions correctly. Then I called Mxokazi Mxenge, Griffiths Mxenge’s brother, to speak to Joe Mamasela. It was live. The first thing that he said was, “Sorry Sophie, I have made a mistake to agree to take part in your programme. I don’t want to speak to Mamasela.” Mamasela responded, saying: “I want to talk to you. I want to hear your voice”. Then I said to Mxokazi, “Okay, are you prepared to speak to Mamasela?”. He said yes, and went on to describe Mamasela as a dog. Mamasela responded with a political approach and slowly the whole conversation started to change. Finally, Mxokazi thanked Mamasela for revealing what happened, and said he would like to meet him.

Some people criticise me, saying that I was forcing reconciliation because I had not told Mamasela that I was going to call Mxenge. But Mamasela kept on calling me afterwards because he wanted me to facilitate a process where he could respond to people who wanted to ask him questions. One person who phoned during the programme, poured abuse on him. He replied, “You know what? When you keep on insulting, calling me by names, it is a healing to me.”

It was an hour and 30 minutes programme, and since then I tell myself, yes, it is so easy, people can really forgive and reconcile. But it depends on how the process is facilitated.

Special reports

ADIO had Special Reports in 11 languages. They were so good that people were really cross when they were stopped, as this was where black people heard the stories from two different worlds, in their own language. Learned people knew about Dirk Coetzee and his revelations. But to ordinary people it was the first time. I had a special interview with him. I had a special interview with Mamasela. So now people are really able to understand what happened in the past. But we don’t have the Special Reports anymore. In other words, the majority is now disadvantaged. People don’t know what is happening with the TRC. You can’t use one or two minute pieces in current affairs and make people understand. But when you had a TRC special report, you would speak to Dirk Coetzee, you would speak to Mamasela, giving them 10 minutes. After 30 minutes, listeners really got the essence of the whole activity or event.

Learned people knew about Dirk Coetzee and his revelations. But to ordinary people it was the first time.

Articles excerpted from presentations to the Media, Truth and Reconciliation workshop in Cape Town, February 1997.
Human Rights

and wrongs

JOHN VAN ZYL rates the performance of the press in covering the Commission.

NEVER before in South Africa, not even during the extended Treason Trial, have the media been forced to deal so directly with the question of reporting the violation of human rights. It has required a new mindset — a shift from reporting "criminal activities" by the Nationalist government, or the breaking of specific laws inscribed in the judicial code in South Africa — to a consideration of the nature of human rights.

I doubt whether the phrase "gross violation of human rights" existed in the South African media vocabulary before the TRC first started using it in 1995. Obviously, South Africa’s exclusion from the United Nations and its deliberations were partly to blame for this. There was clear evidence at the March 1996 "Reporting the TRC" conference organised by the Applied Broadcasting Centre in Johannesburg that few of the practising journalists or editors were familiar with the scope of the International Bill of Human Rights. Certainly very few could quote the various key Declarations by the United Nations and its instruments, such as the 1966 Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination, or the 1978 UNESCO Declaration on the Contribution of Mass Media to Strengthening Peace.

However, it would appear that many editors and journalists responded positively to the discussions about the relationship between media and human rights at the conference, as well as the explorations of the nature of various other truth commissions in Bosnia, East Germany and Chile.

For example, The Star newspaper from the beginning of 1997 has devoted its op-ed page every Monday to a discussion of issues raised by TRC sessions during the week. It employs two specialist journalists that report on this subject. Business Day has carried perspicuous reports on the more controversial aspects of the work of the TRC. Animal Krogh and Pippa Green reported sensitively on the human face of testimony heard at the sessions until the SABC cut the budget assigned to AM Live which has resulted in far fewer reports.

SABC television, on the other hand, from the end of 1996, created a Special Report slot every Sunday evening in which journalist Max du Preez analysed the previous week’s hearings. By juxtaposing television news clips from the apartheid years (with its lies and concealments), with the truth being revealed during amnesty applications by police generals and military operatives, he has managed to contextualise the events. His journalistic contribution is by far the most effective in underwriting the aims of the TRC to publicise the history of the gross violations of human rights in South Africa.

One of the greatest problems facing journalists is the harrowing stories of the victims which contribute to the elaborate writing and rewriting of the history of struggle and repression. Added to this is the attempt to put a value, an empathetic dimension, on almost unimaginable suffering, pain and loss. Not only have these stories to be reported responsibly by journalists, but there is an equally great responsibility on editors as well as television and radio news managers to educate the public on the meaning of these stories.

“Objectivity” has become neither possible nor desirable since attempts at objectivity stifled debate and lead to silence. Arguably it is only journalism that is aware of a human rights perspective and has a knowledge of the interdependence of human rights and the media that can stimulate debate and discussion.

There are a number of specific instances where journalists have to be aware of their human rights perspectives:

- When journalists hear a victim’s story of humiliation and degradation they report it in one of two ways: in a hard-nosed, verbatim way that perpetuates the condition of the victim, or in a way that reaffirms the victim’s humanity. That turns individuals from victims into survivors.

- Journalists have to decide how to deal with the statements (“confessions”) would be too kind a term) by criminal perpetrators like Eugene de Kock and his assistant Joe Mamasela who revealed some 80 or 70 murders. How to report the horror of what they did without invoking the Law of Diminishing Returns? Are 70 murders 70 times worse than one murder in the telling? How to reveal the brutality of the agents of apartheid without turning them into victims in their own turn? How to turn back attention to the survivors from the fascinated horror these perpetrators evoke?

- How do journalists deal with questions of individual responsibility for acts of brutality? What could be the status of the trigger-pullers: the assassins of high profile anti-apartheid activists like Matthew Goniwe, David Webster and Fabian Ribiero? The narrative of journalism has to assign “characters” to individuals (what Media Studies academic John Hartley refers to as “uni-accentuality” or unambiguity). Are they individual bad apples, the usual run of gangsters that can be found in any society? Are they knee-jerk ideologies, blind believers fully responsible for their deeds? Or are they the ignorant footsoldiers, the armies of the night, last in the line of command, simply obeying the orders coming from the top where politicians shelter behind the mask of “plausible deniability”?

- Finally, there is the question of the moral fatigue that will inevitably set in towards the end of the life of the TRC. The last victims giving testimony at the end of two years must be accorded the same respect as the first. As yet, this is not happening, the fresh revelations of cabinet culpability, murder, cross-border raids and cover-ups is keeping the news on the front pages and in the television headlines.

Prof John van Zyl teaches at the Applied Broadcast Centre, Wits University. A noted television critic, he was once banned from SABC premises for his condemnation of news manipulation within the corporation.

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To understand the Truth Commission is to take responsibility for one’s journalism, says Mandla Langa.

The writing was always on the wall, but where were the reporters?

On a visit to Michigan in August 1979, I took a Greyhound bus from Ann Arbor to East Lansing via Jackson. Inside the bus, I was struck by the tropism to the back seats by African American passengers. Those who seemed white — ‘seemed’ because I’d left my Race-o-Meter in sunny South Africa — would enter from the back and stride purposefully and confidently to the front. This gravitational pull to opposite poles left a gap as menacing as a demilitarised zone. Up ahead, seeming to emerge out of wheat fields and orchards, loomed a brownstone structure which later turned out to be Jackson’s main penitentiary.

The driver announced on the intercom, “Jackson, East Wing!” With the announcement of each cardinal point, the bus would stop before imposing gates and the black passengers would file out. I struck up a conversation with a middle-aged woman who told me that her son was serving a long sentence for a murder he hadn’t committed. Since I was a black man from South Africa, she presumed that I knew how she felt; before alighting to enter the gates of the South Wing, she wished me luck. Alone, I looked at the woman’s fellow Americans ensconced in the seats of the mighty, and it occurred to me that they hadn’t actually seen the massive prison fronted by barbed wire above which stood armed guards in observation posts with guns at the ready. When we hit East Lansing, the driver drawled: “East Lansing, keep your left hand on your wallet and your right hand on your pistol.” There was a titter of nervous, self-conscious laughter up in the front.

The blacks shuffled out in a stony, unmoved silence. Recently, a journalist friend of mine who once worked for the Rand Daily Mail spoke of the way print journalists were seduced into thinking that they were major players when South Africa still had an all-white parliament. During the debates, they would sit in the gallery and spin words about the no-bullshit debating style of, say, B.J. Vorster as opposed to the cunning arguments — which means the ability to vex Vorster — offered by a member of the opposition. In those years whatever reportage which could be termed remotely anti-apartheid revolved around lampooning the excesses of apartheid, especially the Pass Laws. That, too, was mostly with regard to what extent these odious pieces of legislation impinged on or frustrated white people’s pursuit of life and happiness. There is no record, at least not one that I have come across, that the journalists ever seriously questioned what they were doing, as white people in a forum that was decided to air white grievances in a country that was remarkably black. In a word, no-one was hit by a blinding, epiphanic light of revelation or suffered — even momentarily — an existential crisis. If, perhaps, any one...
"...black people who weren’t pale imitations of their masters always took what the press said or didn’t say about them with a liberal pinch of salt. And they passed this knowledge onto their children. The skeptical cannot be lied to."

journalist fainted at this omission, that could have well been interpreted by his mates as a nervous tic. Everything was normal. If the papers had simply ignored the suffering of black people and continued on their weaving of a magical white Utopia — and not started their own campaign against black political activism — most of us would simply have shrugged our shoulders and dismissed their past lofty editorials as a further testimony to their irrelevance, something we should have expected anyway. With a few exceptions, many journalists did not howl out in rage when their editors played down the numbers of casualties in police attacks.

It took a collaboration of Joseph Lelyveld of the New York Times and photographer James Spurlock to expose the injustices that South Africa had visited on her darker children. It was also people like Anthony Sampson, who trained and nurtured journalists and writers under Drum magazine, for white people to start having a glimpse into what was being done on their behalf. The photo-journalistic exposés by Peter Magubane and Henry Nxumalo in Drum, Post and The World, among a few others, and courageous publications, of what went on in prison plantations, hostels and all such areas outside the orbit of white consciousness, should have been the starting point for white newspapers. Here, at least, journalists would have been given a chance to report and reflect the nature of the society in which they lived and take responsibility for the accuracy and quality of their daily messages.

The heightening of political temperature and the acceleration of the struggles in the 1980s spawned the alternative media. To me, the excuse that the mainstream media could not do more than what it was definitely not doing — because of the Byantine legislation against reporting on security matters — is blasted to smithereens by the commitment of the alternative media. While papers like The Star and the Sunday Times gestated over the SAPD’s cross-border raids, the alternative media strove to put the nature of the apartheid beast into perspective. The question which should be asked is, how was it that those white journalists who spearheaded the alternative press also came from the same society of those in the mainstream? If it wasn’t a question of colour, we can surmise it was certainly a question of balls. Co-writers journalists in the mainstream press, it must be admitted, have courage, witness the accounts on rhinoceros, wild-blood, Soweto 1976, the uncovering of police culpability in the slaughter of what is now known as the Gugulethu Seven, and so on. Many brave white journalists were incarcerated in prison, some lost their lives, others went into exile. But, with those few exceptions, what was lacking was reportage which suggested that black people should be taken more seriously, that their lives mattered also. Some detractors of this contention point out to the media’s role in the uncovering of Miederberg, but to me this was still functioning within a white collar and revealed a level of venality that was insupportable only because it had overshadowed the mark of acceptable badmouthing.

Right now, amid the clamour of mea culpa and the suggestion of a need for a press truth commission, many facts are being revealed of the media’s collusion with the apartheid security apparatus in the misinformation of the main- white readers. I say “mainly” because black people who weren’t pale imitations of their masters always took what the press said or didn’t say about them with a liberal pinch of salt. And they passed this knowledge onto their children. The skeptical cannot be lied to. It is also true that white South Africans, for a very long time — and despite their famed admiration for their collective intellect — were left in the dark. They only knew what they were supposed to know and they didn’t know that they didn’t know. Had they known, I think, they would have taken responsibility for what was being done, and the pace with which South Africa came to its senses would have been hastened. Which means that many more lives would have been saved.

The saving of lives, the acknowledgment and possible reclamation of those lost, and the rehabilitation of the blaspheemed, form part of the TRC’s central thesis. Reporting on the TRC Commission requires inner reserves on the part of journalists, reserves that might have not been called up before. This, because all of us agree that, even though we might have guessed that the testimonies would be horrific, the magnitude of what has been done can easily lead witnesses to the very gates of a madhouse. When the hearings started, media attention was at its premium, the testimonies made headlines and came into our living rooms, in living colour. The reports were vivid, arriving as closely as possible to detail what had existed. They tried to unpack the meaning of the silences and absences and communicate to us, the new voyeurs, the gravity of it all. In doing that, they were providing a narrative that would lead us out of a Kafkaesque nightmare. But journalists can easily be forgiven into horror. That distance, by the way, is how they have managed to remain sane in a mad world. One more dead body, one more woman collapsing on being overcome by the burden of memory, become routine. And — more importantly — there is a certain South African familiarity and attendant absence of indignation — with a dead body. Especially if it is a black body and we are somehow intimate with the circumstances of its journey from life to death. Unless there is a new wrinkle added to the death, or the body belongs, in that rare eventuality, to a white person, the reports are banal and without accompanying words of compassion and understanding. This detachment comes, more-so, from a lack of real understanding of the issues under plunging the TRC.

The work of the TRC has implications of sustaining a memory of what has happened in this country, with an aim of providing an object lesson so that South Africans never again regress to their retrograde past. For journalists to fully understand the implications of the TRC presupposes an ability on their part to accept the TRC on its own terms. This opens up the possibility of examining their own culpability, their own silence when they could have spoken, when they had the requisite weapons to analyse and give society a glimmer of light. To understand is to take responsibility, and it is my contention that this can be achieved through an arduous self-appraisal and criticism. It is only now that we know that the media knew about Van Reinius
It is a risky run-around to get the truth, says STEPHEN LAUFER.

One of us managed after the press conference, off the record, to get the initials of this person — WB, Right? Dr WB. Okay. So take Dr WB and find out who he is, and why, having been arrested on charges of dealing in drugs, he might be of interest to the Truth Commission. What then happens is that you get onto this strange carousel. You phone some defence lawyers who know, you phone some prosecutors who know, who refuse to talk, but sort of indicate that WB might be this person or that person.

You then phone your political editor, who goes into the library and comes back and says we have got two Walter Bassons in the library. One of them is involved in the Anton Lubowski assassination story and the other one is involved in chemical weapons. Who is it? So you get back on the carousel. And you are into this sort of poker game, where you phone all the people again that you have already phoned once, and you sort of show them you have another card in the hand — and try and get them to then confirm what you are looking at your target.

The net result is that radio, SAPA and most of the newspapers had the story. But none of us knows whether it is true, and none of us knows whether we have the right Basson, and even though we think we have the right Basson, who is the chemical weapons one, and not the Lubowski one, we are not actually sure whether the Truth Commission is interested in him because of chemical weapons or because he might be a cardiologist.

And if he is a cardiologist and has been in the Seventh Medical Battalion, has he been involved in individual poisoning cases, for example? The commissioner who let the cat out of the bag has done what he wanted to do. He has publicised the case. He has shown that the Truth Commission is on the ball. He has put this person under pressure. Right? And we are the ones who have taken all the risks.

There is going to be no come-back for the Commissioner if Jan D'Oliveira, the Transvaal Attorney General, feels that a case that he was preparing against this guy has been bunged up — no, the media are going to be blamed for it.

And if we get the wrong Basson, of course we are in for the high jump. We are going to be sued and all the rest of it. I think that the Truth Commission is being irresponsible in its media policy in this kind of situation. It is not the first situation of this kind that we have faced. Everybody in the Truth Commission knows who the person is and knows why the Commission is interested in this person, and they either want to keep it quiet, or they want it out. They must make up their minds. And even if they want it out, and they don't want to be disputed, there are many well tried and well-worn paths between journalists and others, concerning background information, where journalists know that this information is solid and therefore is unable, rather than doing this sort of high tightening act.

Gillian Slovo, author.

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The award is administered by the Department of Journalism and Media Studies, Rhodes University.
THE WORD "victim" has its etymological root in early antiquity. It originally meant a beast selected for sacrifice, and is intimately tied up with the concept of a scapegoat. The sacrifice of the victim, or the exclusion of the scapegoat, would symbolically make the rest of the community safe from harm. When the victim was a person, it had, with few exceptions, to be someone young and very pure, or someone very old or a stranger. The ideal victim was someone who did not have deep roots in the community.

The origin of the word perpetrator — no surprise — has a far more positive connotation to it than a victim. So the word perpetrator comes from the word perpret, which means to accomplish, to achieve, to bring about, to effect. Its origin appears to lie with an action carried out in the Latin origin, the word perpret and the word perpetrator could be either good or bad. And it is only much later that the English start using the word in the criminal sense, such as to perpetrate a crime, the perpetrator of a murder.

When the whole process started, we had to create a language for it. We worked out what is truth and reconciliation in Xhosa, what sort of accent. We could not find the word in Afrikaans for perpetrator. People talk about “perpe” — I mean they have a shortened version of it. There wasn’t an exact word in Afrikaans. “Outtredes” is not necessarily the same as “perpetrator”. We use in Afrikaans, “in skande van mense regte”.

Victim: Death, lies, cover-up
Perpetrator: brazen, devious, secret

At UmAfrika, we experienced problems translating terms into Zulu, so we decided that we had to make our own. For names like hit squads, which came in the ‘80s, we came up with the term umfundo, to twist someone’s neck. For white men we came up with the word umuntu-lukhanti, the stiff-necked. Third Force is inga endobose, a hairy arm. Ambush is laliska umnyeza, which means lying down waiting to do an evil act. We said let us come with the words, and introduce them to our readers. S Khumalo Moya, UmAfrika

Victim: someone who has suffered, needs counselling and support
Perpetrator: someone who has caused suffering, who is asking for forgiveness and sometimes shows remorse

NEW forms of journalism need to look at the very simplest cultural context of the majority: the people who make up the victims of what has happened in this country. And if we address concepts and values, they should be quite simple. For instance, one of the cultural bases of reconciliation, to resolve conflict, is called akhe — a grass blade for the palm wine. If you milk this grass blade, you get the palm wine. Traditionally, when two people had a problem, one would sit opposite the other. They hold the blade from the centre, and they pull it — milking. And as they milk, they confess to each other. You did this to me — you did that. People are there to watch that they do not engage in a physical fight. It is a dual until this blade is dry, and it must coincide with the dryness of the confessions from the heart. The symbolism of the blade gives you the equality. We are level as human beings. Afterwards there is a celebration that so-and-so opened up to and so-and-so. The whole community will applaud that occasion. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission should be explained around such cultural symbols. Khuba Mbuzo, SABC

Victim: tears, women and helpless
Perpetrator: fat, white, male

I have a profound problem in distinguishing the terms “victim” and “perpetrator” because to me every word I write down actually counts for both of them. For example, I recall an instance in which the fat white male was the victim, as his child had been blown up. The only distinction to me is in the sound of the two types of hearings, and that is the legal sound that keeps on obscuring the tales of the perpetrators. That you don’t find with the victims.

Sophie Mboowa, SABC Radio

I often do coverage for the Sotho group which is Sosotho, South Sotho, Tsuana and Pedi. It is very difficult for African languages to come up with the correct words or concepts, because our vocabulary is very limited. Most of the time we tend to put a phrase rather than a word itself. We interpret — like when we talk about a victim, we would say someone who has been affected. You tend to interpret the word rather than come up with the same word or a synonym. It is very difficult. Sophie Mboowa, SABC Radio

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I have a profound problem in distinguishing the terms “victim” and “perpetrator” because to me every word I write down actually counts for both of them. For example, I recall an instance in which the fat white male was the victim, as his child had been blown up. The only distinction to me is in the sound of the two types of hearings, and that is the legal sound that keeps on obscuring the tales of the perpetrators. That you don’t find with the victims.
and the existence of the Third Force. It is now that we know that the media knew of the bodies now being exhumed in KwaZulu Natal! If the media didn’t know, then they have no business pretending to be the fourth estate, which is supposed to have its nose on the ground. What remains unrevealed remains so mainly because its time to come to light has not come, not because it is unknown. To know without the possibility to disclose creates a disjuncture between the profession or trade and basic humanity. Antje Vogt has written eloquently about this, and the possible schizophrenia which affects journalists reporting on the process of the Truth Commission. Add to this the burden of prejudice and the language which conveys what is happening and you are left with a bewildering possibility of conclusions. One of them is that journalism is still overly subscribed by people who, by accident of birth and the lying history of this country, cannot be beyond a language which has to be acceptable to the most powerful sectors of this society. To that end, the truth itself is packaged, sanitised and made palatable if only to sell newspapers and maintain the continued interest of advertisers. Much more importantly, the journalists have to acknowledge the terror which induced cowardice and the vast silences which followed. To complicate their predicament, they, more than anyone knew that the balance of power would one day shift in favour of the wretched of this country. The writing has always been on the wall, it just needed readers. They must have known that nowhere in the world has oppression been left unchallenged. But this knowledge would have meant taking sides with the oppressed if only by telling it like it is. Vorster, Botha and de Klerk, through their collective moral failure, might not have been able to assess or imagine the prize paid by their victims, or that it is fatal to create too many victims or even have the vision that the will of the victim is an inchoate as a river. The journalists did.

On the bus to East Lansing, the birthplace of Malcolm X, there might have been some white people whose relatives were also in Jackson. The black woman’s son might have been guilty of the crime which had landed him there. What, perhaps, could have leavened the gloomy atmosphere in that moving vessel, was a communion among fellow Americans. ‘Thou, at least, are bound by the same language, or variations thereof. To that effect, they might have been able to interrogate that intolerable excess of terror which articulates itself as hate.

In South Africa, a new dawn is breaking, every day. Jouna-
Former Sowetan editor
JOE LATAKGOMO tells of the treatment of black journalists.

MUCH of the debate has been muddied by people talking about whether the companies employed black journalists full time, whether they had separate toilets, whether they were promoted or weren't promoted. We must first of all accept that in the political situation of the time, most companies were guilty of that kind of discrimination against black people. So it is not as if journalists were selected for that kind of abuse.

I was the first black journalist to get onto the Argus cadet course. I had been a journalist for seven years before I got onto the programme and the reason I actually persisted was that I wanted to make the point that I could cope with it. The truth of the matter is that black journalists were never given the kind of training they should have had. They were considered to be not up to scratch for the cadet course, but at the same time no alternative programmes were arranged.

I think it was part of the policy of the company at the time that the two black newspapers in the company had what was called editorial directors. Henge had an editorial director in Arthur Konikramer and The World had Charles Still. It was clear that the black editors did not have the kind of control over the content of the publications that they should have had. We had to see clear of the contentious things, steer clear of political things. Black executives were in fact toothless on The World. During the time I was editor, if I had to write a leader, it had to go to Charles Still. And if he didn't like it, it didn't go in. So whose voice was the newspaper actually representing? It seemed to me a conscious policy to keep the paper out of trouble. Throughout that period, they had no confidence in their black editors.

Things were beginning to move and I was not able to reflect it in the paper. Any time we needed to do that, there were these tensions between me and Charlie Still. After The World closed, he was moved to the Daily News and I went to make a courtesy call. He said: "Listen my boy," (that is how he used to speak) "Listen my boy, I'll tell you something. I warned the company that unless we were careful, this newspaper would be closed down." And he pulled out a piece of paper and said: "Here. I actually wrote this memo..." And he said he had warned the company that black editors were going to get the paper closed down. I said to him: "What was it that made you uncomfortable?" He said: "Listen, leave politics alone."

As far as he was concerned, if he had been there, The World would not have suffered that fate.

A lot of people were turned into activists by their experience of the horrors of 1976. A lot of them haven't quite recovered from that experience. I was on the news desk and often they would call and they would be crying and saying: "I've just counted X number of bodies." During that period when they were reporting X number of people killed, the police version would invariably have a far lower number. We were seen as stirring up conflict, because I asked the journalists to take photographs of as many bodies as they could, because we needed to have the evidence. Then some police officer accused us of taking people who were alive and making them lie down just so we could take the photographs. It was a sad situation. We didn't get the backing even of our sister publication The Star. It often ran a lead story to say that perhaps 10 people died in Soweto riots and somewhere in the story they would say: "However the black newspaper, The World, puts the figure at 40." It is almost as if they would rather believe the police version than our version. Eventually, we were vilified.

I think perhaps we didn't probe deeply enough to find explanations for a whole number of activities, whether it was attacks on trains or petrol bomb attacks on activists' homes. Virtually every time there were attacks, people would tell us about a car that looked like a police car. Section 27b of the Police Act made it very difficult for us to link those attacks to the police. The onus was on us to prove it. Sometimes we got telephone calls, people telling us what was happening. But we knew our telephones were being bugged. If we got a call like that and published it, it could be somebody sitting in security headquarters giving the impression he was from Transvaal or Lusaka, giving you disinformation and you would end up publishing what would eventually be untrue information. They would prove that you published false information and therefore discredit you forever. So we were very careful. I don't know the number of times that while you were talking to a contact, somebody would interrupt and in a very famous kind of way would say: "Julie praat maar, kak, man."

The mainstream papers accepted too easily the police version and it always left publications like The World and the Sowetan out on a limb, because they looked the odd man out, and therefore there must be something wrong with their reporters. And in addition to that, everyone spoke about the incompetence of black reporters and their advocacy. Even then what was happening was the black guys would get the stories and feed in to some white journalist who would write the story.

Black journalists suffered all ways. Poor training on the one side, pressures from the community on the other side, pressures from the police on the third front, so it wasn't as if they weren't trying to tell the story.
Daily News editor
DENNIS PATHER recalls
having to run the gauntlet of racial prejudice.

I was called in for an interview and told I was the best candidate available, but I had to come back in a couple of days. They needed to check on my background. When I came back, they said there were given to believe that I was a political hothead, that I had been in trouble with the special branch, that I had associated with people like Steve Biko and Strini Moodley and Saths Cooper, something I thought would have been of benefit to my application. I asked whether they thought I was going to get elaborative material into the columns surreptitiously. I was told it was a large company and they couldn't afford to take chances and that I should wait for my letter of acceptance. Up to today the letter has not come.

Two years later, I applied and was asked the same question by the same person. My answer was the same as two years earlier. This time they had consulted the special branch. The crime reporter went to the news editor and said: "Do you want to know about that guy's background. I'll find out." It turned out he went to the special branch.

The first day I joined, I got hungry and went to the canteen. They told me I couldn't be served. I showed the guy my staff card and he said: "Sorry these are the regulations." He pointed me to another room that was darker and had a shelf and pigeonhole through which they served blacks after they had exhausted the white queue. I bought my meal and sat down at one of the tables and then got rude insults from staff members from the works department. I had a choice of avoiding this and taking my meal in a toilet or just insisting on my rights.

I carried on eating at these tables. It was lonely at the beginning, but a few years later there were others who also used the canteen facilities and stood up to these guys who passed racial insults. The company then divided the canteen into two with the strategic placing of pet plants. One was whites only and the other was international, which was totally unacceptable. We sat where we liked and a number of whites joined us in defying the regulations. Those were the times. We were living at a time when a lot of white people refused to associate with black people and were victims of racial stereotypes.

In terms of socialising in the newsroom, our colleagues were very slow. Whenever there was a birthday or some reason for celebration, all of them on a Friday afternoon trooped off to the Osborne Hotel and then regaled us with stories on Monday morning. Then one day the penny dropped. One of the journalists asked me: "You weren't there. What happened to you?" I said: "I'm not allowed into the Osborne Hotel." It had not crossed their minds.

For a black person to be noticed, you had to outshine any white man. I was nominated to take over as political reporter. It took the editor a long time to decide on my appointment. Whether a black political reporter would be able to work effectively with white politicians, and whether white politicians would feel comfortable, were political aspects the editor had to put his mind to. I take my hat off to him that he eventually did agree to it, because for the first time a newspaper in Natal had decided to take this step.

In the beginning it was difficult. Some of the politicians felt uncomfortable. They trusted a white person more easily than a black person. What was to my advantage was that, whereas a white political reporter would have leanings to one party or another, as a black person I had no sympathy for any of these parties. So perhaps I was more impartial than the others.

I remember saying to my white colleagues on the Daily News that I had once lied under oath, and I did not think it was wrong. They were aghast. I said if you were in my shoes you would have done the same. The police had called me into the police station and said that a person who had been banned had come in to see me at the newspaper office. When asked whether my friend had come into the office, I said no. I was prepared to take an oath and say no.

Some whites accused us of being over-sensitive, but they did not go through the same sort of experiences as blacks did. Black journalists were more prone to arrest, house arrest or confiscation of passports or restrictions in travel than most of the white journalists. I would go and attend a meeting and on my way back be waved down off the road, have all the things confiscated from my car, my notes, whatever I had picked up from the meeting. That happened at least half a dozen times.

I was then secretary of Mwaas (Media Workers' Association of South Africa) in Natal, and on more than one occasion I was aroused in the early hours of the morning and the house was searched. The police had also visited the offices of the Daily News and went through our desks and took whatever they wanted.

At that stage I did not even expect anybody on the newspaper to take up the cudgels on my behalf. There would have been an editorial expressing criticism of bans on organisations and so on, but not down to the behaviour of policemen searching your homes.

While some editors at that stage did a sterling job in opposing apartheid, others believed that editorialists criticising that obnoxious system would suffice. I believe there was more for them to do: they should have tested the government to its limits. The aim of the editors was to "stay alive". But I think some of them were deliberately soft. Black people invariably took a stronger line because they were the victims every day of their lives.

Excerpts from Independent Newspapers' submission to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.
Now journalists can be journalists

ZUBEIDA JAFFER has put the painful past behind her. But acknowledging where we’ve come from as journalists is key to building the honour of the profession, she said in her 1997 World Press Freedom Day lecture at Rhodes University.

On the morning of 7 August 1986 — a year ago — I walked alongside a group of women into the main hall at the University of the Western Cape to face the Truth Commission. Arrangements had been made for a special hearing of women to coincide with National Women’s Day on August 9. I was to be the second woman to testify. The first that morning was Agnes Gounden, a woman I had met 16 years ago, Agnes Gounden’s sister, Avril du Bruin, was shot and killed in June 1980 when the Cape Times was gripped in protest. In the months preceding her death — my first months as a reporter at the Cape Times — Cape Town was engulfed in schools boycotts, bus boycotts, a huge meat strike and other forms of civil unrest.

Towards the middle of that year, as protest intensified, scores of people were killed and injured. After news of the shootings filtered through into our newsroom, police refused to supply the Cape Times with a casualty list.

The entire report at the Cape Times could not confirm numbers of the victims nor their names. The police said they had shot gangsters who had looted shops. The chief of the counter-insurgency unit, Major-General V. Verster said: “If you want the names of the dead, you must get them from the families of the dead. We are not going to release them.”

About a week after the shootings, the editor, Tony Heard, called me into his office. He needed somebody who could do an investigation into who the victims were and how they had died. “We will give you the time you need and whatever resources, but we want you to find these people,” he said.

I agreed to do it. I was too young to realise the full import of what I was agreeing to. I was an enthusiastic 22-year-old who came from a loving and protective Cape Muslim family. Little did I know that I was to experience first hand the complete lack of press freedom which I had only learnt about in theory as a student at Rhodes University. Little did I know that I was about to do an investigation that was to change my life. In July, 1980, I drove to Elsies River and Lavender Hill, but most of the work continued on foot. Elsies River was like a maze. I found some of the families in the transit camp where there were no roads, no formal addresses — only an endless sea of shacks. “Over there,” somebody would point out. And through the mud and lush of the untarred pathways, I made my way to the distant dwelling where sometimes I found the family or was sent off in a different direction.

On to the sprawling flats of Clarks Estate, where families were still nursing their grief. A local student, Lynette Maart, served as my guide to the area.

After two weeks, with her help, I had tracked down 20 families. According to hospital reports at least 42 people had died but Tony Heard called a halt to the search. He wanted the story. “I want everything you’ve got so far,” he said.

So I sat on the edge of my bed, next to my desk on which perched my small brown portable typewriter and the horror of the two weeks flowed onto the pages. It was during that time that I had met Agnes Gounden and her mother Mrs du Bruin in a small house in Sibaya, Bishop Lavis. Agnes had told me how she had seen her 25-year-old sister, Avril du Bruin, a bank clerk, slump to the ground after a police sniper bullet.

Agnes and her mother, both distraught, led into their living room a three-year-old boy, Ronald. The mother added, “Over the next five years, he had lost a father who had died naturally and then a mother ripped away from him unnaturally. When I met Agnes last year, a few days before testifying, I enquired about her mother and then I remembered the child who had been orphaned.

“What happened to Avril’s little boy,” I asked Agnes. “My mother could not cope, so I adopted him,” she said. And then she lowered her voice as her eyes brightened with pride. “He is now a second-year medical student at UCT,” she said.

“Goodness,” I replied, “I have a nephew who is also a second-year medical student. Perhaps Ronald knows him.”

“What is his name?”

“Ronald,” I said.

“Ronald is one of Ronald’s best friends,” said Agnes and we both laughed.

Ronald was in the hall when I testified on August 7, but his friend Ronald had not come to hear Agnes tell how her mother had been killed. “We don’t talk about it at home,” said Agnes. “I did ask him if he wanted to come, but he preferred not to hear what had happened.”

The Cape Times headpage had been screened into the riot deaths across a full page on July 24, 1980. The day after the story was published, an anonymous letter was sent 1,500 students for the families of the victims. A fund was started and about 16 days later, with the help of Shawco, Elsies River, I helped to bring together the families to decide how to distribute the funds.

Three days later, shortly after I returned home from working night shift at the paper, security policeman Spkyor van Wyk and his team arrived to detain me. So continued a journey which had started the day I was called into Tony Heard’s office.

Little did I know that I would be beaten into the walls of the Sanlam Centre in Port Elizabeth. “Lies, lies, lies, all lies,” said the captain as his heavy hands hit my body. I cannot remember his name, but I remember he discussed the story with a Captain Oosthuizen who said the lies had also been carried in the Eastern Province Herald. He took me to the window of the sixth storey and said they would throw me down if I did not confess.

They wanted me to admit that I was a member of the ANC or that I knew one name of somebody in the ANC. I did not know anybody and I most certainly was not a member.

What I had done as a student at Rhodes was to attend lunchtime meetings at the offices of the man who is now head of the Rhodes Journalism department. Guy Berger was my tutor and invited me and a number of other students to read Time Longer Than Rope by Eddie Roux to help us understand South African history. We did not
do this in secret in the dead of the night. We met during lunchtime and I certainly did not consider this to be a clandestine activity. This was eventually to be interpreted as constituting an ANC cell of which I was accused of being part.

I was not a member of the ANC in 1980 but the security police could only believe that I had written what I had because I had been instructed to do so by the ANC.

I was definitely on the way to becoming sympathetic to the organisation and the detention experience pretty much convinced me to become an activist. Listening to those stories of families had disturbed me to the core, and then came the detention. They not only beat me, but drugged me and interrogated me until I was unconscious. For many hours, I lay in a stupor on the floor of an interrogation room. And then, when they did not have a case against me, they detained my father so that he could hand over my student books. After being held as a terrorist for two months, I was charged with possession of three banned books. Many months later, I was to be acquitted.

But my life was never the same again. I could not write the way I wrote before. I could not cry. I could not feel. To cope with the trauma, I had to suppress my feelings and this hampered my work. I realised that I had to step back from the mainstream media so that I would not be limited in the truth that needed to be pursued so that apartheid could be destroyed. In an increasingly polarised country, my writing found expression through community organisations, through the United Democratic Front, through trade union publications, through the famous community newspaper, 

I was to return to mainstream journalism in 1982 after the unbanning of the organisations and the beginnings of greater freedom of the press. Testifying at the Truth Commission represented for me a symbolic break with the trauma of the past — it was part of the process of becoming a whole person again.

After I testified, I bumped into a former colleague at the Cape Times, who said to me he had had no idea that I had had such a rough time in detention. “Why did you not tell me,” he said, “You did not ask,” I replied.

Nobody really asked me what had happened. But, I must use this opportunity to acknowledge that I was very well supported by my editor and the management of the Cape Times. Tony Heard campaigned actively for my release. The journalist organisations, Mwasi and SAJU, called for my release and international support came from across the world. I did not suffer what some of my colleagues at other newspapers suffered — they were not only attacked by the state but isolated by their editors and managers.

I was harrassed further. In the mornings when I got off the train in Cape Town and walked to work, I was followed by security police. In May 1981 when I reported on the anti-Republic Day protests at UWC, my passport was withdrawn without explanation. I can go on and on. I dreamed of a time when I would be free to pursue the career that I had trained for. And now that time has come. We are living at a time when journalists can be journalists.

As South African journalists, we have to put our minds together and restore our profession to a central position of honour. The effort of each one of us together, our varied talents, will move us towards a greater professionalism which all our people are entitled to.

Zubeda Jaffer is Group Parliamentary Editor for Independent Newspapers.
DO YOU SWEAR TO TELL THE TRUTH, THE WHOLE TRUTH, AND NOTHING BUT THE TRUTH?

JAG, WELL, NO, OK — SORRY

DITTO — BUT WE HAVE A BETTER CONTEXT

"Amnesty is mine saith the bishop..."

the darker side of life

VICTIM

PERPETRATORS
COURT
INTERDICT

TRC HEARINGS

CARTOONS BY JONATHAN SHAPIRO & DOV FEDLER

THE EVOLUTION OF THE HUMAN SPECIES
Remembering slain journalists

Peter Prichard of The Freedom Forum interviewed Latisa Mabe, widow of Sam Mabe. Assistant editor of the Sowetan, Mabe was shot dead in 1990.

PRICHARD:

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HE FREEDOM FORUM Journalists’ Memorial is located in Arlington, Virginia, just outside Washington, D.C., overlooking the Potomac River and the monuments of Washington. It is in a park called Freedom Park, in which we have several icons celebrating the spirit of freedom. One of the icons is a bronze casting of a South African ballet box from the 1990 election. We also have a picture of people waiting in line to vote in that election. This is part of a museum complex that we are building. We are building the first museum of news and journalism in the world.

We are the only organization that has tried to gather all the names of all the journalists who have died throughout history in the line of duty. Our Journalists’ Memorial is a work in progress. Each year we will add more names.

It has been inspiring to us to see ordinary people come to the memorial, look at the names and show some interest in them.

There is a lot of interest by foreign visitors. The memorial shows that freedom is not free and that many people have made the ultimate sacrifice to try to report the truth from around the world.

Your husband, Sam, was one of those people, Latisa. Would you tell us about him?

LATISA MABE:

Talking about my husband is very challenging. It is very emotional. Sam Mabe was very dedicated to his work, very loyal. He was a man of integrity. He lived journalism: it was part of his life.

He would risk anything to do his work. There were times when he would go out on his journalism project and he would give me an envelope and he would say, “wife, I am going for a project and if I don’t come back, this envelope will help you with everything.” He started the Sowetan nation building concept. He involved me with that concept. He would ask me how we could help people, motivate people. There were so many people who were doing good things in Soweto and they were not recognised. I helped him a lot with that.

Sam was also involved with politics. It was a very strenuous thing for him to do, being a journalist and a politician at the same time. I don’t know where he got the strength from. He used to do all of those things and take care of the family as well. He died when things were shaping up for this country. It was not long after Mandela was released that he died. He had big dreams and he would still do great things as a journalist.

PRICHARD:

You told me (earlier) that you were somewhat bitter because there was not much remembrance of Sam after he died.

MABE:

That’s true. I was very angry. Overnight, everything about this great man was forgotten. Sam spent most of his time with journalists. I want to thank The Freedom Forum for this moment. I feel it is the moment I have been waiting for for six years. Every day, I go to my bedroom and cry and I ask myself a question. “What happened to Sam’s colleagues?” You know, up to this day, I have never ever received a phone call from anybody saying, “Latisa, how are you?” How are the boys? How are you coping?” It was very hard. I was bitter about anything that had to do with journalism. There was no way I would encourage any of my sons to be journalists, because after Sam’s death his memory was lost.

PRICHARD:

And you never really discovered what happened?

MABE:

I don’t know who took Sam or why.
Media wrestles with the legacy of a divided society

Bernard Kalb of CNN's Reliable Sources, Peter Sullivan (The Star) and S'bu Mngadi (then Tribute magazine) talk about racial transformation.

**KALB:** What kind of journalistic journey or human journey have white editors made over the past four or five years to leave that community of journalism that was once inhabited by white journalists and move to what exists in this country?

**SULLIVAN:** I'm not quite sure of how to answer that question. If I look at my own journey from when I started on the Rand Daily Mail, I started as a journalist because I wanted to fight apartheid. That's what I spent my life doing. It seemed to me the best way to do it. I became a political journalist and I spent all the time trying to report those evils of what was going on.

One of the toughest decisions to take was to say early in December (1993) that the elections would work in 1994. The next four months were very traumatic as The Star held a line that said these elections are going to work. They are necessary for the country, they are the only thing that we can do. Everybody accused us of sunshine journalism. Well, the resultant mistake was a vindication of what we did then.

If you step off the aeroplane at Johannesburg International and you look at the newspaper, it does not reflect what's going on in society. That's what we're grappling with. The problem, of course, was that apartheid was remarkably effective in separating people and making whites wealthy and blacks poor. So you have the wealthy north of Johannesburg, which has a great deal of income and which the advertisers really like, and you have the west or the south, which has a lot of poor black people. Those interests do not always coincide. How do you decide what to lead the back page of the paper with, Ernie Els winning the golf, which the north of Johannesburg is quite interested in, or Bafana Bafana winning the soccer a day earlier, which is an old story, but which the majority of our readers are interested in? Those are the kinds of pagination issues that come in.

**MNGADI:** I would agree with that. But I will go along and say that successive apartheid governments or regimes in this country basically centralised apartheid, but the media industry perfected apartheid. It is the media that perpetuated the divisions (such) that whites have to enjoy rugby and cricket, blacks enjoy boxing and soccer, and that's it.

The media perpetuated it because the apartheid regimes did not control the media. While bosses controlled the media, the media are in this trouble because of their own making. There may be attitudes that the media did not enjoy what was happening in the past. They enjoyed every minute of it. The challenge now to the media industry — to the bosses, to the editors, to all of us including my organisation, the South African National Editors' Forum — is to reverse that, not to blame it on other people, because we are equally responsible.
IT IS THE TIME FOR ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

JOHN BATTERSBY

HATSOEVER the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s hearings on the media produce in the way of documenting the collaboration between the state apparatus and the media during the apartheid era, the initiative has probably already served its most useful purpose. It has sparked a public debate about the media during the apartheid years in which the media was an active participant. As the institution which attempts to reflect society and purports to be society’s watchdog over government and the expenditure of state funds, it is vital that the media should not only be undergoing their own transformation but should be doing so publicly. Unless the media are seen to be transforming themselves in line with other institutions in the society, they will not have the credibility to play their role as a vehicle of information about the transition to democracy or as society’s watchdog.

The TRC hearings would perform a useful service if they documented the mechanisms used by the state to enlist the print and electronic media in its total strategy against the opponents of an unjust and evil system as well as the way in which various media collaborated in that conspiracy. More specifically, the TRC hearings would perform an invaluable service if they succeeded in extracting submissions from some of those government agents who operated in our newsrooms as informers. As one who once reported to a police colonel (John Horak) as a manager in the old South African Associated Newspapers, I harbour some personal anger on this score. Gordon Winter, perhaps the most infamous of the newsroom spies, gave us a very selective look at how he operated in Inside Boss. Perhaps he could be persuaded to tell us the whole story from his self-imposed exile.

Independent Newspapers made its own attempt, as a company, to acknowledge the shortcomings of the old Argus company during the apartheid years. The voluntary submission by Independent Newspapers’ outgoing chief executive John Featherstone appears to have caused more controversy than it settled. If the subsequent response of former Argus editors is anything to go by. (The initiative has now been taken forward by the creation of a website where former employees and callers can tell their stories about the past. It has also served to foster further debate and introspection about the role of the media during that period.) The reaction of some former Argus editors was understandable because many of them had not been consulted and did not feel part of the process and all made the point that no-one else could apologise on their behalf - least of all a manager - because they were independent of management and solely responsible for the editorial domain. The protests of these editors led to another round of exchanges between editors past and present and members of the public pitched in with their views. The point about all this, as I see it, is that acknowledging the shortcomings of the media - or any other institution for that matter - during the apartheid years is an intensely personal act. You cannot do it on behalf of anyone else. Each one of us has to deal with it in our own way and at a time when we feel compelled from the heart to do so. Whether we were instrumental in upholding the system of apartheid - or at the forefront of trying to break it down - we were defined by the system as oppressors, if we are white, and as the oppressed, if we were black. In that sense, even the most horrible things that were done were done on our behalf if we are white.

The amnesty-for-disclosure formula of the TRC is succeeding spectacularly in flushing out the perpetrators of gross human rights violations during the apartheid era and hence contributing towards the overall objective of documenting what happened during the apartheid years so we can learn from that ghastly aberration and build a better society. But the process has two downsides. By identifying the perpetrators and focusing on those who gave the orders it is easier for ordinary citizens to absolve themselves of all responsibility for the apartheid era. Secondly, the heavy focus on victims of human rights abuses, with little in the way of support or compensation, has made forgiveness far more difficult for them. Hopefully, reparations will go some way towards easing the pain of victims more through the symbolism of acknowledgment than the physical reparation itself. But the feeling behind the apology I made to my fellow journalists at the founding meeting of the South African National Editors Forum (Sanef) in Cape Town last year was that there is no substitute for each individual who lived during the apartheid era acknowledging the enormity of what was done to black South Africans. That is the paradox of collective responsibility: to a lesser or greater degree we bear responsibility for what happened, whether journalists or citizens in other spheres of activity.

But we cannot apologize on any one else’s behalf. We can only acknowledge our own role, however tiny, in a monstrous system. And in that act of acknowledgement lies the essence of healing and the chance of building a better society. Once the TRC ends its hearings, at the end of the year, and delivers its report, in the middle of next year, the collective consciousness of this society will shift dramatically from the past to the future. The quality of the future society we build will be directly dependent on the quality of acknowledgement that takes place over the next year or so. It is a simple act of humility which holds the seed of revolutionary change in the way we see the society around us and the way we relate to each other.

John Battersby is editor of the Sunday Independent.
"We are not just journalists.

Journalists probe their relationship to the public and the profession, in these excerpts from the Media, Truth and Reconciliation workshop in Cape Town in February.

We all have a past. We have all been involved in one thing or another beyond the narrow scope of the profession. We are not journalists like journalists in Britain or Australia or the United States or wherever, where you are a journalist and that is it. You are not just a part-time political activist, a former detainee, a former SADF soldier, or whatever it is you happen to have been in one of your many previous incarnations.

A lot of us juggle these things, and we juggle them particularly intensively with a particularly intense story, which is the Truth Commission. Our job, at one end and the same time, is to question, to reflect the realities of what is going on, to attempt to show that the truth is multi-faceted. Sometimes truth is extremely unpleasant and it becomes particularly unpleasant when the victims have also been perpetrators — or the perpetrators are in some fashion victims.

Nevertheless, you also have to deal with the question: what is your contribution to the new South Africa? It takes some subtlety and effort to suggest that reflecting the complexity is in fact the contribution to building a new South Africa. The fact that we all have backstories means that we also get more subjective in this particular story than we do in many other situations. Stephen Lauffer, Business Day

The media has a role, not simply to follow the statutory guidelines for the TRC, but to question some of the basic premises of the TRC. The assumption, almost a quasi-religious assumption, that truth is automatically going to be followed by reconciliation—that there is going to be a catharsis, might have been worked out in committee or in the minds of the people who framed the TRC. The reality is not that simple at all. Why should people be reconciled to the fact that their children were shot in Alexandra township? We have to realise that the past, that sense of anger, cannot be worked through according to the dictates of a committee. And where the media falls down to some extent, is in questioning the many assumptions, such as “What is this reconciliation for?” Is it even a good thing to reconcile perpetrators and victims at this point? There have been a number of areas where the media has accepted the guidelines for the debate, instead of stopping outside of them. Philip van Niekerk, Mail & Guardian.

Continued on next page.

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We need to know these things. Who were the spies in the newspapers? We need to know were there journalists who still haven't revealed they were ANC operatives? We need to know, for instance, about the Conference of Editors and the deal they had with the defence force and the police. Mike Loewe, EcnA

The Truth Commission is doing a very similar thing to what the Nuremberg trials did. What Nuremberg said to the Germans was, there is a small group of perpetrators and nobody else has to worry about complicity or being beneficiaries. The Truth Commission is doing the same thing for white South Africa; saying a small group were the nasties; the rest of you can sleep well in your beds at night. But there are many in government, the economy and the media who were involved in one fashion or another, down to the very sort of basic level of employing domestic workers at poverty wages. One of the challenges for journalists is how we raise these things, hold them up to the very much larger group of perpetrators, without (a) losing our jobs, (b) alienating the readers, viewers and listeners. Stephen Lauter, Business Day

We covered the story of Anton Fransch — his brother and neighbour came to tell us what happened the night he was killed. In August when the Truth Commission had its hearing at the University of Western Cape, Yazeed Henry, a comrade of Anton Fransch who told the police where Anon was hiding, came forward to tell his story. I tell you that we cried with the family of Anton Fransch and we also cried with Yazeed Henry, after he had finished with his testimony. Have we handled only the easy part so far? What will happen to reconciliation when those perpetrators and informers whom we didn't know about are removed? Is it going to help reconciliation — or is it actually going to be destructive to the whole of South Africa? Kenneth Makalela, SABC

I had a lot to do with the Cape Times coverage of what was happening in the townships, which was despite, rather than because of, support from TML management, and despite, rather than because of, the support we were getting from other newspapers. We would break a story for instance about vigilantes being led into battle by police in Crossroads. We would have eyewitness accounts by reporters, and the Argus follow-up story would just be the police denial, with no attempt to investigate the story. After my giving evidence at the TRC, three senior members of the Cape Times told me that at the time they did not believe us. They said: "We thought you had a political agenda, and we often tried to treat your copy with a pinch of salt. We'd run it because Tony Heard said run it. Now that we've seen what is coming out of the TRC, we realise that you weren't even scratching the surface of what was happening." Tony Webster, freelance
Looking back at the press

N ALL THE current argument about the past role of the media, much has been said about the powers and pressures behind the scenes. But it's interesting to look back on what the press actually did in the critical years before the opposition leaders went to jail.

Over the last year I've had to look at those reports as historical documents, as a by-product of my main task of writing President Mandela's biography. The findings are surprising.

It is remarkable, in the first place, how infallible is the press record up till the time when Mandela went to jail in 1962. It is true that other black leaders were more prominent in the press, including Albert Luthuli, the ANC President, and Walter Sisulu, the former secretary-general.

Mandela had been banned from any official position since 1952, and was operating largely behind the scenes. Even in the Communist weekly The Guardian, later New Age, his appearances are rare. Yet he had already been a key figure in the Defiance Campaign and the Treason Trails, and many close observers marked him as a future leader. It was not really until 1961, during and after his last public speech at the Pretoria (Rat) Constitution conference in March, that he became at all well known in the mainstream press, and featured more prominently. But by then he was already in hiding, proclaimed as the Black Plumber. He became far more famous on the run than when he was free.

He knew that the press was desperately important to him in the two months of April and May 1961, when he was preparing the ANC's last great attempt (as it turned out) at non-violent protest, the so-called home strike planned for Republic Day, May 31 1961. For he needed the newspapers to publicise the strike, and to make his case.

In those two months he kept popping up in different cities to talk to editors whom he thought would be helpful, most notably Laurence Conradie of the Rand Daily Mail and John Sutherland of the Evening Post in Port Elizabeth; both papers were helpful in publicising it. Benjamin Pogrund, who later appointed as African Affairs correspondent, became an important transmitter of ANC news, and a trusted friend. But other editors were much more timid. When Mandela called on Victor Norton, the respected and liberal editor of the Cape Times, Norton was tremendously impressed by his intelligence and courage, as he told many people privately; but there was no evidence of this in the Cape Times itself. As the stay-at-home strike came closer, it was shaping up, as Mandela said, to be a "virtual war between the state and the liberation movement"; and he watched with alarm as "the entire English language press crumbled and urged people to go to work" - assisted by the rival PAC who opposed the strike.

On the first day of the strike, even the Rand Daily Mail played down its effectiveness with a headline MOST GO TO WORK. ALL QUIET - which was the work of an unsympathetic sub-editor, as Pogrund explained to Mandela.

In fact, in the light of the massive military presence, the strike achieved (as the historian Tom Lodge later reckoned) "a surprisingly widespread degree of participation." It was not the first time that sub-editors would prove more powerful than the best-informed reporters.

It was the last real opportunity for the press to give effective coverage to the ANC before it turned to violent methods which required total secrecy, and before new laws limited reporting more strictly.

But editors could still resist government and police propaganda, which provided easy copy for journalists who lived off sensation. When Mandela was eventually arrested in August 1962 the newspapers, particularly the Sunday Times, splashed the cock-and-bull story which the police provided as "a fantastic story of intrigue and internationalism, with the inescapable "Mandela was betrayed: Reds are suspected" - for which there was no evidence beyond the police.

A year later, when the other ANC leaders were arrested at Rivonia, the newspapers had a field day in publicising the police allegations before the trial began, ignoring any sub judice rules because the men were kept under the new 90-day law, and were not technically charged with a crime. So they had full scope for headlines like REVOLUTION ON MILITARY BASES which helped to foment a hysterical attitude among white readers - while the plans for a military revolution had never in fact been approved by the ANC.

This kind of biased reporting, and the vulnerability to government propaganda, made the newspapers a sadly inadequate historical record. And western diplomats were almost equally ill-informed: they were so fearful of talking to ANC sources, lest they be caught by the secret police behind the scenes, that they themselves relied heavily on the press or on their own contacts with government. It was not till the late seventies, when the Soweto uprising provided indisputable evidence of black resistance, and when later the split government provided the evidence of corruption in the Inform Scandal, that newspapers acquired alternative sources though they still could make no mention of the ANC or Mandela.

And it was not until the mid-eighties, with the birth of the alternative press, that some newspapers began seriously testing the limits of their expression, and thus became important as historical documents. Of course the job of editors in the early sixties was fraught with danger, and inevitably involved compromises. But what remains striking is the ability of a few editors to defy the pressures - which were financial as much as political. And it is hardly surprising if Mandela today sees newspapers in very personal terms, as the responsibility of individuals rather than institutions.

But whatever editors privately think, it is their newspapers which provide the real testimony, and perhaps the most useful contribution by the Truth Commission, or by any other investigator of the press, would be not to ask newspapers to justify themselves, but simply to record how they reported a few crucial events, and let the facts, and the lessons, speak for themselves.

Anthony Sampson is writing the authorised biography of Nelson Mandela.