

# THE VALUE OF THE VICTIM HEARINGS OF THE TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION OF SOUTH AFRICA IN SHARING NARRATIVES

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Every individual, family and place has a history of its own which may contribute knowledge and understanding to the study of history and wider themes. Unfortunately, written sources are not always available on all themes or time periods and/or are, at times, not adequate enough. Oral narratives may provide a type of historical source, among others, to gain information, fill the gaps and add to a more balanced view of events and occurrences.

By using oral narratives the researcher may obtain from the lips of the living survivors/victims a fuller record of their participation in events of historical significance. Hereby ordinary people may express their views and enlighten a fragment of the past transmitted by word of mouth. In this process ordinary people take part in the course of creating historical awareness. For this reason, it has an important role to play in the reconstruction of South Africa's past and especially in the lives of the ordinary people who lived it.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa (TRC) shone a profoundly illuminating spotlight on South Africa's past. The truth-seeking purpose of the TRC lay in the official confrontation of past human rights abuses, with the aim of fostering individual and national reconciliation, through the catharsis of testimonies and confessions by the perpetrators of human rights abuses and their victims. This process opened the possibilities of public acknowledgement of the atrocities of the past. The hope was that it would lead to healing for victims and their families, forgiveness and ultimately reconciliation throughout the post-apartheid society of South Africa.

The Commission's mandate, as contained in the Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act 34 of 1995, had to provide the space within which victims could share the story of their trauma and the Committee on Human Rights Violations filled this vacuum. By distinctively focusing on victims, including the neglected

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victims, the Commission broke the silence and gave authority to the voices of ordinary people. Through personal recollections the Commission could provide more answers to more people, to gain, ultimately, a larger and more complete picture of what constituted the past as it emanated from the larger narratives of its victims.

## 2. A UNIQUE TRUTH COMMISSION FOR SOUTH AFRICA

Part of the twenty-first century is the process in which divided societies struggle to master a heritage of collective violence and severe gross human rights violations. Confronted with processes of how to deal with a past of human rights violations, the desire to know the truth and remember the past, will influence the decisions made. Knowing what really happened and untangling the web of lies and manipulations may constitute a fundamental role in “coming to terms” with the past. Here acknowledgement in dealing with past wrongs, that may lead to healing, is considered.<sup>3</sup> The argument may be made that the wounds of the past can and even must be confronted, as the past cannot be suppressed or erased. Justification is made on the grounds that in remembering the past, forgiveness and reconciliation may only then be considered when a nation has confronted the full knowledge of the past.<sup>4</sup>

To answer the question: “Why remember past injustices?”, the philosopher Paul Ricoeur explains that we must remember, because “remembering is a moral duty. We owe debt to the victims. And the tiniest way of paying our debt is to tell and retell what happened [to them] ... the horrible needs to be rescued still more from forgetfulness by the means of memory and narration.”<sup>5</sup> For Ricoeur the simple truth is that “by remembering and telling, we ... prevent forgetfulness from killing the victims twice”.<sup>6</sup> Elie Wiesel, moreover, states that “memory is not only a victory over time; it is also a triumph over injustice”.<sup>7</sup>

Despite calls for a process of amnesia, emphasis is placed on the necessity that the past should be remembered. Philosopher George Santayana explains it as follows: “Those who cannot remember the past, are condemned to repeat it.”<sup>8</sup> Richard von Weizsacker, one-time President of West Germany, goes further: “Whoever closes his eyes to the past, becomes blind to the present. Whoever does not wish to remember inhumanity, becomes susceptible to the dangers of new

<sup>3</sup> PB Hayner, "Fifteen truth commissions – 1974 to 1994: A comparative study" in *Human Rights Quarterly* 16(4), 1994, pp. 607-608.

<sup>4</sup> DM Tutu, *No future without forgiveness* (London, 1999), p. 32; A Boraine, *A country unmasked. Inside South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission* (Cape Town, 2000), p. 2.

<sup>5</sup> W Verwoerd, "Towards the recognition of our past injustices" in C Villa-Vicencio and W Verwoerd (eds), *Looking back reaching forward. Reflections on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa* (Cape Town, 2000), p. 163.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 159.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> Tutu, p. 32.

infection.”<sup>9</sup> Archbishop Desmond Tutu, chairperson of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, explains that “unless our past was acknowledged and dealt with adequately, it could blight our future”.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, for Kader Asmal, Minister of Water Affairs and Forestry at the time the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was set up, the danger of not dealing with the past lies in the fact that “we are thereby ripping the foundations of justice from beneath new generations”.<sup>11</sup>

During South Africa’s transitional phase, the choice was made for a truth commission as an answer as to how to deal with the past by confronting past atrocities. Due to the political environment in which the former government was operating, born out of and shaped by negotiations, political compromises and the balance of power, dealing with the past resulted in a so-called “third way” between national amnesia and criminal prosecution.<sup>12</sup> This historical compromise between the former National Party (NP) government and the African National Congress (ANC) during the multiparty negotiations resulted in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa (TRC).<sup>13</sup>

The demand for prosecution or amnesia in the South African process could never really be regarded as viable because of the negotiated compromises, which resulted in power-sharing. It would have been difficult, and even unconstitutional, not to take into account the constitutional provisions of amnesty or to limit it in such a way as to make it nonsensical. Therefore, the negotiated compromises, which resulted in power-sharing and the constitutional provisions of amnesty, were the cornerstones for a truth commission process.<sup>14</sup>

The decision was made to pursue a policy of truth-telling and disclosure rather than one of prosecution and punishment. It would be viewed as a compromise between the politically possible and the morally ideal. A delicate balance between serving justice on the one hand, and the necessity of upholding reconciliation and peace on the other, had to be maintained by the newly elected democratic government.

Consequently, there was decided upon a unique truth commission for South Africa, with the granting of amnesty to individuals in exchange for full disclosure

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<sup>9</sup> Boraine, p. 366.

<sup>10</sup> Tutu, p. 32.

<sup>11</sup> A Krog, *Country of my skull* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Johannesburg, 2002), p. 268. See also Boraine, p. 4, where he quotes Leo Tolstoy from Cathleen Smith’s book *Remembering Stalin’s victims*, where her argument follows the same lines: “People say: why recall the past? What is the good of remembering what has been swept away? What is the good of irritating the nation? How can one ask such questions? If I suffered from a serious and dangerous disease and recovered or was cured from it, I would recollect the fact with joy. I would be disturbed by it only if I was still ill or if I’d taken a turn for the worse and wanted to deceive myself.”

<sup>12</sup> P Waldmeier, *Anatomy of a miracle. The end of apartheid and the birth of the new South Africa* (London, 1997), pp. 94, 229-230; J Sarkin, *Carrots and sticks. The TRC and the South African amnesty process* (Schoten, 2004), pp. 49-50; *The Daily News*, 27 October 1998, p. 13.

<sup>13</sup> Hereafter referred to as the “TRC” or “the Commission”.

<sup>14</sup> Republic of South Africa, “Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act No. 34” in *Government Gazette* 361(16579), 1995, p. 2.

of the truth relating to the crime for which amnesty was being sought. The quasi-judicial power to grant amnesty to individual perpetrators was the first for any truth commission and was a unique feature. This was seen as an innovative attempt to establish mechanisms of accountability. The Commission would also give an opportunity to ordinary people to tell their stories, allowing them to remember and empowering them in the process, while at the same time acknowledging their individuality and humanity. The decision was thus taken - the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa would seek to promote full disclosure of the truth, limited amnesty and reparation.<sup>15</sup>

The Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act 34 of 1995 (the Act) empowered and mandated the TRC. It cannot be denied that this Act was a major event in the transition process in the country. The fact that the mandate of the TRC focused exclusively on “gross violations of human rights” that had been committed with a political motive in the period 1960-1994, did not include the whole apartheid history, especially the institutionalised racism of the system. It is understandable that criticism was levelled against this narrow interpretation of the Act.<sup>16</sup> It also influenced “as complete a picture as possible” of gross violations committed during the period mandated. Nevertheless, it would have been a task too great to accomplish if the Commission had taken into account all forms of violations in the apartheid period.

Thus, one year after the first democratic elections in 1994, a Truth and Reconciliation Commission for South Africa was established. People came from all walks of life to tell their stories – from victims to perpetrators. It was an event and process of which the world took notice, learnt from and could not dismiss as insignificant. The Commission was the formal beginning of another process of confronting the past through official truth-seeking.

The stage was set for bringing human rights concerns to the fore, recognising the suffering of victims and realising the acts of perpetrators, with the aim of establishing a fair, global truth. This could lead towards learning from history, while keeping memory alive.

### 3. HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS (HRV) COMMITTEE HEARINGS

The goals to which the TRC had to contribute were founded in the belief that in order to build the “historic bridge” of which the Interim Constitution speaks, it was

<sup>15</sup> See the total "Act" in Republic of South Africa, "Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act No. 34" in *Government Gazette* 361(16579), 1995; Tutu, pp. 24-34; K Christie, *The South African Truth Commission* (New York, 2000), p. 68; Boraine, p. 7; K Asmal *et al.*, *Reconciliation through truth. A reckoning of Apartheid's criminal governance* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Cape Town, 1997), pp. 17-20; *Sowetan*, 12 May 2004, p. 15.

<sup>16</sup> RA Wilson, *The politics of truth and reconciliation in South Africa. Legitimizing the post-apartheid state* (Cambridge, 2001), p. 35; M Mamdani, "A diminished truth" in W James and L van de Vijver (eds), *After the TRC reflections on truth and reconciliation in South Africa* (Athens, 2000), pp. 58-61.

needed to establish as “complete a picture as possible” of the injustices committed in the past.<sup>17</sup>

The first phase in the life of the Commission was to give attention to the question of the restoration of the human and civil dignity of individual victims of past gross human rights violations. These victims’ hearings in particular meant that thousands who had experienced human rights violations could, in their mother tongue, at their own tempo and in their own way, convey their stories and give testimony at public hearings across South Africa.<sup>18</sup>

The HRV Committee had therefore the declared aim of facilitating a truth recovery process. To be able to fulfil this purpose, statements were taken from victims and families of victims of gross violations of human rights. Thereafter, so-called demonstrative and representative cases were chosen from among the statements and taken to be presented at public hearings.<sup>19</sup>

Through these stories of suffering and grief, many people were confronted, some for the first time, with the human face of the unknown or silenced victims of past conflicts. The public nature of these hearings broke the silence, lifted the veil of secrecy and gave authority to the voices of ordinary people. In the process truths, half-truths, myths and lies were challenged through these public hearings to gain a fuller account in a larger framework of what had happened in the past. For many the victim hearings represented the symbolic core of the Truth Commission process, where the voice of the oppressed would finally be heard.<sup>20</sup>

Those who came to the Commission were a wide cross-section of South Africans. They did so voluntarily and came from every part of the community, from all over the country and included old and young, men and women, black and white. The overwhelming majority of people coming to the Commission were ordinary South Africans, from all sides of the conflicts of the past, caught up in political action and/or in an environment in which they had become victims of gross human rights violations. The vast majority of testifiers were women who often talked about what had happened to a husband, son or brother. The majority of testifiers were also black people, with some Coloureds and Indians and a few whites.<sup>21</sup>

The task set out for the HRV Committee was enormous. In the end, 21 296 people came forward and told the Commission of about nearly 38 000 gross violations of human rights, from which nearly 10 000 were killings.<sup>22</sup> More than 19 050 were

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<sup>17</sup> Republic of South Africa, "Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act ...", pp. 2, 4, 6.

<sup>18</sup> Tutu, p. 87.

<sup>19</sup> Truth and Reconciliation Commission, *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report 1* (Cape Town, 1998), pp. 163-165.

<sup>20</sup> N van Driel, "Healing our land" in *SA Now* 1(6), 1996, pp. 14, 16.

<sup>21</sup> Truth and Reconciliation Commission 1, pp. 165, 173.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.* 7, p. 1. Volume 6 of the TRC *Final Report* indicates that a total of 21 519 victim statements were collected during the two year operational period and contained more than 30 384 violations.

found to be victims of a gross violation of human rights and in addition, more than 2 975 victims emerged from the amnesty process. The HRV Committee also made more than 15 000 findings during its period of operation.<sup>23</sup>

In general, the proceedings of the HRV Committee are viewed as having been the most successful. These public victim hearings brought into the open the layers of human experience and made “individuality and humanity more visible than usual”.<sup>24</sup> As explained by SABC anchor person Max du Preez, the hearings were a “grand process of the people” and a “human moment”, in which people “got thinking very fundamentally about how they experienced their humanity, their strengths and their weaknesses, the things they recognised and denied in themselves, the kind of relationships and society they wanted actively to make”.<sup>25</sup>

#### 4. APPRAISING ORAL NARRATIVES AS EMBODIED WITHIN THE VICTIM HEARINGS

The “culture of silence”, that is many times associated with political violence and turmoil, was changed by the TRC and its emphasis on creating a legitimate space to voice victim’s experiences.<sup>26</sup> Structured and facilitated story-telling through the TRC began the process on a societal level to break the silences of the past. The impression was created that the violations these victims went through were worthy of attention and by listening to their sufferings, they were acknowledged. This, in turn, affirmed their dignity.

The TRC gave flesh to the country’s constitutional commitment to recognise the injustices of the past. In the process it helped South Africans to put a human face to the suffering, grief and violations of human rights that many had suffered in the past.

By giving a voice to the voiceless, a social contribution is made. Through sharing oral narratives victims may experience that they are not alone and actually have shared memories which connect them to others.<sup>27</sup> The victim hearings emphasised this realisation by drawing together many victims from all levels of society.

The ideal is that a truth commission should be victim-centred. Probably the strongest and most enduring accomplishment of the TRC is the accessible forum that

<sup>23</sup> Truth and Reconciliation Commission 6, p. 570 and 7, p. 1. Volume 7 of the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report* is a tribute to the victims and intended to acknowledge those who did come forward to tell their stories. This volume records the names of those who had been found to be victims of gross human rights violations and provides a brief summary of each victim’s story.

<sup>24</sup> D Thelen, “How the Truth and Reconciliation Commission challenges the ways we use history” in *South African Historical Journal* 47, November 2002, p. 163.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 179.

<sup>26</sup> See Krog, p. viii.

<sup>27</sup> P Thompson, *The voice of the past Oral history* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed., Oxford, 2000), pp. 20-23; S Caunce, *Oral history and the local historian* (London, 1994), p. 25; H Slim *et al.*, (eds), *Listening for a change. Oral testimony and community development* (London, 1995), pp. 8-9.

it offered through the victim hearings to ordinary victims of the political violence to tell their stories to sympathetic listeners. It was to the benefit of the TRC to provide such an opportunity to ordinary people to convey their stories in a supportive setting which was victim-friendly, as required by the Act.

To the credit of the TRC, victims were handled with the utmost sensitivity and integrity. Besides the fact that the victims were fully informed about what to expect at the hearing, the environment at the hearings was managed in such a way as to avoid any feelings of intimidation. The TRC went out of its way to avoid any form of an intimidating atmosphere that may have recreated memories of past interrogations. Moreover, the TRC also succeeded in treating all victims equally.<sup>28</sup>

Storytelling, which forms an integral part of oral history, is a narrative component that made the hearings of the HRV Committee compelling. For those who addressed the Commission, the value of the simple act of telling their story before a supportive audience, was in itself significant. Through storytelling, narrative truth may be heard, securing a kind of public recognition, attention and respect for victims.<sup>29</sup> The telling of events and experiences that form part of a victim's own story, is perceived by the victim as a legitimate source of truth. Consequently, this collective story-telling process gave victims an opportunity to engage in recording and making their own histories, which have actually earned their experiences a place in the history records of South Africa.

The TRC victim hearings gave a prominent place to oral narratives. From the lips of the living, a fuller record of their participation in events during the period 1960-1994 was gained by attending to the complex legacy of memory. By tapping into the experiences of ordinary people, evidence was gathered from a new direction, adding to history from the bottom up.<sup>30</sup>

By focusing on the day-to-day reality of lived experiences in the apartheid period, an opportunity was given to enrich people's understanding of events and motives on both a personal and communicative level. By sharing oral narratives on the effects of trauma and suffering, everyone is confronted with the experiences of pain and grief through the eyes of other people. In this process oral history is rewarding. Sharing narratives may lead to a better understanding of events, to the discovery of new perspectives and sometimes even to a process of acceptance.

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<sup>28</sup> Truth and Reconciliation Commission 6, pp. 738-739; A Verdoolaege, "The Human Rights Violations Hearings of the South African TRC: A bridge between individual narratives of suffering and a contextualizing master-story of reconciliation", <[http://cas1.elis.rug.ac.be/avrug/trc/02\\_08.htm](http://cas1.elis.rug.ac.be/avrug/trc/02_08.htm)>, 2002 (date accessed 10 March 2009); FC Ross, *Bearing witness. Women and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa* (London, 2003), p. 14.

<sup>29</sup> LS Graybill, "South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission: Ethical and theological perspectives" in *Ethics and International Affairs* 12, Spring 1998, pp. 48-49. See also Truth and Reconciliation Commission 1, p. 112.

<sup>30</sup> Thompson, pp. 3, 6.

It cannot be ignored that the process of a truth commission, with knowledge having been gained, of knowledge confirmed which had sometimes been known all the time, the public acknowledgement of truth and suffering, is a noble purpose.<sup>31</sup> The official acknowledgement of violations may provide credibility to the victim's sufferings and further enhance or restore dignity.

By giving people from all walks of life an opportunity to participate in a process of truth-telling and then creating a safe, public space to convey their stories and experiences, the TRC set an example of a democratic society where everyone might voice their perceptions and views. Thus, it seems important to allow the truth to be told and heard. In the long term, through an oral history process of describing personal experiences, knowledge may be conveyed to future generations, while strengthening an understanding of the past.

Accordingly, the memories of people may contribute to knowledge and an understanding of the past. The success of the HRV Committee to gain any information lay with the willingness of victims to share their memories at the victim hearings. Without the victims and their willingness to come forward and convey their stories, there would have been no Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa. Their participation enabled the Commission to carry out its task of establishing as complete a picture as possible of the violations of human rights in the past. The importance to the public of the creation of past events by sharing their memories must be stressed. Thus, it is important that the narrator's contributing role in gaining a more detailed and even more realistic, critical historical reconstruction of the past should be realised.

The fact that the Act made provision for the testifier to do so in the language of his/her choice was a significant feature of the TRC. It cannot be denied that the narrator feels more comfortable in his/her mother tongue and is able to express emotions more easily than in a third or fourth language. In this way more information, with the accompanying emotions, may be revealed. The interpretation services used for the public hearings further highlighted the uniqueness of the Commission.<sup>32</sup>

In a truth commission set-up, the testimonies of victims form an integral part thereof. Here, the oral narrative is the primary source of information and although more than 20 000 people made statements to the TRC, the question remains: "What about the rest of the stories of the people who had suffered?" Thus, space to tell our stories as a nation needs to be created and addressed. Although the narratives of victims have been acknowledged, the telling of stories needs to and should continue

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<sup>31</sup> Christie, p. 49.

<sup>32</sup> MM Oelofse Private Collection, *Interview with A Lotriet*, 17 January 2007; MM Oelofse Private Collection, *Documentation received from A Lotriet*, January 2007; Truth and Reconciliation Commission 1, p. 283 and 6, pp. 749, 751; Borraine, p. 111; *Beeld*, 19 April 1997, p. 5; Republic of South Africa, "Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act ...", p. 14.

to be encouraged. In the process, people become actively involved and reclaim some dignity and authority and this may have an empowering effect.

On a more individual level, the telling of the violation could also, although in a limited way, aid psychological restoration. By tapping into people's memories a "therapeutic conversation" of narratives can take place. The process may sometimes add relief and provide catharsis to the person. Important here is that closure may be achieved in gaining knowledge about what had happened to loved ones; especially for those who want to know what happened and why it happened. While sharing the narrative, it may also provide an opportunity to deal with unfinished business. According to some of the testifiers, a painful, traumatic appearance before the TRC was many times transformed into a cathartic experience.<sup>33</sup>

However, for some people it can be too painful to release their memories and to revisit the experiences of the past. On an individual level, interacting with the TRC and giving public voice to trauma had highly personalised and varying consequences for the victims and their relatives.<sup>34</sup> Truth commissions should in future note that the testifying process is more than likely the first step for the testifier on his/her road to psychological recovery and healing. On many occasions truth commissions are the public expression of emotions, whereas psychological restoration is a long-term process that requires an extensive network of support structures.<sup>35</sup>

The TRC added knowledge to events and instances of the gross violations of human rights that had occurred during the apartheid years in the period 1960-1994. Information about the extent and effect of widespread abuses, the atrocities that had taken place, what forces had been responsible and the factors contributing to the violations, were uncovered. A number of questions on disappearances and about prominent political murders were also answered.<sup>36</sup> These public hearings on human rights violations especially helped to highlight the actions of the previous government's political order and also offered an important kind of acknowledgement of the suffering and sacrifices that people had experienced. It publicised the wrongs committed under the previous government.

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<sup>33</sup> Boraine, pp. 293-295; M Minow, *Between vengeance and forgiveness. Facing history after genocide and mass violence* (Boston, 1998), p. 66; Christie, p. 57; W Orr, *From Biko to Basson. Wendy Orr's search for the soul of South Africa as a commissioner of the TRC* (Saxonwold, 2000), pp. 31-32.

<sup>34</sup> A Allan and MM Allan, "The South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission as a therapeutic tool" in *Behavioral Sciences and the Law* 18, 2000, pp. 472-473; L Graybill and K Lanegan, "Truth, justice, and reconciliation in Africa: Issues and cases" in *African Studies Quarterly* 8(1), Fall 2004, p. 6; A Gutmann and D Thompson, "The moral foundations of truth commissions" in RI Rotberg and D Thompson (eds), *Truth v. justice. The morality of truth commissions* (Princeton, 2000), p. 30.

<sup>35</sup> B Hamber, "Truth: The road to reconciliation?", <<http://www.csvr.org/articles/artrcant.htm>>, 1997 (date accessed 10 March 2009).

<sup>36</sup> Truth and Reconciliation Commission 2, pp. 543-545; *The Star*, 4 August 1998, p. 13.

In the process, the TRC amassed a large amount of new historical data and basic facts about apartheid during the period 1960-1994. Information was added to previous historical accounts, while also clarifying and acknowledging long-silenced facts. This played an even more significant role, taking into account the systematic destruction of documents during the protracted phase of negotiated transition.<sup>37</sup> This added to and forms part of the general historical record of the country that may be used as important source work and a public analysis for the future.

Thus, the oral narratives during the victim hearings provided information of experiences of human rights violations which might otherwise have been lost. Information was salvaged by tapping the memories of those people who lived through the violations. Some of these lived experiences were nowhere else documented and some recorded sources were complemented by the shared information. This situation makes these oral narratives extremely valuable and in the process historians' database of evidence and information is expanded.

It should be emphasised that the TRC revelations played a role in producing an understanding of certain events that had happened during the period that was covered. However, it cannot be regarded as *the* "official history" of South Africa on all gross violations of human rights occurring during the period 1960-1994. The TRC only made a contribution by providing an intimate view on certain aspects and by providing, as far as possible, as complete a picture as possible of events of the past.

The TRC may also be seen as a major educational process. These stories form part of a new, official national narrative. It produced a record of violations of the past and thus an archive open to public scrutiny.

It is difficult to express the effect of the TRC; yet, the Commission and its activities did capture the attention of large segments of the South African population, as the process touched them in one way or another. On a societal level, a shift in perceptions and beliefs of the past did occur as past human rights violations and crimes can no longer be denied and the members of this society are challenged about the "truth" that was revealed about their past.<sup>38</sup> This "shared sense of the past" will, in the long term, go through a process of discussion and a confrontation with the facts that were disclosed.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The TRC was arguably the most ambitious to date and has been used as an example in many parts of the world as a new model for confronting a tormented and divisive history.

<sup>37</sup> Truth and Reconciliation Commission 1, pp. 201, 229. For more detail on the TRC's view and handling of the destruction of records, see Truth and Reconciliation Commission 1, pp. 201-243.

<sup>38</sup> Graybill and Lanegran, p. 4.

It was a remarkable human process in gaining information from the telling of stories. The Commission's archive constitutes a valuable resource; not only for records of the past that were generated by looking into previous human rights violations, but also as a truth-finding process in a transitional environment.

Through oral testimonies the invisibility of the formerly marginalised were redressed and formerly subjugated voices were heard in recovering the suppressed or neglected voices. In the process, human experience in all its richness was collected, as well as a record of the past gained and even more, through oral narratives an on-going discussion about the meaning of the past may continue.

Though the process was not always perfect, truth has been exposed. Given the different restraints on time and resources under which the TRC operated, the *Final Report* is still a remarkable achievement. The *Final Report* fills seven volumes, of which volume seven is a tribute to the victims of apartheid and is intended to acknowledge those who did come forward to tell their stories.

The South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission was but one component of a transformation strategy in the reconstruction and development of South African society. The shift of responsibility has moved away from the TRC to the rest of society. There are still numerous ordinary people with important stories and memories to add to the richness of South Africa's history. In the years to come, progress should be made on the road to restore human dignity and to pursue a culture of human rights within the bounds of caution and respect.